The Rise and Fall of State Socialism: Industrial Society and the Socialist State, 1996, 233 pages, David Lane, 0745607438, 9780745607436, Wiley, 1996

In this major new work, David Lane provides a wide-ranging re-evaluation of socialism as an ideology and a political movement. He addresses the nature of the socialist tradition and puts into perspective the 'socialist project' inaugurated by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. He also examines the rise of Marxist-Leninist states, arguing that Marxism-Leninism became a doctrine of development with a practical political appeal to economically backward states. The first part of the book outlines the 'World of the Comrades' characteristic of the world communist movement. Here, developments in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China are compared. The major achievements of state socialism are outlined. But so too are its deficiencies, which led to disenchantment and reform. Part II, 'Denouement', addresses the tensions of state socialism in the context of world capitalism. The internal and external sources of change leading to collapse - the rise of the intelligentsia, economic decline, ideological decay and international pressures are analysed and evaluated. The reforming strategies adopted in Eastern Europe, the USSR and China are compared and discussed. Theories of state socialism are examined, both long-term causes and precipitants of change are considered and, to explain collapse, the author emphasizes the conflict between the 'political' and 'acquisition' classes. This book, by one of the leading authorities in the field, provides a clear and comprehensive account of the achievements and deficiencies of state socialism and the reasons why it failed to establish itself as a viable alternative to capitalism. It will be essential reading for courses on industrial societies, development, socialist theory and Marxism, social stratification and social change, as well as on those focusing on post-communism.

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