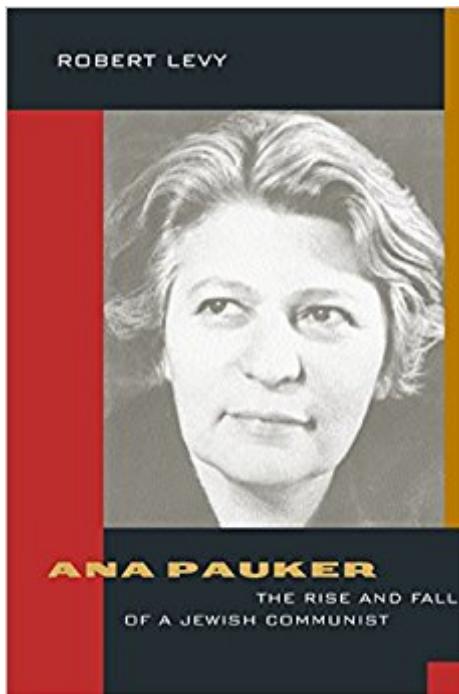


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Ana Pauker: The Rise And Fall Of A Jewish Communist



Synopsis

In her own day, Ana Pauker was named "The Most Powerful Woman in the World" by Time magazine. Today, when she is remembered at all, she is thought of as the puppet of Soviet communism in Romania, blindly enforcing the most brutal and repressive Stalinist regime. Robert Levy's new biography changes the picture dramatically, revealing a woman of remarkable strength, dominated by conflict and contradiction far more than by dogmatism. Telling the story of Pauker's youth in an increasingly anti-Semitic environment, her commitment to a revolutionary career, and her rise in the Romanian Communist movement, Levy makes no attempt to whitewash Pauker's life and actions, but rather explores every contour of the complicated persona he found expressed in masses of newly accessible archival documents.

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Customer Reviews

Virtually unknown internationally today, Pauker appeared on a 1948 Time cover, described inside as "the most powerful woman alive." In Romania, she's remembered as a dogmatic, fanatically subservient Stalinist, emblematic of the terror and repression of the 1947-1952 period in which she served as foreign minister and more briefly as de facto behind-the-scenes leader. Levy easily refutes this image, since Pauker was purged on Stalin's urging precisely for being too soft. What's more difficult is to discover who she really was. Levy concisely describes the recurrent, historically precarious position of European Jews as social pioneers eventually viciously displaced as "parasites" a pattern repeated with revolutionaries like Pauker. Though ultimately unsuccessful in

avoiding this fate, she displayed high levels of historical self-awareness, acting in often surprising ways. The central chapters explore her roles in agriculture, party purges and Jewish emigration, which provoked the major accusations against her. As agriculture secretary she opposed forced collectivization and supported higher prices for agricultural products; as a party leader, she opposed the purge of popular leader Lucretiu Patrascu and the foreign, disproportionately Jewish veterans of the Spanish Civil War and the French Resistance, while her complex relations to her Jewish heritage, identity and compatriots were typically demonized by the anti-Semitism that doomed her. Though Pauker the person remains enigmatic, the political figure's complexities and contradictions, as portrayed by Levy, belie the caricature her homeland clings to, and challenge simplistic notions of the Cold War's darkest hours. 20 b&w photos, 1 map. (Mar.) Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

In his introduction, Levy describes Ana Pauker as "the daughter of poor religious Jews rising to the pinnacle of power in a country traditionally disdainful of both Jews and women." Officially Romania's foreign minister from 1947 to 1952--the first woman to hold such a post--Pauker was actually the unofficial head of Romania's Communist Party after World War II, and for a number of years she was the country's true behind-the-scenes leader. Levy examines Pauker's life and career; the evidence reveals a person characterized more by contradictions than by dogmatism, a Communist leader fanatically loyal to Stalin and the Soviet Union but actively opposing the Stalinist line and deliberately defying Soviet directives on a number of important issues. The remainder of the study covers her years in power and subsequent purge. The book will be of interest to students of the history of communism in Eastern Europe and of one of its most important figures. George Cohen
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well researched

"I don't need their rehabilitation," Ana Pauker asserted upon her release from Stalinist prison in Romania. "History will rehabilitate me." Thanks to Robert Levy's biography, history finally came around. Levy here provides the necessary human touch so largely lacking in the historiography and polemical literature on Communist East Europe. Levy reveals what anyone with decency and common sense should have known all along: that dissident intellectuals like the Paukers engaged the Communist movement as a fulfillment of their idealism, not its denial. This is hard to square with the stereotyped Stalinist apparatchik, loving only power, squelching all human values in himself and

others as he persecutes "real" dissidents and unbelievers. Levy shows that the contradiction was strongly felt by many of these apparatchiki - even one who allegedly kept her umbrella handy in Bucharest, in case it rained in Moscow. But no harder to comprehend than a bishop staying loyal to his Catholic Church, in spite of pederast priests; or a banker still believing in the virtue of the free market even after the rupturing pederasty of Wall Street. (Or, for that matter, the insistent blank check given to Israel by Washington as a reward for being a liberal democracy, in spite of overwhelming evidence otherwise.) Levy shows how Communism for the Paukers was a way of overcoming the narrow horizons of Orthodox Jewry, and the even narrower limitations imposed by European anti-Semitism. They were "avowed" Communists who still felt keenly the pangs of identity and racism; who saw social revolution as a complement to this identity as Fidel Castro considered himself both Cuban patriot and Marxist-Leninist. Considering the resurgence of xenophobia and anti-Semitism in post-Communist "free Romania," we see the old demons with which Pauker wrestled a century ago were never truly exorcised but have proudly re-possessed the land. And the irony is compounded in that few stood up for the Romanian peasant more than Ana Pauker in the councils of her Party. Much as Jewish Marxist intellectuals in the US embraced the black Southern sharecropper as fellow outcast, Pauker upheld the Romanian peasant as the mudsill of the old system who had - like the Jews - everything to gain from a new order of things. That the Party hurt only itself by disregarding this grassroots potential was no fault of Pauker's, as Robert Levy shows. Yet even today (in reading certain reviewers below as well as Levy's interviews with some of her old "comrades") no Communist is more vilified in Romanian popular memory, because of her "foreignness": the very alienation that allowed her to identify with the other despised of old Romania. As a good "company person" she played along with the system she served, even at great personal cost. But in considering her background she had few other options. She was a founder of the Romanian Communist Party who had suffered torture and prison for the cause. She could not be intimidated by the backstabbing politics of the Comintern or the Kremlin, nor desert her Party in favor of a fashionable Zionism - even as she helped other Jews escape the poisonous anti-Semitic rot of her homeland, and was nearly devoured by it herself. Anti-Semitism was her true enemy, not Stalin: even if infected with it also, he conveniently died to spare her a final contradiction in her long, unfairly judged career as a Communist Jewish woman of her era and place.

Good insight as to the corruption and infiltration resulting the demise of a country

"Ana Pauker" is an excellent and compelling biography that blows old notions about East European

communists out of the water. While hardly glossing over Ana Pauker's serious delusions and often cynical compromises, Robert Levy meticulously and convincingly demonstrates that Pauker was remarkably resistant to Soviet dictates during the most perilous years of Stalin's reign. This is a fascinating, well-written account based on recently unearthed communist archives and personal interviews of participants and eye-witnesses. Anyone interested in communist history or contemporary East European Jewish history will find this book utterly informative.

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Sorry, no arguments will convince me to relativize the following fact: at the time of her political activity, Ana Pauker had to know the criminal (genocidal, to be accurate) nature of the political party she was a leader of. My mother still cringes when she remembers the slogan "Ana Pauker si cu Dej - baga spaima in burgeji" (Ana Pauker and [Gheorghiu] Dej scare the bourgeois) cried out at forced mass rallies. The "bourgeois" mentioned in this aggressive rhyme had reasons to be scared of Pauker. Hundreds of thousands Romanians are estimated to have been imprisoned for political reasons, thousands of them tortured and killed, buried without a grave. Pauker believed she can "change things from inside?". Would you join the Nazi party (for example) to improve its ethics???

This is a sound and wise biography of Ana Pauker. An exceptional volume. An examination of the Romanian communist system and its leaders was long due--beyond false anxieties. And Levy does it so superbly, blending history with years of archival and interview-based research. A lucid cut in the political life of a controversial Romanian communist leader, Ana Pauker.

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