

Summary

The Alternative: Critique of Real Socialism (published in English under the title *The Alternative in Eastern Europe*) owes its fame both to its content and to the circumstances of its origin. Its author, Rudolf Bahro (1935–1997), was an outwardly loyal East German citizen who, following his experience of the Warsaw Pact invasion in 1968, broke off internally with the regime and privately wrote a book criticizing the Soviet system from a Marxist point of view. The manuscript was smuggled to the West, where the book was published in 1977 and immediately became a bestseller. In East Germany, Bahro was arrested, charged with espionage, and sentenced to seven years in prison. After his amnesty, he went to Germany, where he became one of the founders of the Green Party. The basic message of the book is a critique of the bureaucracy of Soviet regimes and an attempt to propose an alternative to them, combining calls for democracy, ecological renewal, removal of the privileges of the apparatus, a government of experts, and the removal of privileges for the ruling bureaucracy. The first part of the book focuses on the historical roots of Soviet-type society, which the author calls proto-socialism. The second part analyzes the social structure of Soviet societies, especially the privileged position of the bureaucracy. The third part contains a proposal for the reform of this society, in particular the promotion of equality and openness, as well as an economy focused on sustainability and not on growth at all costs. Herbert Marcuse described this book as the most important Marxist work of the last decade. According to the East German Stasi, it was “highly sophisticated and dangerous anti-communist propaganda, which, as must be emphasized, is also anti-Soviet”. In the opinion of certain circles of Eastern European emigrants, it was a “dangerously disproportionate utopia”. The Czech translation of the book emerged in the Czech dissent community, circulated as a samizdat, and after four decades lay forgotten. Now the book is once again available to the Czech reader, with notes and with an introductory study by Stanislav Holubec about the author’s life and the discussions that the book aroused.