

tigation of their interactions in the economic, ideological, military, political, and diplomatic arenas. Only their competition in the realm of science and technology is ignored.

In the economic sphere, the rivalry involves not only the abilities of the two sides to produce the goods and services of modern industrial life, but also their competition to provide models of economic development for the rest of the world. Here and elsewhere, as the author readily admits, the incongruent nature of the two systems makes honest, meaningful comparisons difficult. Nonetheless, Larson is able to draw a concise picture of the strengths and weaknesses of the American and Soviet economies and of their relative appeal as models for other countries. In presenting economic comparisons, the author is quick to puncture the inflated claims of both sides and to expose the dubious blessings of some economic victories—such as production of the most automobiles. He also explodes a number of myths about U.S.-Soviet trade, especially the fallacious notions that increased trade will necessarily improve political relations or give one side more leverage over the other.

The discussion of political and ideological rivalry involves a similar exercise in demythologization. Larson demonstrates how the propagandists on each side (one group using the totalitarianism versus free world model, and the other using the imperialism versus anti-imperialism model) have fundamentally distorted the nature of both their own and the opposition's political system. He also shows that, in their approach to other nations, both Washington and Moscow have been more concerned with securing loyal supporters in the international arena than with fostering the spread of either liberal democracy or socialism.

Nonspecialists will find the section on military rivalry especially valuable. After cataloging the many categories of military competition, Larson concludes that the Soviet Union has virtually closed the formerly wide gap between itself and the United States in strategic arms, and that a similar trend has begun—but is far from complete—for globally mobile forces.

Larson's conclusions are sobering. He argues that the United States is still ahead of the USSR in almost every aspect of their rivalry, but that long-term growth trends which favor the Soviet Union will result in general equality between the two powers by the end of the century. He also predicts that, although communism probably will not make any gains among industrially developed countries, the continued growth of nationalistic, command economy regimes in the Third World will represent losses for America, if not clear-cut gains for the USSR.

In comparing the achievements and failures of the two superpowers, an enterprise in which bias and tendentiousness usually abound, the author has achieved a remarkable degree of objectivity. The result is neither an apologia for liberal capitalism, nor a conservative argument for greater armaments and a more aggressive foreign policy. Larson's stimulating interpretations and assessments will interest all readers, including specialists. In addition, the information on a wide range of topics contained in his book will be useful to students, businessmen, and political leaders alike.

TEDDY J. ULDRICKS

University of North Carolina, Asheville

COMMUNISM AND COMMUNIST SYSTEMS. By *Robert G. Wesson*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978. xii, 227 pp. \$7.95, paper.

A comparative study of communism must grapple with the thesis, cogently propounded some years ago by John Kautsky, that "Communist systems are not distinguished from non-Communist ones by any particular characteristics," nor "as Communist phenomena, do they have any particular characteristics in common, except the symbol of Communism." In Kautsky's view, Communist regimes do not constitute a

category by themselves, but fit into either of the two categories of "modernizing regimes in relatively underdeveloped countries," or "bureaucratic-managerial regimes in industrially more advanced countries."

Wesson avoids the ticklish problem posed by Kautsky by positing from the outset the idea that Communist systems belong to a single genus, "a group apart," and they vary only within "common parameters." Even if this assumption is accepted, there still remains room, and indeed a need, for making comparisons with other systems, placing the Communist group within the context of all political systems—a task which, for the most part, Wesson avoids. He limits his efforts to the examination of the universal and presumably unique features of all Communist systems in his first chapter, and of certain distinguishing features of each Communist system in his subsequent country-by-country treatment. In so doing, he greatly exaggerates the "common" in contrast to the "peculiar," thus following, ironically, the Soviet prescription of comparative Communist analysis and, worse yet, neglecting the crucial analytical question about the degree to which Communist systems are in fact alike *and* unlike.

In his exposition of Communist universals, there are a number of grievous distortions or errors. For example, he states that all independent Communist states have been "relatively backward, at least in their inception" (p. 25), and that "communism is part of the reaction of traditional societies to the outspreading of modern scientific, industrial power" (p. 29). What about Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and even Russia? Further, he contends that "all, in one way or another, have come out of the Russian Revolution" (p. 3), "all autonomous Communist states have a background of authoritarianism" (p. 26), all, it seems, have some kinship with "the great empires of the past" (pp. 26–27). In addition to these extraordinarily doubtful statements, Wesson propounds other misleading generalizations, such as the common Marxist-Leninist character of all Communist systems. Even if one accepts the author's term "a single creed," one surely cannot ignore the rich diversity of interpretations of Marxism-Leninism that has generated intense doctrinal controversy reminiscent of the conflict of rival versions of Christianity. On a more specific point Wesson states, quite wrongly, that Communist leaders are rarely removed except by death or infirmity (p. 6)—Novotný, Khrushchev, Rákosi, Gomulka, Chervenkov, Nagy, Dubček, and others to the contrary!

The other chapters—which form the bulk of the book—describe separately each of the Communist states, but in superficial sketches, which are too brief to be really meaningful or to bring out adequately the kaleidoscopic variety of the states. Nor is there any real effort at systematic analysis of subcategories of the supposed Communist group (the "species" within the "genus"). The category of "imposed communism," for example, which is said to include five of the eight East European countries and two of the Asian ones, is described as resulting from the presence of Soviet armed forces (Vietnam!). Yet the claim is also made that it arose from "conditions propitious for Communism" so that the Communists would have probably come to power in most of these countries "without foreign intervention" (p. 83). Nor is any effort made to distinguish variations which manifest themselves not only between countries but between different historical periods of the same country.

Regretfully, it must be concluded that Wesson's study casts a rather dim and confusing light on the elusive concept of comparative communism.

H. GORDON SKILLING
University of Toronto