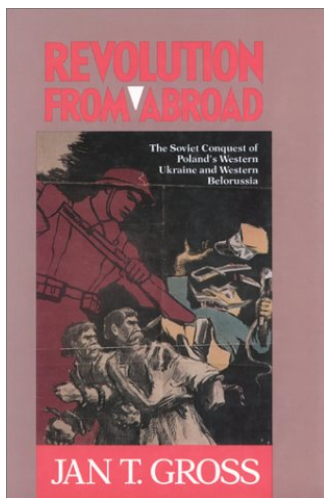

Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia by Jan T. Gross (2002), 396 pages.



This book was actually written in 1986, when the author was teaching in Georgia; the new edition contains an additional chapter and a few introductory comments, but otherwise the original text has been preserved. Jan Gross is now with New York University and became known by his short work *Jedwabne* (2001). Perhaps this is the reason why his earlier work is now being reprinted. The subject matter is defined in the title and relates to a specific period from September 1939 through 1941. Although the described events took place while World War II was raging across the European continent, this narrative of very sad events has, strictly speaking, no connection with military campaigns or grandiose political plans hatched in the capitals. In fact, it is a litany of human misery caused by Stalin, the ruthless annihilation of a peaceful life, and the outrageous denial of basic rights. This book will be of interest to the English-speaking audience: the events happened 60 years ago in a remote corner of the Continent; also, it occurred in a short time and soon thereafter the world's attention focused on the global catastrophe.

Yet what took place at that distant period affected lives of millions of people, and the book should not be considered of only a limited scholarly value. It relates that just over two weeks after German panzer divisions swept through the western provinces of Poland, the Soviet Union stabbed the country in the back by entering the eastern regions under the pretext of liberating them. A million soldiers and thousands of tanks grabbed 77,000 square miles of Polish territory, the equivalent of the six New England states plus New York State, with a population of 13 million people. It started on September 17, 1939, and by October the entire area came under communist regime. The ordeal had begun.

The author took advantage of a unique collection of documents of which most people don't know: when in 1942 the masses of Poles left their Siberian labor camps heading for Persia (Iran), Gen. W. Anders urged every person to write down his/her reminiscences of the three previous years. An amazing trove of heart-breaking memoirs was assembled and, ultimately, most of them ended at the Hoover Institution in California. These materials (as well as many other sources in various languages) were used extensively. Their authenticity cannot be denied. Meticulous special Notes cover over 100 pages, and may interest a diligent student. The casual reader may wish to concentrate on such chapters as: *Conquest*, *Elections*, *Social Controls*, or the final aftermath resulting in *Prisons* or *Deportations*. To assist our members, our own Library's volume contains a custom-made detailed Index of all sub-chapters (including page numbers); there are dozens of them, and their titles are quite informative. Hence, the Index will be of great help. (We wish that the author had prepared one himself.)

This short review cannot give justice to the overwhelming quantity of information contained in the book. Some details will be easier to recall: for example, Soviet soldiers received 300 rubles each as they were entering Poland, and this probably explains their puzzling and frantic watch-buying spree. Almost all hate propaganda contained references to *polskie pany* (overlords) who will be justly punished. In reality, the word *pan* is a simple common courtesy phrase identical to the French *monsieur* or the Italian *signore*. But any caustic comment in 1940's Lwów could cause a deportation. Equally punished would be unguarded comments about social habits, schooling, different traditions and, God forbid, religion. All of that was directed at millions of people most of whom were actually poor, struggling to make a living irrespective of their ethnic background and in the land noted for having no industry or mineral resources. The persecution knew no end, and in no time hundreds of cattle cars full of deportees (usually Poles) were headed for the tundras. Of course shortly after the war ended, other millions were expelled from their homes in eastern Poland where many had lived for centuries and had to find a place to live elsewhere.

George Suboczewski