Fritz Bartel. ***The Triumph of Broken Promises: The End of the Cold War and the Rise of Neoliberalism.*** **Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press, 2022. 429 pages. Hardcover, $45.00.**

Fritz Bartel's book offers a compelling interpretation of how the much-dreaded Cold War ended peacefully and resulted in the rise of neoliberalism, a political approach that favors free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending. In his narrative, Bartel contends that the Cold War began as a competition between democratic capitalism and state socialism to provide welfare to their populations. After the economic depression of the 1930s led to fascism and World War II, governments on both sides of the Iron Curtain argued that their system of government and economy could best provide all the trappings of modernity. Bartel refers to this as the politics of making promises. But the economic shocks of the 1970s, occasioned by the 1973 oil price hikes by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in retaliation for the United States supporting Israel in the Yom Kippur War, flipped over that competition to make promises, and turned the Cold War into a competition to break promises. Without a doubt, the 1973 Oil Shock plunged the global economy into disarray. In effect, energy and financial markets pressured governments on both sides to introduce economic discipline in their governing pledges.

The implication was that capitalist democracies that successfully forced something unwelcome, such as unemployment, price increases, rising inequality, and bankruptcies of non-profitable state-owned enterprises without inviting social unrest survived, while socialist states that could not collapsed. Ergo, Bartel argues that democratic capitalism won the Cold War ostensibly because it showed the resolve to impose market discipline on its own people. State socialism collapsed because it could not. The book narrates how the pressure to break promises propelled the end of the Cold War. Liberal democracies and neoliberal economies won out because they proved most skillful at foisting austerity. Thus, neoliberalism served as a handy tool and ideological platform for governments on both sides to break promises. The bottom line was that promises were broken because governments could no longer meet the expectations of their populations, stemming from the post-World War II economic marvel about continuously rising standards of living. And Bartel refers to this as the politics of breaking promises.

In his broader discussions, Bartel demonstrates that both the Western and Eastern blocs were, more than they had thought, subject to the pressures of the same global market. For example, with the energy and financial crises of the 1970s, socialist states became increasingly indebted to Western financial institutions. Bartel discussed at length other players in the dynamics of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberalism, including Margaret Thatcher (UK Prime Minster), Ronald Reagan (US President), Paul Volcker (Chairman of the US Federal Reserve), Helmut Khol (Chancellor of West Germany), Mikhail Gorbachev (Secretary-General of Soviet Communist Party), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The aftermath of the Oil Shock, including price increases and shortages of essential commodities, stoked rising popular discontent in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc. In addition, the disastrous military incursion in Afghanistan and falling oil prices contributed to growing budget deficits for the USSR. Soviet leaders conceded that economic burdens demanded a new political system, in which the state did less for its citizens. The new thinking was that if the people participated to some degree in governance, they would be willing to accept any austerity measures the state might implement. However, implementing cost-cutting measures and economic adjustment, including restructuring state fixed prices and price controls, proved politically difficult. The expectations and demands of the population for a basic standard of living, subsidized by the state, were at odds with neoliberal economics. Communist leaders felt boxed in: they could not square a reduction in people's living standards with pledges for a better life ingrained in official government rhetoric. Other specific promises that increasingly became economically burdensome for the Soviet Union were the guarantee of heavily subsidized oil and gas to its Eastern European allies. Several allies, including Poland, German Democratic Republic (GDR), Hungary and Czechoslovakia received the bad news regarding Soviet cutbacks in energy deliveries. What is more, it was particularly challenging for the Soviet Union to adjust to new economic realities as it struggled to maintain its superpower status.

Capitalist democracies made promises to their citizens, too. In the United States, that promise came in the form of the American Dream, popularized in the writings of novelist Horatio Alger. The strength of this national myth is anchored in the narrative of opportunities to rise from humble backgrounds to lives of middle-class, even upper middle-class security and comfort through hard work, determination, courage, and honesty. The aspiration for a good life was in sync with the tenets of neoliberalism. To this end, individual achievement, not dependence on government, is considered the principal indicator of success. Meritocracy, thereby, becomes a fair and worthy guiding post. Those who fell behind are to blame for their social disabilities in not taking advantage of opportunities.

Like Gorbachev in the USSR, the United States under President Reagan experienced escalating national debt and budget deficits. Paul Volcker at the Federal Reserve applied monetary policies that became known as the "Volcker Shock," by raising interest rates, which precipitated successive recessions that impacted the manufacturing sector. The Soviet Union did not have its Volcker equivalent to deliver economic shock therapy. Furthermore, Reagan raised US military spending to a new high in the 1980s as an explicit strategy to dare the USSR to compete and, thereby, bankrupt it. Beyond *perestroika* and *glasnost*, the economic burden of empire weighed down the Soviet Union that eventually led to its breakup. In sum, Bartel identified the three economic forces – oil, finance, and economic discipline—that played crucial roles in fundamentally altering the nature of the competition between democratic capitalism and state socialism. As Bartel aptly puts it, “As long as nation-states maintained access to either capital markets or energy resources, they could continue making promises at home and fighting the Cold War abroad. If, however, they lost access to one or both, they would have to turn to the politics of breaking promises and implementing policies of economic discipline at home” (p. 332). It is this process of political adjustment and ideological reform that is referred to as the collapse of communism and the end of the Cold War. The Triumph of Broken Promises is scholarly researched, persuasively argued, and excellently written. Fritz Bartel offered a compelling story.

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