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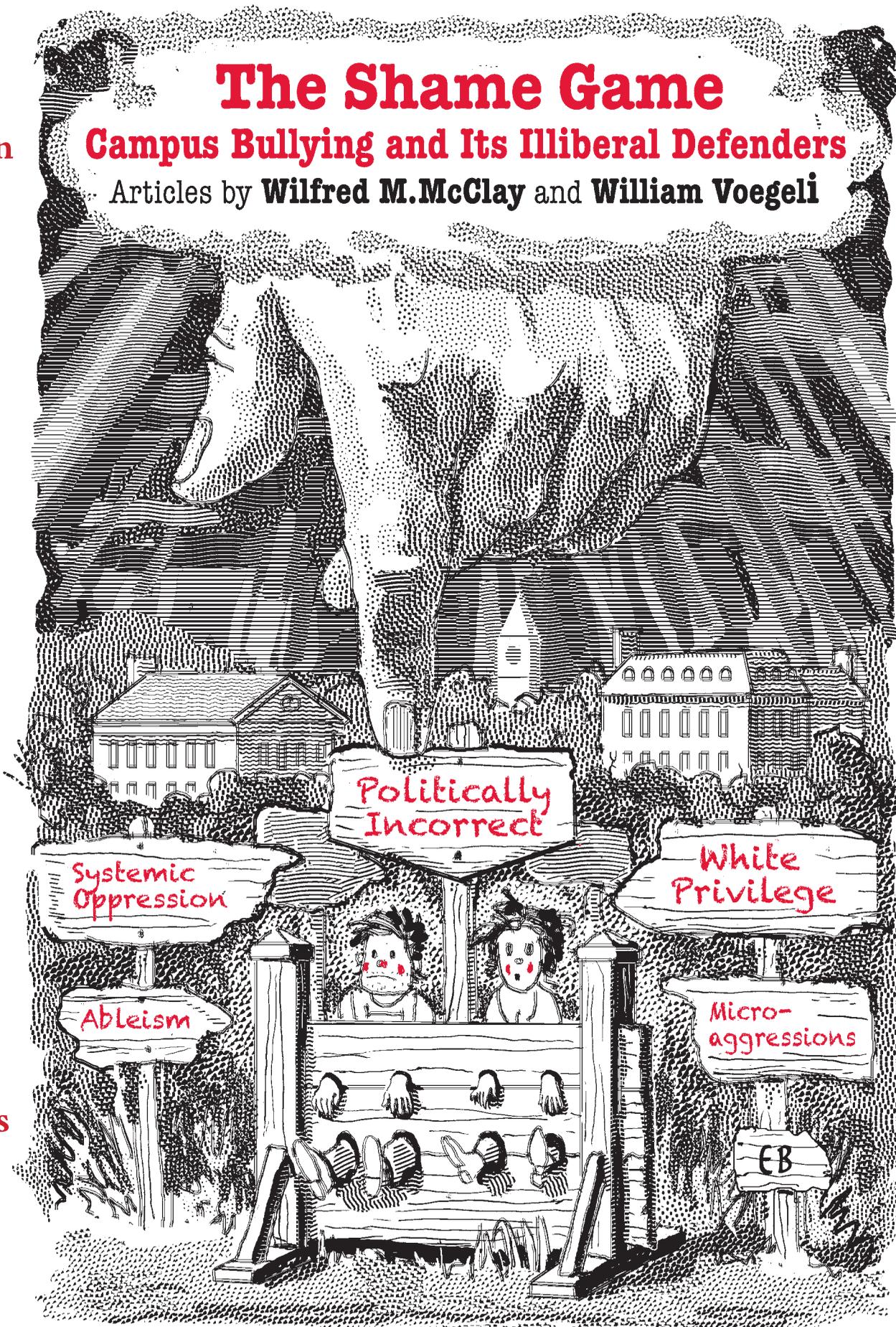
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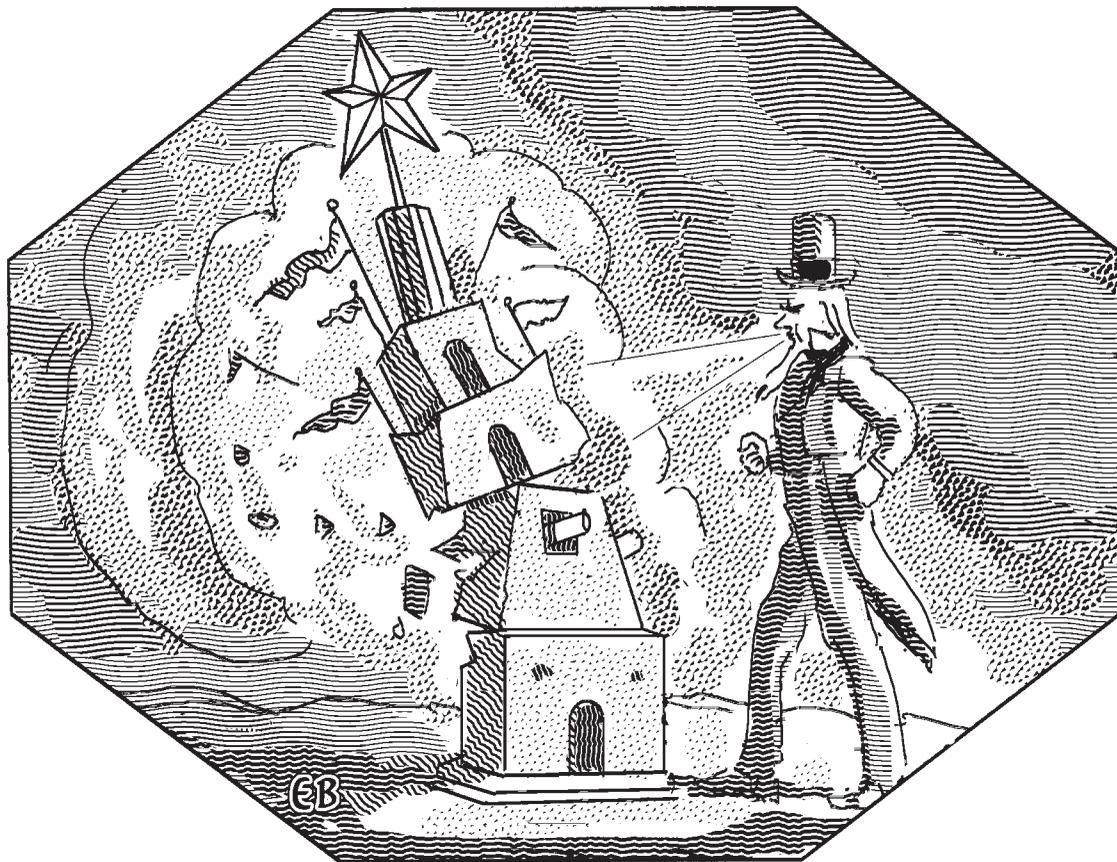
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Book Review by Paul Kengor

WE WIN, THEY LOSE

The End of the Cold War: 1985–1991, by Robert Service.
PublicAffairs, 688 pages, \$35



NO ONE MORE DESERVES THE OPPORTUNITY to write a book on the collapse of Soviet Communism than Robert Service. The emeritus professor of Russian history at the University of Oxford, and senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, he has written books on some of the worst people and developments in human history: biographies of Lenin, Stalin, and Trotsky, plus chronicles of the Bolshevik Party, Russian Revolution, and world Communism. Now 68 years of age, Service finally gets to relate a happy ending.

The years 1985 to 1991, the period examined in his new book, match Mikhail Gorbachev's tenure as General Secretary of the Soviet Union's Communist Party. Nonetheless, Service begins with a succinct biography of Ronald Reagan, not Gorbachev. Reagan "wished to challenge the global power and pre-eminence of the USSR; but he also sought peace in the world," writes Service. "He wanted his presidency to make a decisive impact." It did so, through the efforts of a foreign policy team *The*

End of the Cold War examines: Richard Pipes, the Harvard professor of Russian history on leave for two consequential years to serve in the National Security Council; Richard V. Allen, Reagan's first national security advisor; Edwin Meese, who served in the White House after eight years as a close advisor to Governor Reagan in California; William J. Casey at the Central Intelligence Agency; and Cabinet officers including Caspar Weinberger at Defense, George Shultz at State, and Jeane Kirkpatrick as ambassador to the United Nations.

Service gives Gorbachev his due, highlighting the sense of determination he had in common with Reagan. Unlike his American counterpart, however, Gorbachev was never sure of the exact outcome he sought. Where Reagan knew the change he wanted—the USSR's dissolution—Gorbachev "would find the right policies as he moved along." In this, maintains Service, the new general secretary was "decisive and imaginative, though it also laid him open to trying things out without a proper idea about what to expect."

AS REAGAN HIMSELF WOULD LATER say of his negotiating partner, Gorbachev started a process that became far more unmanageable than he ever expected, one that not even a totalitarian state could control. In the end, no matter what Gorbachev initially intended, his actions helped end the Cold War and the Soviet Union. The combined force of the internal pressures generated by Soviet Communism's contradictions, and the external pressures generated by Ronald Reagan's implacable opposition, proved irresistible.

Service is authoritative and scholarly, with an academic's command of primary and secondary sources but a good writer's ability to present material in an engaging, distinctive way. *The End of the Cold War* relies heavily, and effectively, on literature from the Soviet side, while also making use of important archival material on international Communism. The chapter on "World Communism and the Peace Movement," for example, examines how the Kremlin tapped various Communist par-



ties around the world to pursue its goals in the 1980s. These parties had always answered to Moscow, specifically to the dictates of the Soviet Comintern, established in March 1919. The Comintern was quietly “disbanded” during World War II, in part to reassure Russia’s American allies. In fact, the Soviets simply transformed the Comintern into a new entity, the International Department. Service notes that the powerful head of the International Department from 1955 all the way through the 1980s was Boris Ponomarev, one of the central figures in the Soviets’ clandestine Cold War tactics.

MOSCOW ENSURED THE COOPERATION of its global Communist parties through subsidies, always approved by the Politburo. Ponomarev personally held the purse strings through the Assistance Fund for Communist Parties and Movements of the Left. Though most of the cash originated in Moscow, the USSR’s poverty forced the Kremlin to squeeze some extra money from “our friends,” the comparably bankrupt satellite states of Eastern Europe.

Service affirms what others have reported, namely that the “biggest grant” annually dispensed by the Kremlin was its \$2.5 million subsidy to Gus Hall’s Communist Party USA (CPUSA). American officials knew of this secret, illegal aid at the time, thanks to the incredible success of an agent named Morris Childs, the number-two man at CPUSA. Hall had no idea that Childs had long ago rejected Communism and begun working for the FBI. That story was reported in John Barron’s superb *Operation Solo* (1996). Service does not mention Childs, but he notes that “the USSR needed an agency of continuous propaganda for its cause, and Hall was the person whom Moscow regarded as the best at performing this task.” Hall dutifully endorsed the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968. He sang the praises of glorious life in the USSR and of the leadership of Comrade Brezhnev, all the while scorning each U.S. president. “He passed every test

in the Kremlin’s book,” states Service, “even offering support of the Soviet Army’s war in Afghanistan.”

Service says that the next-biggest recipient of Moscow’s largesse, after CPUSA, was the French Communists, who received \$2 million per year, followed by Finland’s Communists at \$1.35 million, and then Communist parties in Portugal (\$800,000), Greece (\$700,000), and Chile (\$500,000). Moscow looked to rally these parties to stop the Reagan Administration’s campaign to deploy Pershing II missiles in Western Europe. The Communists would prompt, manipulate, and join the wider Left—socialists, liberals, peaceniks, dupes, dopes—in what came to be known as the “nuclear freeze” movement. “The Kremlin targeted the World Peace Council as an instrument of its purposes,” Service writes, “and American communists filled posts in the leadership.” Other organizations “that were used” included the National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, the U.S.-USSR Citizens Dialogue, and the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Moscow even pursued certain far-left members of the British Labour Party.

In the end, Kremlin efforts to support the nuclear freeze failed to defeat Ronald Reagan’s ambitions, though not before gigantic protests were organized in cities from London to New York. One of those on the Reagan team who experienced this intensely was NSC head William P. Clark, Allen’s successor, who told me often that the nuclear-freeze battle was a “dog fight.” The tougher dog won. Reagan successfully built and deployed the Pershing missiles, and he and Gorbachev would come together in Washington in December 1987 to sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, in which both sides agreed to abandon all intermediate-range missiles. The INF Treaty enshrined and vindicated Reagan’s strategy, first laid out in his November 1981 “zero-zero option” speech. It was the greatest nuclear-weapons treaty of the Cold War, and a milestone in bringing it to a successful conclusion.

THE END OF THE COLD WAR GIVES CLOSE, generous attention to the role of Reagan’s successor, President George H.W. Bush. Reagan and Gorbachev had become friends, not just friendly, laying the groundwork for Bush’s warm, amiable dealings with the general secretary. Many scholars neglect the personal dynamic in international relations, but Service emphasizes the importance of the relationships that connected Reagan, Bush, and Gorbachev. He dedicates over a hundred pages to Bush’s indispensable role in completing the geopolitical transformation that Reagan had started.

He also makes clear that the calamity in Afghanistan was crucial to the Soviet Union’s collapse. Eastern Europe was not a major topic in Reagan, Gorbachev, and Bush’s discussions, “[s]trange as it may seem,” while “Afghanistan by contrast attracted ceaseless attention.” Moscow viewed the war there as a “bleeding sore,” but it was closer to a hemorrhaging wound. After the Afghan resistance acquired U.S.-provided Stinger missiles in 1986, the Red Army’s position became untenable. “The mujahidin were relentless,” according to Service.

By 1988, the war that Gorbachev had tried to win was a debacle. On February 15, 1989, the last Red Army soldier retreated from Afghanistan into Soviet Tajikistan, ending the nightmare with no gains of any type offsetting the USSR’s profound losses. Service declares the whole mission a “lamentable failure.”

Though one can question whether its interpretation gives sufficient credit to Boris Yeltsin, Vaclav Havel, and Pope John Paul II, *The End of the Cold War* gets all the big questions right. The world was fortunate to have leaders who brought a half-century nightmare to a peaceful conclusion, and his readers will be grateful for Robert Service’s clear explanation of how and why it happened.

Paul Kengor is professor of political science and executive director of the Center for Vision & Values at Grove City College. His latest book is Reagan’s Legacy in a World Transformed (Harvard University Press).

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