



When the Wall Came Down: The Berlin Wall and the Fall of Soviet Communism

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This is a rather odd account of the reunification of Germany. Its focus is uncertain and its presentation an uneasy mixture of journalism and political history. Schmemmann was a **New York Times** correspondent in Berlin in 1989 and his report of the dismantling of the wall and the events that led up to it has immediacy and insight (indeed he won a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of the reunification). But the historical account in which it is embedded is less satisfying. The book is two thirds a history of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and one third a collection of articles from the **New York Times** about key moments in that history from 1955 to 1990. This is very much the **New York Times** version. The further reading section is made up entirely of articles from the **New York Times**. And Schmemmann's selection of events in the wider world to illustrate the fall of communism tends to emphasise the peaceful triumph of democracy and national self determination over ruthless authoritarianism (or the suppression of peaceful movements for change by communist dictatorships ? as in China). The less edifying aspects of the collapse of communism and the emergence of new nation states in the former communist sphere of influence, shown in full horror in Yugoslavia, finds no place in this account at all. Curiously, I reviewed a Kingfisher book on Beijing a couple of months ago which omitted to mention the Tiananmen Square protests. A different political view here: but, once again, an important part of the picture is missing.

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