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of separate family apartments? More active engagement with these questions and with recent scholarship that has begun to explore some of them would have enriched this study.

Using a wide array of archival sources as well as literature, film, and other primary materials, *Property of Communists* offers an important window on Soviet housing, social welfare, and property rights. The book is highly recommended for specialists as well as graduate students interested in these topics.



István Hargittai, *Judging Edward Teller: A Closer Look at One of the Most Influential Scientists of the Twentieth Century*. New York: Prometheus Books, 2010. 575 pp.

*Reviewed by László Borhi, Institute of History, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and Indiana University*

When Ronald Reagan introduced Mikhail Gorbachev and Edward Teller at a reception, Gorbachev allegedly refused to shake Teller's outstretched hand and claimed not to know who Teller was: "there are many Tellers." Teller replied, "I agree." As author István Hargittai reveals, Teller was hounded by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation because he had the same name as a Communist teacher in New York. Read as a remarkably candid self-reflection, Teller's response to Gorbachev exposes the physicist's awareness of the many facets of his own personality. Hargittai's biography reveals the hidden dimensions of one of the most influential scientists of the twentieth century, showing him to be a product of extraordinary times.

Drawing on interviews, documents, and secondary sources, Hargittai traces Teller's life from childhood through his emigration from Hungary to Germany and eventually the United States, his quest for the hydrogen bomb, his clash with J. Robert Oppenheimer, his stint as director of the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, his opposition to the nuclear test ban treaty, and his lobbying for the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI)—all while trying to penetrate Teller's innermost thoughts. Breaking with the prevailing canon, Hargittai convincingly argues that "Teller made an invaluable contribution to world peace with his work on the hydrogen bomb."

From childhood Teller was prepared for the formative experience of his life: exile. His first, "internal emigration" was the experience of Jewish families preparing their children for new environments. At an early age he developed doubts about even those close to him. He may never have been aware of his father's devotion to him. His upper middle-class, assimilated Jewish family was caught in the turmoil of history when they left Hungary in 1926, finding refuge in Germany. Although legislation was adopted in Hungary in 1921 to curb Jewish participation in higher education, it did not prevent the young Edward from being admitted to the technical university. Yet, like many other intellectuals he decided to move to Germany, where he focused initially on chemical engineering.

Hargittai points out that Teller made some of his lasting contributions to science

in chemistry. He blames Teller's decision to go to Germany in 1926 on the hostile environment in Hungary: "Teller left an anti-Semitic and fascist Hungary." This explanation is unconvincing. Political and economic consolidation in Hungary helped anti-Semitism to subside, and it did not surge again until after the Great Depression. Although Miklós Horthy's system in the mid- to late 1920s was authoritarian, it was a far cry from fascism. Moreover Teller, who felt a strong attachment to Hungary throughout his life, seems not to have personally experienced such prejudice. The members of his family who survived the Holocaust were deported to the countryside by the Communist authorities, who tried to recruit his sister in the hope of luring Teller into the Hungarian (and, by extension, Soviet) intelligence service.

In Germany, Teller developed unreserved—and, as Hargittai shows, unreciprocated—admiration for his professor, Werner Heisenberg. Teller maintained that Heisenberg sabotaged Adolf Hitler's effort to build a nuclear bomb. Hargittai argues that Heisenberg and his colleagues worked to build nuclear weapons despite the Nazi leaders' lack of interest and that new evidence about Heisenberg's failed quest "renders Teller's claim meaningless." It might have been interesting to uncover the psychological roots of Teller's unreserved devotion to Heisenberg. Teller was oblivious to the rise of anti-Semitism in Germany. Neither did he hold against Heisenberg his continued service to Hitler's regime, although his collaboration was, as Hargittai shows, less blatant than that of other prominent scientists, some of whom were successful after the war despite their checkered past. Heisenberg was the one who introduced Teller to the international physics community, and Teller's social and intellectual debt to Germany was great.

Hargittai finds it hard to explain Teller's strong anti-Communism. He asserts that the physicist considered Communism to be a bigger menace than National Socialism. After a careful study of Teller's statements about the causes of his anti-Communism, Hargittai finds that they are inconclusive, and he avers that Teller harbored anti-Soviet sentiments rather than hostility to Communism. In some writings Teller claimed he became anti-Communist when he learned of the imprisonment of Lev Landau in Moscow. Elsewhere Teller ascribed his anti-Communism to his reading of Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*. All the sources on Teller's anti-Communism are recollections and therefore unsuitable for tracing the evolution of his sentiments. Hargittai gets around this problem by arguing the implausibility of someone disliking the idea of Communism to this extent. Hargittai insists that Teller's distaste was "directed primarily against the Soviet Union . . . and was less concerned with communist ideology. Soviet communism may have been more an expression of Russian ambitions than of the original communist ideology." But this statement fails to explain why Communism has invariably given rise to tyranny and impoverished the societies in which it holds sway. Some Western intellectuals, including Oppenheimer, have been willing to turn a blind eye to the atrocious crimes of the Communist system and to disregard the fact that Marxism and its variants were ideologies of hatred, but Teller was not.

Hargittai points out that although others also testified against Oppenheimer, Teller was singled out among his peers for vilification. He attributes this to the

“shrewd” and seemingly “premeditated” nature of Teller’s statement. An alternate explanation worth exploring is whether Teller’s well-known political views played a role in the unforgiving hostility his mostly leftist peers displayed toward him. Teller claimed that he felt like “Daniel in the lion’s den.” A colleague, John Wheeler, said he appreciated Teller’s “honesty and courage.” A Soviet scientist, Vitalii Ginzburg, likewise voiced support for Teller: “I don’t think Teller was incorrect. Oppenheimer did not understand the Soviet threat and Teller did.” Hargittai argues that the Oppenheimer-Teller controversy was at least partly motivated by an interservice conflict. The physicist Freeman Dyson felt that Teller was entrapped in politics and that the U.S. Army and Air Force were “more hostile to each other than either of them toward the Russians.”

Hargittai stresses Teller’s crucial dual role—as political crusader and pioneering scientist—in the development of thermonuclear weapons. He argues that “the Ulam-Teller controversy has spoiled all attempts to unambiguously assess the events around the development of the American H bomb” and that Teller’s own writings “illustrate the difficulties of conveying and knowing the past.” Ironically, Teller believed that “the past can be known.” Do these contradictions expose Teller as less than truthful, a falsifier of history? Or is memory in general problematic? The controversy highlighted in the biography is a beautiful illustration of the notion that memory cannot be used reliably to reconstruct history. Hargittai contends, however, that despite recent attempts to downplay Teller’s contribution, it was actually crucial. Despite poring over all accessible sources, Hargittai could not fully clarify the record. The “absolute truth” of history cannot be revealed.

Teller’s personality was exceptionally strong, driven by insatiable curiosity for modern physics. He grilled Livermore physicists—an establishment he considered the main achievement of his life—over lunch about their research and would “display childish joy when he could figure out an explanation.” His partners remembered his tremendous mental capacity and recall. He exposed the darker side of his character when his conversation partner was ill prepared: “You’re wasting my time, go away.” His opposition to the nuclear test ban treaty and his advocacy of the SDI were vehement but not motivated by base desire. Teller, as Hargittai shows, never advocated aggressive behavior. His concern was to avoid nuclear war and stop the Soviet Union but not to kill its people. Some thought it would have been easy to imagine Teller in the Soviet program, “respected by many feared by more.” One acquaintance from Hungary remembered that he “suffers from a disease: he thinks he is Messiah.” He was arrogant and intolerant but could be charming and kind. Yet, his confidential correspondence reveals that privately he craved the approval of his superiors and was full of self-doubt. Although he testified against Oppenheimer, he stood against McCarthy in support of Stephen Brunauer. His strong willpower, stamina, and determination were “his baggage from Hungary: he could survive only if he outdid everybody around him.” He was “proud to be identified with the Jewish community,” and he sang the Hungarian National Anthem in his chosen home, Los Alamos. In sum, Teller is a fascinating subject for students of identity. In Hargittai’s informed estimation, Teller was a “first-rate” scientist who made “important, non-controversial discoveries.” The “ap-

plication of some of his results [is] still on the rise,” even though he was not on a par with the great geniuses of his time. Teller is also remembered as a great educator who reveled in the popularization of science.

Hargittai's magnum opus is more than a biography or a history of science or thermonuclear weapons. The book is a fascinating history of an individual caught in the upheavals of the twentieth century.



Pavel Stroilov, *Behind the Desert Storm: A Secret Archive Stolen from the Kremlin That Sheds New Light on the Arab Revolutions in the Middle East*. Chicago: Price World Publishing, 2011.

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I first heard of Pavel Stroilov in an article published by Claire Berlinski in the spring 2010 issue of *The City Journal* titled “A Hidden History of Evil: Why Doesn’t Anyone Care about the Unread Soviet Archives?” The article describes Stroilov’s claim that he had exploited a computer flaw and stolen thousands of pages of documents from the archive of the Gorbachev Foundation. These documents, the article claims, portrayed Mikhail Gorbachev as an evil and menacing manipulator and shed light on unsavory aspects of the end of the Cold War that allegedly would be highly embarrassing for many a retired statesman. Berlinski, who seemed unaware of the vast amount of scholarship that has been published based on research in the Russian archives, also maintained that Stroilov had approached Yale University Press to publish a book about the First Gulf War but that something supposedly “frightened” then-editor Jonathan Brent so that Stroilov “never heard from Brent again.”

Stroilov later shared his manuscript with me. I could immediately see why Yale University Press would not want to publish it, though I kept my reservations to myself out of politeness. Subsequently, Stroilov’s book came out with Price World Publishing, a low-budget press that specializes in weight-training and fitness books published under titles like *6 Weeks to 6-Pack Abs*, *Gluteus to the Maximus*, and *Muscle Explosion*. This is Price World’s first foray into history. My impression after reading the final product is that the publisher would have done well to stick with its usual fare. Stroilov’s book, despite its outstanding documentary base (of which I will say more below), is a disaster.

Stroilov believes he has uncovered an international conspiracy—chiefly directed by Gorbachev, but with the assistance of U.S. President George H. W. Bush—aimed at returning Israel to its 1947 borders as a quid pro quo for Iraq’s withdrawal from Kuwait. Gorbachev’s anti-Jewish “socialist jihad” was part and parcel of his mission of “conquering the world” by using the “Red Arabs” of the Middle East, especially the Iraqis, Syrians, Libyans, and Egyptians, as his proxies. Bush (who, Stroilov suggests at one point, was Gorbachev’s “agent”) was duped into playing along because he was so heavily invested in building a “new world order” (p. 167). To this end, Bush bartered