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The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: the Revolution and Civil Wars

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BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Robert B. Edgerton. *Death or Glory: The Legacy of the Crimean War*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999. ix, 288 pp. \$30.00.

Death or Glory might profitably be subtitled, "Military Futility and Meaningless Death." Rarely will a reader encounter in two-hundred and fifty-odd pages of text more numerous or graphical descriptions of the consequences of modern combat. To readers familiar with the *Flashman* novels, Robert Edgerton's non-fiction outdistances in breadth, depth, and realism anything lurking in George MacDonald Fraser's imagination. This book is the starting point for anyone who needs to understand how soldiers and civilians suffered in the thick of nineteenth-century warfare.

In a chapter on the war's origins Edgerton sketches a clear enough chronology of the war to illuminate the thematic balance of the book. Chapters follow on death and more death: by disease (representing a significant majority of the fatalities), exposure, dismemberment, injury, thirst, starvation, punishment, and suicide – and, of course, combat. Although arranged in chapters with subtitles such as "Women and Children," "The Turks at War," and "Butchered Leadership," Edgerton's study has one clear central thesis: that distinctions such as uniform, language, or position were insignificant in the face of every participant's permanent proximity to death. One can scarcely imagine a more lethal existence, and the reader will come from the book with useful new knowledge of sanitation, epidemiology, and medical practices, and some surprising observations about mid-nineteenth century anthropology.

Edgerton's sources, some contemporaneous to the events, make for a powerful, unsettling narrative, delivered in readable style. They will also pose problems for historians and others interested in the text as source, problems which the author, an anthropologist at UCLA, does not confront. Not least is the plausibility of some of the reporting. Edgerton recounts without comment the romantic-heroic words put into the mouths of the dying by survivors, and simply asserts (based on his sources) events that strike the critical reader as unlikely. What is one to make, for instance, of the description of Turkish soldiers freezing to death while embarked en route to the eastern Black Sea – in mid-August? Although the author exploited his sources to the hilt, he seems not to have also confronted them with vigor.

The challenge of selecting a useful comparative war as a foil for his story defeated Edgerton; his choice of the American Civil War merely underlined how truly miserable both wars were, without providing the contrast that would have moved his argument to a broader analytical plane. The German war a decade later, and the Franco-German war in particular, would have sharpened his devastating criticism of incompetent leadership and nuanced his conclusions about the basic logistical failing of armies, analysis that is necessary but lacking in his account. While the "personal experience" of death and misery was equally bad in the two European conflicts, one war produced dramatic results – a decisive victory – and permanently changed the map of Europe. This dissimilarity of results of the 1854-1856 and the 1870-1871 wars af-

fect memories that in turn shaped postwar narratives, with dramatic effect, up to and after the First and Second World Wars.

Edgerton is perplexed by the almost universal inability of nations to support and supply their military contingents in the Crimea. His mystification comes, possibly, from his interest in the "personal experience" of war rather than on institutional decision-making and dysfunctionality. Again, even a passing contrast with Prussian and French institutions in 1870-1871 would have placed very useful analytical tools in his hands. He is unaware, for instance, that among combatant states in 1853-1856, only the French had permanent general staff organs to prepare and maintain its logistical infrastructure, and nothing except the murderous effects of grapeshot and ball affected "personal experience" more than this. (The Royal Navy contingents ashore received superlative provisioning, support, and care; Edgerton notes this, but does not inquire further. The Royal Navy staff had centuries of planning practice and was the world's premier maritime power as a result.)

Finally, the Crimean and German war started in motion reforms of vast strategic significance that, by the 1890s, had set the stage for 1914. Russia undertook reforms after 1860 of inestimable military significance (not least professionalization of its general staff and establishment of universal military service) which rendered it France's only strategically efficacious courtier after 1871. While states seem, *ben trovato*, to "refight the last war," in fact each participant in the Crimean conflict undertook reforms or modernization – not always successfully – intended to obviate failings revealed in that war.

Whether well fed or not, whether kept warm, dry and healthy or not, Edgerton's "personal experience" approach demonstrates one unequivocal fact: that men continue to fight – to demonstrate "military effectiveness" – long after reason dictates they should. It is in exploration of this unnerving fact that Edgerton is weakest. Soldiers in nineteenth century armies (and, of course, late-twentieth century armies as well) drank, whored, gamed, sang, smoked, and abused their subordinates to the extent that they had freedom to do so. Their ability and willingness to fight was, however, a much more complex issue. A couple of decades of academic work on "military effectiveness" has transformed understanding of the loyalties that kept soldiers fighting. That this corpus makes no appearance among Edgerton's tools is regrettable, particularly as it might have sharpened his reading of the sometimes implausible primary sources he uses.

Despite these criticisms, *Death or Glory* should be read by anyone unfamiliar with (and, especially, anyone uninterested in) the consequences of nineteenth-century warfare. For undergraduates it will provide a bracing glimpse into the degrading hell of one mid-century war, and it can serve instructors as a useful point of departure for further historical examination of war in the "modern" world.

David Rich

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Aileen M. Kelly. *Views from the Other Shore: Essays on Herzen, Chekhov, and Bakhtin*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999. 260 pp. \$30.00.

In *Views from the Other Shore*, Aileen Kelly continues the perspicacious and thoughtful analyses of Russian thought and culture that she provided in her previous volume, *Toward Another Shore: Russian Thinkers Between Necessity and Chance*. Troubled by the seemingly universal acceptance in Russia of a Russian messianism which seemed at once to justify "the horrors of Stalinism" and provide intellectual sustenance for a number of xenophobic nationalist movements in post-Soviet Russia, she argues that there were actually two antithetical Russian Ideas. Besides the much better known messianic and utopian Russian Idea articulated by Berdiaev and Solzhenitsyn among others, she argues that there exists an alternative Russian Idea which the three subjects of her study best exemplify. Kelly insists that this second Russian Idea has relevance for both the West and Russia because it "can make a significant contribution to current discussions in Europe and North America on the problem of defining freedom and morality in a postfoundationalist culture" (3).

Divided into seven chapters, four of which are republished, this volume focuses on these three thinkers precisely because they criticized the teleological historical schema and faith in absolutes of the dominant utopian Russian Idea. Although she devotes the last two chapters to Chekhov and Bakhtin, the real protagonist of the book is the founder of the alternative Russian Idea, Alexander Herzen. Continuing on the theme of her discussion in *Toward Another Shore* and showing the influence of her mentor Isaiah Berlin, the author provides an analysis of Herzen's thought quite different from most other scholars, especially Martin Malia. Kelly's Herzen is not the utopian father of Russian Socialism; he is actually the pragmatic realist who rejects the teleological arguments of the doctrinaire young radicals of the 1860s and the dogmatically Hegelian Russian liberals.

Highlighting Herzen's intellectual debt to a number of the greatest Western thinkers from Bacon to Schiller to Darwin, Kelly shows that the Russian publicist based his outlook on a concept of moral freedom which sought to reconcile the central problem of the modern age – the antinomy between the modern state and the individual. It was this quest "to discover a form of social organization that would combine the values of individual autonomy with social solidarity" that led him to Russian Socialism, not his utopianism (210).

The author also emphasizes his humanism. Herzen saw people as ends in themselves, not simply as a means to the visions of the future of the various ideologues of the time or links in a chain as envisioned by liberals and radicals who possessed an idolatry of abstractions, such as progress or the common good. Whereas various ideologues were willing to sacrifice the present generation for an abstraction, Herzen insisted that people should liberate themselves, not humanity. In fact, Herzen argued that humanity was moving "toward another shore" by which he meant that people would someday reject their traditional reliance on absolute truths and universal norms, whether religious or secular, to realize that it was the responsibility of all individuals to shape their own lives as best they could.

At times, Kelly's reverence for Herzen tends to crowd out the other figures in the book. The chapters on Chekhov and Bakhtin seem to lose some of their force because of the way in which she introduces Herzen throughout these chapters. One gets a sense that, despite their originality, they are epigones of Herzen. In addition, the brief analysis of Konstantin Kavelin's thought as synonymous with Boris Chicherin's views is facile. Nevertheless, *Views from the Other Shore* is a well-written, thought-provoking study of an important and often overlooked subject which has particular relevance within the contemporary context of Russian intellectual and political life. As Russians try to cope with the complexities of everyday life and search for a national idea to replace the fallen god of communism, they would do well to remember Herzen's warnings about faith in absolutes and abstractions, including Westernization, messianism, and progress.

Curtis Richardson

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Irina Paperno. *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997. ix, 319 pp. \$ 42.50 cloth; \$16.95 paper.

Describing suicide as a "black hole," or enigma, that defies explanation, Irina Paperno argues that cultures have come "to use suicide as a laboratory for the investigation of crucial philosophical and social problems" (2). In the process, this intensely private, human act becomes a cultural artifact or institution, "a practice associated with patterns of symbolic meaning adapted to the general ends of culture and specific needs of a society" (3). Specifically, Paperno demonstrates how men and women living through the profound social, cultural, and political changes of late imperial Russia found in suicide "a symbol of the age" (3). According to Paperno, between the 1860s and 1880s, and again briefly between 1906 and 1914, writers, scientists, journalists, and other citizens of tsarist Russia believed that they were witnessing a suicide epidemic. They discovered in this extraordinary (and it seems, illusory) phenomenon an occasion for exploring the largely negative effects of changing social patterns and ways of thought (positivism) on Russian society. In effect, suicide became the emblematic act of what many perceived as a society in decay.

In the initial chapters, Paperno reviews the suicide literature of nineteenth-century Western Europe and offers a survey of Russian thought on this subject in the context of canon and civil law, popular belief, and scientific studies. On the one hand, Paperno's approach is a familiar one, underscoring the precocity of Russian thought on a subject relative to that of its West European counterparts. For instance, she asserts that in the course of a few years Russian students of suicide went from seeing suicide as a meta-physical problem rooted in the human soul or will to interpreting it as a manifestation of deeper physiological or sociological problems, a process that took decades to unfold among west Europeans. Less familiar and far more interesting is Paperno's discussion of how older Christian models of humankind and the individual's relationship to the world competed and coalesced with these newer paradigms of the medical

and social sciences to offer new interpretations not only of suicide, but of human action in general.

In chapter 3, Paperno examines the role of Russia's burgeoning press in disseminating and debating these various interpretations of suicide, crediting liberal and left-leaning newspapers in particular with creating the impression that social pathology in the form of suicide had reached epidemic proportions. In keeping with the empirical demands of modern science and their own devotion to publicity, newspapers published suicide notes and autopsy reports, which encouraged the experienced reader to interpret the "facts" for themselves. Paperno's analysis in chapter 4 of suicide letters and diaries which appeared in the press illustrates the extent to which journalism and the individuals who committed suicide sometimes transformed this act into a public spectacle. Because of the formulaic nature of such texts, people were allegedly more likely to put their faith in the "natural text" of the body dissected by scientists; however it is never entirely clear how Paperno has gone about determining how such texts were received by the reading public.

The remaining chapters focus on the ways in which Dostoevsky combined the methods and language of contemporary philosophy, patristic theology, and positivistic science to offer his own interpretation of suicide as a metaphysical problem particular to the age in which he lived. As Paperno points out, Dostoevsky applied the experimental models of medical and social scientists to both "real" and "fictional" characters to demonstrate that it was the modern individual's waning belief in God and immortality that led to suicide, rather than some pathology of physiological or sociological origin. Using actual suicide notes and diaries appearing in the press, Dostoevsky allegedly strove to transcend reality and created it instead. This convergence of life and art is ably illustrated by Paperno in the figure of Albert Kovner, a feuilletonist for the liberal Petersburg daily *Golos*, who apparently modeled himself on Dostoevsky's characters, becoming an atheist, criminal, and suicide.

With its unique combination of psychological, historical, and literary methods of analysis, *Suicide as a Cultural Institution in Dostoevsky's Russia* offers rare insight into the ways in which complex social, political, cultural, and psychological forces interacted in the late imperial period to transform Russian life. As such, it should appeal to anyone interested in the history and culture of modern Russia.

Tom Trice

Glenville State College

Tovah Yedlin. *Maxim Gorky: A Political Biography*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1999. xiv, 260 pp. \$59.95.

Few writers have played as prominent a role in politics as did Maksim Gor'kii. His activism began early; he participated in populist circles while spending part of his teenage years in Kazan', and from then on political involvement remained a constant at every stage of his life. Tovah Yedlin's study uses this aspect of his biography as its focal point, introducing literary and personal matters only to the extent necessary to elucidate his activities in the socio-political arena. Certain chapters concentrate on

events that affected Russia as a whole (the 1905 revolution, the First World War and the revolutions of 1917), but for the most part the biography's divisions reflect periods in Gor'kii's own life ("Capri," "Gorky, 1921-1928," "Gorky, 1928-1936").

Since the period of *glasnost'* much new information about Gor'kii has come to light: previously unknown letters to political figures and writers (including the first publications of his letters to Iagoda and Stalin, significant additions to his correspondences with Chukovskii and Korolenko, and for that matter with Lenin), memoirs that had not been published either in whole or in part, studies by Russian scholars who have offered those in his home country radical reinterpretations of Gor'kii's reputation, and even the secret police archive on Gor'kii. Understandably, much of the new knowledge relates to the years leading up to and those following the Bolshevik revolution, the era that was most sensitive in terms of the Soviet effort to maintain an image of Gor'kii as a whole-hearted supporter of the Communist regime. Professor Yedlin begins to make regular use of this material toward the end of the chapter on "War and Revolution," and turns to it with increasing frequency during the chapters that follow. Here the biography is at its liveliest. The account of Gor'kii's convoluted relationship with the Bolsheviks during World War I and then in the years immediately following the revolution captures both the hectic atmosphere of the era and Gor'kii's own vacillations as he struggled to influence the tides of history. The broad outline of Gor'kii's activities during this time has long been known: his opposition to the tsarist regime but also his increasing hostility to the Bolsheviks as they moved closer to assuming power, his efforts to preserve Russian culture during the harsh years of "war communism," and his subsequent departure for Europe and eventual return to the Soviet Union, where he lived his last years an increasingly isolated figure despite the flood of official accolades. The newly released material does not so much change those outlines as sharpen the picture of who Gor'kii was and what he did. It is possible, for instance, to make more informed conjectures regarding the complex of reasons that led to Gor'kii's departure from the Soviet Union in 1921 as well as his return in 1928; more information is also now available about the causes of his death. (Yedlin's review of the contradictory assertions ends by quoting Vitaly Shentalinsky, who examined the police archive and concluded that Gor'kii did indeed die a natural death). Of particular interest are the letters that reveal just how negatively the Bolshevik leadership, especially Zinov'ev, reacted to Gor'kii during the immediate post-revolutionary years. That Gor'kii was able to assert any influence at all says much about the personal relationship he enjoyed with Lenin (despite their often sharp disagreements on specific issues) and about Gor'kii's own ability to wield the authority that had accrued to him as a literary figure of world-wide stature.

While this political biography contains fresh information for anyone who has not closely followed the publications relating to Gor'kii since the late 1980s, it also remains less than fully satisfying. On the whole the volume is accurate enough in its details; I spotted a few minor spelling errors and other inaccuracies (e.g., Andrew Barratt's last name appears variously as Barret [244] and Barrat [245]; Zinovii Peshkov, Gorky's adopted son, was Iakov Sverdlov's brother but not his twin [40, n. 12]; the story "Repetitsiia" is hardly "unpublished" [146, the passage illustrated can be found in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 17: 454-55]), but hardly an inordinate number for a

work of this complexity. The writing itself occasionally becomes a distraction, especially in the early chapters of the book and the conclusion, where the style is sometimes awkward. In a couple of instances the English usage seems unidiomatic. Most people would write "his Nizhnii Novgorod period" rather than his "Nizhegorodskii period" (similarly "his Moscow period" rather than "his Moskovskii period"); yet here "Nizhegorodskii" regularly appears in English phrases. The revolutionary activist Parvus is said to have founded a publishing house called *Verlag*, which of course simply means publishing house (32). It would have been more helpful to provide the name (*Verlag slawischer und nordischer Literatur*). Now and then repetitions of small points occur as well.

As mentioned above, the study does make good use of newly published material, but some sources that would appear relevant are not mentioned. While the book refers to certain works by Chukovskii, it does not mention his recently published diaries (though the diaries of Prishvin are used). When Amfiteatrov's efforts to recruit Gor'kii for his publishing efforts are mentioned (91), it would have been good to refer, at least in a footnote, to the *Literaturnoe nasledstvo* volume (no. 95, 1988) which contains, among other things, the Gor'kii-Amfiteatrov correspondence along with a long introductory essay. The use of "recent" to describe publications from the 1960s (102, n. 76; 143, n. 114, and so on) gives pause; it is as though parts of some chapters were written a while ago or at least do not include many references to scholarship of the past decade or two.

In the final analysis, Gor'kii himself remains a strangely distant figure. The facts of Gor'kii's life are recounted, but except for certain passages over the last three chapters, he does not quite come alive as a person. Part of the problem may lie in the very effort to separate out the political career of a person who was, after all, primarily a writer and whose role in the events of his day was inextricably linked with his literary fame. It could have helped to provide more frequent analyses of Gor'kii's own writings and pronouncements; his voice does not come through as clearly as it might. Finally, the biographical endeavor itself often involves a bold effort to get inside the subject, to convey a sense of who the person was and how the individual thought. The path followed here seems safe and in its own way leads to some discoveries, but it would require a bolder effort to arrive at truly new insights into the various inconsistencies that mark the man and his career.

Barry P. Scherr

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The Bolsheviks in Russian Society: The Revolution and Civil Wars. Edited by Vladimir N. Brovkin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997. 333 pp. \$30.00.

The title of this book is rather misleading. It has less to say about the Bolsheviks in Russian society than about the opposition of Russian society to the Bolsheviks. Nine of the book's fourteen chapters explore the "mentalities," political views, and actions of the Bolsheviks' opponents: Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, members of the Volunteer Army, Siberian warlords, dissatisfied workers, peasants, and émigré intel-

lectuals. The essays that focus on the Bolsheviks examine rhetoric and policymaking at the highest levels of the party leadership. At their best, these essays provide a wealth of detail drawn from recently-opened archival sources, and illuminate the political and social fluidity suggested in the subtitle's substitution of the term "civil wars" for Civil War.

Shifting the terms of debate on 1917 away from the question of popular support for the Bolsheviks, the essays in Part 1, entitled "Paralysis of Politics and Bolshevik Seizure of Power, 1917," examine the intelligentsia's attitudes and political missteps that apparently enabled the Bolsheviks to take power. Anna Geifman attributes the prerevolutionary intelligentsia's support for terrorism and terrorists to a combination of their "political ambitions" (35) and post-1905 debauchery: "radicalism and political violence provided intriguing new avenues of self-expression and . . . thus differed little in its underlying motivation from the widespread use of alcohol and drugs" (38). O. V. Volobuev's brief essay asks: "Which mistakes by the Socialist parties contributed to the success of the October coup?" (43), and provides a detailed account of Menshevik political decisions in the fall of 1917. Michael Melancon's impressively researched essay on the Left Socialist Revolutionaries goes well beyond the emphasis on "mistakes" to suggest how paying attention to the Bolshevik-Left SR coalition forces a rethinking of the narratives that present October as a purely Bolshevik achievement.

Six essays examine – at the level of party leaderships and "from below" – a diverse array of lost anti-Bolshevik causes. Essays by Sergei Pavliuchenkov and Tania Osipova provide examples of widespread worker and peasant protest respectively. Delano DuGram's chapter offers a measured analysis of the usually local dimensions of peasant resistance, and examines the combination of superior force and "real reforms" (193) that eventually diffused it in Tambov. Scott Smith's essay on the Socialist Revolutionaries draws on extensive archival research, and emphasizes the political, as opposed to purely economic or social, bases of workers' opposition. Rejecting the argument that "the narrowness of the opposition's social base was the cause of its failure in 1918," Smith emphasizes the "severe institutional and organizational weaknesses" that plagued the SR and Menshevik parties (99). In his contribution on Siberian warlords, N. G. O. Pereira examines other sorts of structural and personal weaknesses to document how "despite its overtly anti-Soviet outlook, *atamanshchina* did much greater harm to the Whites than to the Reds" (123-24). On the basis of memoirs and other materials produced by members of the Volunteer Army under Generals Lavr Kornilov and Mikhail Alekseev, Leonid Heretz provides a more romantic picture of the opposition doomed to failure. He characterizes the "White mentality" as informed by "an intense sense of duty and devotion to Russia" (106), and the White movement as "an attempt to cleanse and purify Russia by means of self-sacrifice" (119).

While anti-Bolsheviks are located at all levels of Russian society, "Bolshevik" in these essays tends to connote a policymaker in the Kremlin. In his overview of "unpublished Lenin," Richard Pipes argues that recently-revealed documents confirm Lenin's "utter indifference to human lives and human suffering, and his all-consuming concern with holding on to and expanding his power" (203). Vladimir Brovkin's contribution on Bolshevik policy toward women decries the "Bolsheviks' patronizing and

modernizing attitude toward women" (213). Brovkin himself describes the "mentality of women under the Bolsheviks" on the basis of news reports from one textile town in central-northern Russia: "They had heard of dictatorship of the proletariat, but they did not quite understand who the proletariat was" (217). Jonathan Daly's essay provides a well-researched analysis of the discrepancy between the private discussions of top Bolsheviks and the propaganda that surrounded the confiscation of church property in 1922.

The final section, "Ideology, Mentality, and Culture," includes Dmitry Shlapentokh's survey of the nationalist ideologies of two émigrés, which, he asserts, had "striking similarities" to the "ideological premises of NEP Russia" (294). Christopher Read's essay on the "cultural dimension of the Bolshevik dictatorship" draws on the writings of Lenin, Trotsky, and Bukharin to argue that even the Bolsheviks' most "practical" decisions and institutions were shaped by the desire to make a new world and new people. His thought-provoking essay provides a useful framework for examinations of the Bolsheviks' relations with society.

As this brief summary suggests, the essays in this collection offer many well-researched examples of mass opposition to the Bolsheviks – and of Bolshevik perfidy. Brovkin's introduction attempts to fit the essays into a larger historiographic framework. Unfortunately, his preference for attacks on unnamed "revisionists" limits the value of his opening remarks. Brovkin summarizes and criticizes the work of dozens of historians without so much as a single footnote. The introduction offers a stark interpretive choice between "revisionist" histories that excuse Bolshevik rule by suggesting that it enjoyed popular support, and analyses that revolve around "the shocking practices of the Bolsheviks" (9). Advanced undergraduates will likely understand that axes are being ground, but they will come away with no clear understanding of how an emphasis on "civil wars" and oppositions deepens or challenges current understandings of the period. It is easy to agree with Brovkin's contention that "it is impossible to understand the nature of the Russian civil war without seriously considering the values, views, policies, and actions of the Bolsheviks' opponents" (3). The best essays in the collection provide examples of how such considerations might proceed. However, Brovkin's introduction does little to tie the contributions together or to delineate the unanswered questions opened by these essays.

Lisa A. Kirschenbaum

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Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii. *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999. viii, 198 pp. \$24.95.

With the post-Sputnik explosion of Anglo-American Russian studies that began in the 1960s, dozens of first-rate scholarly treatments of the 1917 revolutions have by now appeared in print. The high quality of much of this work was facilitated by the unique confluence of new historical methodologies and the availability of sources even at a time when Soviet archives for the period remained closed to Western schol-

ars. Émigré publications, assiduously compiled Soviet period documentary collections, and above all contemporary newspapers furnished an ample research base for these political and social historians, particularly for studies that focused on the capitals of Petrograd and Moscow. Beginning in 1985, the gradual opening of Soviet archival collections on 1917 have offered opportunities and challenges to a new generation of scholars. Some historians have used these opportunities to apply established paradigms and methodologies to regions and locations previously inaccessible to English-language scholars. Other historians have returned to the central processes of revolution with new sets of questions shaped by encounters with new cultural and post-modern histories. And a third group has combined these new approaches.

The book under review falls into the second category. Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii have joined forces to probe the uses and meaning of language to add new light and complexity to the political and ideological struggles manifest in the 1917 revolutions. In this way, the authors propose a linguistic approach to understanding the political culture of 1917, using many familiar sources such as memoirs and newspapers, but also tapping into archival texts such as letters, petitions, resolutions, slogans, and songs. In this self-proclaimed "exploratory" effort, the authors borrow from current approaches to the French revolution to suggest a new methodology for interpreting the Russian revolutionary process, one that should be welcomed by all who use the kinds of sources represented here. The book is arranged in six thematic chapters, richly documented and accompanied by photographs that reinforce the linguistic analysis. While not explicitly chronological, the order of the themes allows the reader to trace in stimulating ways the familiar trajectory from the fall of the monarchy through social polarization to the political triumph of the Bolsheviks by autumn 1917. The first chapter focuses on the "desacralization of the monarchy," adducing key themes of moral corruption, the loss of authority by Tsar Nicholas II, and treason, and emphasizing the powerful role of rumor in creating the conditions for the loss of Romanov legitimacy by the start of 1917. The fall of the monarchy ushered in the "symbolic revolution," the theme of chapter 2, which looks at cultural geography, songs, flags and emblems, the theatricalization of the revolution, and the battle for symbolic representation that elevated choices of songs or whether or not to wear one's epaulettes in public to acts of political affiliation. Symbols could unite the diverse Russian population, as the red flag did in February; they could also divide it. This approach reinforces our understanding of the political process using a new vocabulary in which to express the social polarization that took place between February and October.

A third chapter explores the cult of the leader and makes an empirical case for the popular roots of this element of Russian political culture. The authors pay particular attention to the cult of Alexander Kerensky and to its weaknesses: the man who personified the revolution would also draw blame when euphoria turned to anger in the autumn. Instead of one leader, the revolution now divided its loyalties between two, General Lavr Kornilov on the right, and Vladimir Lenin on the left, but the authors interpret all the cults as the legacy of monarchical psychology, in which the person of the monarch and abstract institutions of state became fused in the minds of the simple Russian populace.

In a chapter on workers, the authors tackle the issue of class consciousness, employing a linguistic challenge to materialist forms of class identity. (This challenge is now widespread among historians of West European worker experience.) The basic language of class was deeply rooted, they argue, but it had many idioms which reinforced the multiple forms of workers' self-identity. At the same time, the authors emphasize other points of identification than "class," particularly citizenship and human rights, and they show how the language of class and of citizenship could become synonyms in the process of revolution, thus allowing citizenship (membership in the "democracy") to be constituted on the restrictive basis of class. A parallel chapter explores the political language of the peasants, of course a more diverse population even than "workers." Using extensive but not intensive exploration of letters and petitions, Figes and Kolonitskii explore peasant notions of citizenship, their constructions of power and the state, and their understanding of socialism. They conclude that the town and the country spoke different languages, that peasants borrowed ideas from the city but reshaped them to suit their own social needs. A final rich chapter examines images of the enemy, a portrayal that evolved continuously throughout the months of the 1917 revolution. From the German enemy of the World War to the demonic "bourgeoisie," the language of enemies, they argue, surely facilitated the language of violence, and the authors suggest that hatred of the bourgeoisie became the emotional basis for the terror that accompanied the Bolsheviks' consolidation of power in the civil war years after 1917.

The authors' aims, in the end, are modest. By calling attention to the interaction between language and political action, they do not argue that language *constitutes* identities or behavior, as do some more extreme travelers of the linguistic turn such as Gareth Stedman Jones. Rather, they argue that "words and symbols acted as a code of communication" (190) to legitimize actions, and that the dominant pattern of this discourse was struggle, not compromise. (In other words, Lenin's pithy formulation *kto kogo* did indeed capture the essence of Russian political culture.) This stimulating study should be read by anyone who uses or teaches the primary documents of 1917, and it should stimulate students of 1917 and the Soviet experience to bring a fresh and critical eye to their understanding of the basic documents of the revolutionary period.

Diane P. Koenker

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Cynthia A. Ruder, *Making History for Stalin: The Story of the Belomor Canal*. Gainesville, Fla.: University Press of Florida, 1998. xvi, 248 pp. \$49.95.

Of what use is Stalinist-era official socialist realist literature for historians seeking to understand the Soviet Union? This is precisely the question that lies at the heart of Cynthia Ruder's intriguing study of one of the most celebrated projects of the First Five-Year Plan, the Stalin White Sea-Baltic (Belomor) Canal. Completed on June 20, 1933, this long-awaited waterway was built by over 100,000 slave laborers working under brutal conditions with primitive tools. Interestingly, Ruder focuses not on the canal itself, but on the Writers' Brigade commissioned to prepare the official history

of the construction, *Belomorkso-Baltiiskii Kanal imeni Stalina: Istorii stroitel'stvo*, published in 1934. This notorious piece of propaganda represented one of the first examples of socialist realism applied to history. Just as fictional scenarios had to promote socialist ideals, the past as well had to fit the needs and goals of the Stalinist state. The authors ignored the inhuman conditions and the use of political prisoners to present the canal as an heroic achievement of Soviet socialist labor and of *perekovka*, the re-forging of human beings into "new" Soviet men and women, thus justifying the use of forced labor to build the canal. But rather than simply condemn the writers, Ruder, who is a specialist in Russian language and literature, argues for consideration of their work in the context of the period, and recognition that some level of truth remains even in the most conformist of writings.

It is Ruder's argument that the literary text, though obviously a distortion of historical reality, nonetheless is a window into important facets of Stalinist society. The canal and its literary history were more than simply examples of Stalinist totalitarianism and its exploitation of human beings. There were interactive processes between state and society that involved some measure of genuine enthusiasm and belief in the regenerative potential of socialist labor. By examining the experiences of those who chronicled the canal's construction, as well as the texts themselves, Ruder seeks to illuminate the full range of human experience that encompassed not only the Belomor project, but Stalinist Russia as a whole. The *Istorii stroitel'stvo* was both a tribute to *perekovka* and a mechanism of the same, designed to inspire readers to emulate the models depicted therein.

Ruder's study is particularly insightful in its examination of the individual writers, some of whom are barely known in the West. She reveals the different fates of those who took part, dispelling myths that participation automatically insured protection against official persecution. Ruder also probes writers' motivations for participation, seeking to show how some embraced the official values, while others compromised with the regime in hopes of gaining greater latitude in other spheres. Though many of her conclusions are speculative, they offer much food for thought concerning the complexities of human behavior in Stalinist Russia. Equally valuable is her detailed description of the compilation of the *Istorii stroitel'stvo*, which reveals the difficulties inherent in collective authorship, but also demonstrates clearly the seriousness with which the writers approached the preparation of this text.

There are some weaknesses. It is not entirely clear whether Ruder is trying to tell the story of the canal or the falsified literary history of the canal. Ruder moves from an insightful examination of the literary re-construction of the canal to the more problematic analysis of the literature as historical sources shedding light on the actual history of the canal. Nor is it clear whether she is treating the whole scope of literary discourse on the canal or simply the *Istorii stroitel'stvo*. In the fourth chapter she does broaden her analysis to include other literary texts, as well as the English-language version of the *Istorii*. But this section seems to take her study into a different direction without providing much insight into the original focus, the Writers' Brigade and the *Istorii*, and thus may have best been left to a follow-up monograph.

Ruder's use of literary texts as historical sources leaves many of her findings open to question. From an historian's perspective, she takes speculative leaps with her evi-

dence, particularly when she extrapolates from the literary texts to the actual reality of the project, or draws conclusions regarding authors. How can one identify from the literature what motivated a person to distort the truth: were there threats to life and family, careerism, or genuine belief in the purpose of the project? Certainly much can be learned about the official conceptualization of the project. Only if rigorously compared to memoirs and documented sources can literary sources be used to re-construct a broader picture of the canal's history. As many historians admit, even archival documents cannot be entirely trusted, and it is important to draw from as many sources as possible. But Ruder has left much undone in her use of sources which could have verified her conclusions more definitively.

Nonetheless, Ruder's work is a significant contribution to the current historiography of Stalinism. Her research is exhaustive, mining previously closed archives, memoirs, secondary literature published in Russian, newspapers, and personal interviews. By bringing the story of the Writers' Brigade and the Belomor Canal to an English readership for the first time, the author has opened an important door into Stalinist society. She illuminates the human side of the canal project, both in terms of the prisoners who built it and the writers who re-fashioned its history in accordance with regime demands. The re-writing of history became a surreal but effective method to amplify and justify the Stalin cult and the expansion of state power, and it is vital to understand this process as it transpired both from below and from above. Investigating the Writers' Brigade, as well as other literary and historical projects of the 1930s, promises deeper understanding not only of the evolution of Stalinism, but of the capacity of people to construct their own lives, negotiating their way through a complex labyrinth of pressure, fear, and rewards.

Thus, the Belomor Canal is an important window into multiple facets of Stalinism. Much still remains to be done, as the author acknowledges. She herself poses this as an on-going study that will be updated as more sources become available. Western scholarship should applaud her pioneering work and encourage its further development.

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Steven J. Zipperstein. *Imagining Russian Jewry: Memory, History, Identity*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999. xii, 139 pp. \$30.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

Steven Zipperstein originally presented the essays collected in this volume as the Samuel and Althea Stroum Lectures in Jewish Studies, sponsored by the University of Washington, in 1995. Scholars of East European Jewish history will find the essays most provocative, but Zipperstein's meditations on the historian and the craft of history make this a volume that will interest the non-specialist as well. The four essays treat different topics: the memory of the *shtetl* among American Jews; late nineteenth and early twentieth century efforts to reform Jewish education and maintain Jewish culture in Russia; the cultural history of Odessa and the relationship of the historian to

historical source; and the role of the Holocaust in the writing of the East European Jewish past.

Zipperstein uses American Jewish literature and popular culture (*Fiddler on the Roof*) as his sources to discuss the memory of the *shtetl* among American Jews. While use of these sources by historians is not new, Zipperstein demonstrates his personal connection to his profession and deftly illustrates the nostalgia and sentimentality for the *shtetl* that have so often clouded accurate understandings of the East European Jewish past. As Jews moved further away from the *shtetl* when they migrated from the cities to the postwar suburbs, the *shtetl* became an idealized image of community for American Jews (*Fiddler on the Roof*) or a painful reminder of a separate Jewish life impossible to perpetuate in suburbia (Philip Roth's "Eli, the Fanatic").

Zipperstein's chapter on the *heders* (traditional Jewish elementary schools) examines the fragmentation of Russian Jewish culture at the turn of the century. Some Jewish community leaders supported the *heder*, an institution with a notorious reputation, in an effort to sustain a Jewish culture increasingly threatened by cultural assimilation. That they would support the *heders*, often criticized for their poor teaching and unsanitary conditions, suggests the desperate measures they were willing to take to preserve a separate Jewish culture. From the transcripts of meetings of Jewish primary school teachers sponsored by the Society for the Promotion of Jewish Enlightenment, Zipperstein has concluded that Jewish educational leaders defended the *heders* as national, meaning simply Jewish, institutions, without a connection to any kind of recognized Jewish national politics. Supporting the *heders* was part of a strategy whereby Russian Jews could attempt to integrate into the multinational Russian empire without sacrificing Jewish nationality or ethnicity.

Zipperstein's discussion of Odessa here reads as a postscript to his earlier work (*The Jews of Odessa: A Cultural History, 1794-1881*, Stanford University Press, 1985). Newly opened archives in Russia have revealed a wealth of material about the city's economic life, material not accessible to Zipperstein at the time of his earlier study. Zipperstein acknowledges here that the new material will yield important insights into the city's commercial history, but he confesses his preference for the literary sources he was compelled to use because no others were available. Zipperstein originally wanted to write the history of Odessa's Jews "from the vantage point of the center," but when the sources became available for him to do this, he realized that his real interests lay in the literary men of the margins and their relationship to their community and their work.

With the exception of his reading of the transcripts of teachers' meetings, Zipperstein does not introduce new material here. He does, however, raise important issues for the historian of the East European Jewish past. In discussing the role of the Holocaust in the writing of Jewish history, Zipperstein describes how professional historians of East European Jewish life moved away from describing the pre-1939 experience as "the edge of destruction" in an effort to develop professional objectivity. Zipperstein argues that the professional historian writing about pre-1939 Jewry cannot, and should not, excise the Holocaust from the text. For Zipperstein, such objectivity is unrealistic, and even undesirable, as historians turn to pre-war East European Jewish history out of their own response to the Holocaust. Now that East European Jewish

historians have proven their objectivity, Zipperstein hopes that historians not afraid to recognize their engagement with the community they study will turn to an examination of the "anxieties" of prewar Jewry and develop topics hitherto unexplored. Zipperstein's call for passion in the writing of Jewish history will certainly lead to the exploration of many new subjects. Zipperstein cites his own interest in the fear of military conscription among Jews in Tsarist Russia, but he could have cited his study of the integrationist Russian Jewish teachers and the preservation of Jewish culture within a multinational Russian empire as well.

Zipperstein's work here is very personal, even intimate. His essays reveal the interests of the engaged intellectual and the motivations of the professional historian. Throughout the essays, Zipperstein grapples with the question of the distinction between the professional and the personal, demonstrating how tightly connected the two can be. Zipperstein wants to contextualize the relationship between his community and his work; he has learned from Eudora Welty that there is nothing more dangerous than writing what you know. He bravely acknowledges his work as a personal response to the East European Jewish past and in doing so, he encourages other historians to examine their work in terms of its contribution to East European Jewish scholarship and to the communities of which they are a part.

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Graeme Gill and Roderic Pitty. *Power in the Party: The Organization of Power and Central-Republican Relations in the CPSU*. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1997. ix, 222 pp. \$65.00.

The political reality that has changed little since the collapse of the Soviet Union explains the failure of post-Soviet countries to have democratized. Formal elected political institutions are weak and ineffective, while political power is dominated by informal political structures. Alternatively termed "political clans" or "political oligarchies," informal political structures linking wealthy oligarchs, politicians, and criminal syndicates with common backgrounds and regional origins on the national and local level in Russia and other post-Soviet countries effectively run things behind the scenes. They manipulate elections, the media, political parties, and formally elected legislative assemblies to benefit themselves. The underlying political reality behind the facade of constitutions and elected institutions since 1991 has been a number of countries widely derided for their systemic political corruption and labelled "kleptocracies." A decade after the end of Communism, political power in Russia and most post-Soviet countries continues to be personalized and despotic much as it was for decades of the Soviet Union, rather than institutionalized and publicly accountable.

This study touches only briefly and indirectly on the period since 1991. But its analysis of power in the former Soviet Communist system, based on their content analysis of criticism of Party leaders and Party organizations from the republic press in five former Soviet republics (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belorussia) over the period from 1954 through 1991, provides important insights about

why very little politically should or would have changed. The portrait of power which Gill and Pitty delineate from their study is a Communist Party system whose very intent to regularize and institutionalize decision-making and procedures among republic Party organizations was undermined by its very expectations of their performance. Given the irrational pressures and uncertainty in which republic Party officials operated, they were constantly berated by the central Party organs for their administrative incompetency, malfeasance, violation of formal Party rules, and even outright criminal misconduct. The truth is that republic Party organizations by the very contradictoriness of expectations issued from the center had little option other than to cut corners and improvise in order to meet the impossible demands for economic performance placed on them.

In this context, to protect themselves from illogical and uncertain demands and threats from the political center, republic Party officials and organizations from the time of Stalin through the very end of the Soviet era resorted to various means of protecting themselves. Establishing mutually protective and supportive informal associations with all other state, police, and other institutional authorities within their jurisdictions was absolutely essential. Over time, attempts of the center to impose regularity and control over republic Party officials and organizations failed for the most part to break down these informal political structures and relationships. Political cronyism and corruption were not the exceptions but the norms by which republic Party officials alone could cope with the irrational and contradictory demands and expectations placed on them by the center. At an extreme in certain republics like Uzbekistan, Islamic culture and traditional norms based on close ties of extended families and clans among related Party officials produced a political environment in which embezzlement and bribery evident in the "cotton affair" of the early 1980s became a way of life over decades, ensnaring succeeding generations of top Uzbek Party, state, and police officials.

If cronyism and corruption became routine, so, too, were the accusations constantly levelled against republic Party officials. Yet there were differences in the pattern and nature of criticism over time and among different Soviet locales. The authors explain differences among their five union-republics in terms of Soviet regime eras, which marked changes in the style and emphases of top leaders (the interventionist policies of Khrushchev, contrasted with the stabilization of cadres policies of Brezhnev and the democratic reforms of Gorbachev). The authors also find a relatively consistent pattern of differences over the four decades and over different Soviet regimes in certain republics. The constant barrage of criticism against republic Party mismanagement expectedly would escalate into accusations of criminal misconduct, when the denunciation coincided with the purge of a republic first secretary and his replacement by a republic rival attempting to differentiate himself "morally" from his predecessor. Party officials, too, would be more vulnerable to charges of criminal misconduct rather than mere administrative mismanagement, if they exceeded certain understood limits of corruption and personal enrichment. It was one thing to rely on informal political structures to cut corners and to meet irrational economic expectations by the center. It was quite another thing to fail economically and to use one's

Party position too ostentatiously and almost solely to enrich oneself and one's political coterie.

Very little ever changed over the decades from Stalin's death in 1953 until the very end of the Soviet Communist system in 1991. Many post-Soviet chief executives both on the national and local level – like Yeltsin, Nazarbaev, and Karimov – were former Communist *nomenklatura* officials before 1991, and were socialized and conditioned to resist organizational institutionalization little different from the circumstances under which they have acted as publicly elected office-holders over the past decade. Democratic procedures, forms, and institutions since 1991 have been modified and adapted by these post-Soviet chief executives. Elected Russian governors appear to view the Russian Constitution with something of the same sardonic disdain as they may have viewed the requirements of Party Rules as former *nomenklatura* officials before 1991. Elections are merely a new obstacle to overcome in placing their political coterie in positions of influence and to protect themselves against the new center, identified with a president rather than a General Secretary as in the past. To understand the context and reasons for their behavior since 1991, this study finds the roots in the pattern of power of the former Soviet Communist system. In certain ways, Gill and Pitty's study could be retitled *How the Post-Soviet Political Elite Was Forged*.

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Douglas R. Weiner. *A Little Corner of Freedom: Russian Nature Protection from Stalin to Gorbachëv*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. xiv, 556 pp. \$45.00.

In *A Little Corner of Freedom*, Douglas R. Weiner marshals archival research and interviews with the participants to argue convincingly that an independent Russian nature protection movement not only survived the Stalinist terror, but mounted a challenge to the communist state's Promethean utopianism and went on to nurture a diverse clutch of offspring that endured as long as the USSR itself.

Picking up where his 1988 monograph *Models of Nature* left off, Weiner traces the mighty struggle of a small group of conservation activists to preserve a measure of autonomy in the face of Stalin's ferocious onslaught against independent thought and action. Natural scientists for the most part, they fought to maintain a vision and promote an agenda that ran counter to the Stalinist program for a "great transformation" of nature in the interests of human economic activity. From the 1920s to the 1950s, their activities were centered in the All-Russian Society for the Protection of Nature (VOOP). Their greatest concern was the protection and enlargement of the Soviet Union's network of *zapovedniki*, which they conceived as juridically inviolable field laboratories encompassing pristine examples of all the natural systems existing within the borders of the USSR.

The concept of *zapovedniki* sprang from an ecological theory that maintained that the natural world consists of discrete, self-regulating, and essentially static units called "biocenoses". While most scientists in the West were abandoning similar ideas in fa-

vor of a vision that stressed interdependency and dynamism in nature, this "organismic" concept survived until the 1970s in the Soviet Union because of its utility as a justification for the network of *zapovedniki*, which possessed iconic significance as an "archipelago of freedom," a "geography of hope" beyond the clutches of the state.

Inevitably, during the 1930s and beyond the conservation movement and its prized nature reserves came under severe pressure. On the one hand, the movement consisted largely of intellectuals who held dear the prerevolutionary values of "scientific public opinion" and represented the old scientific intelligentsia; as such they were members of an endangered species in Stalin's Soviet Union. Indeed, critics portrayed the VOOIP itself as a *zapovednik* for "bourgeois scientists." On the other hand, inviolable reserves withdrawn from economic activity hardly fit in with the call to remake nature. Jealous resource-extraction ministries began demanding the right to use *zapovedniki* for their own purposes. Faced with attacks upon both their intellectual autonomy and their control of the *zapovedniki*, the VOOIP and its activists adopted a strategy of "protective coloration" – they talked the talk of the party bureaucracy, gave ground only when they had to, and thus managed to conceal their research agenda beneath a shell of seeming communist orthodoxy and to hang on to a shred of institutional independence.

A Little Corner of Freedom has been a long time in press – Weiner seems to have finished the book in 1996 – and in the meantime Nikolai Kremontsov's *Stalinist Science* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1997) has shown us that what Weiner calls "protective coloration" was in fact the *modus vivendi* adopted by all of the USSR's scientific intelligentsia during the Stalin years. If the story had ended here, Weiner's claim for unique status for the nature protection movement would be in jeopardy. What is remarkable about the natural scientists, however, is that once the party bureaucracy finally took control of the VOOIP in the mid-1950s, their movement managed to spawn successors, each of which promoted new agendas under the Khrushchev and Brezhnev regimes. Among these were the Nature Protection Brigades that appeared at Moscow State University and other top institutions of higher education from 1958. Unlike the old guard of activists, they were imbued not with the values of "scientific public opinion" but with a revived version of the old prerevolutionary ideal of *studenchestvo*. Elitist in orientation, they conducted raids to catch poachers and to prevent the sale of illegally obtained trees, flowers, birds, and other natural objects. Another group sprang from the "Kedrograd" movement among students in state forestry institutes and other non-elite technical schools, who developed and tried to put into practice an ideal of sustainable, multi-use management for the taiga forests of Siberian stone pine. With literary assistance from writers of the "Village Prose" school, this loose movement began to stress themes of Russian nationalism and of an organic connection between people and landscape. The fight over pollution of Lake Baikal and other controversies brought these dissimilar groups together in the 1960s and 1970s. But the appearance of unity concealed very different understandings of the meaning of environmentalism, based in very different social identities.

Weiner argues that the various nature protection movements should not be viewed as the seeds of a future civil society, waiting to grow and bloom when conditions became propitious, but as groups of Soviet patriots who hoped to use the power of the

state to further their own vision of the common good. Indeed, the old guard and their descendants among the student brigades evinced not a commitment to inclusive civil institutions, but rather "continuing expressions of a quite old Russian understanding of social identity: *soslovnost'*, or a corporative-caste mentality" (413) that was exclusive and elitist. For their part, the "environmental nationalists," much like the Slavophiles of the previous century, envisioned not a Western civil society but a renewal of traditional Russian culture and morality.

Mikhail Gorbachev made possible environmental activism on a scale undreamed of only a few years before. But when spontaneous demonstrations over environmental questions rocked the Soviet Union, it was "not endangered wildlife, besieged *zapovedniki*, or flooded sixteenth-century monasteries [that] lit the fires of righteous indignation among the Soviet Union's general working populace but life-and-death issues of unbreathable air and undrinkable water" (437). And when even these concerns gave way to bread-and-butter issues in the wake of economic disruption, both wings of the old environmental movement found themselves consigned to the margins of political life. Ironically, it was the center's perception that the nature protection activists were harmless, marginalized eccentrics that had helped the movement to survive in the darkest of times; now it was unable to adapt to the new conditions.

A Little Corner of Freedom could have used more careful editing in spots. Minor quibbles aside, however, Weiner's achievement is a broad and complex work of scholarship that adds unsuspected dimensions to our understanding of Soviet society in the Stalin, Khrushchev, and Brezhnev years.

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George J. Neimanis. *The Collapse of the Soviet Empire: A View from Riga*. Westport, CT; London: Praeger, 1997. 153 pp. \$42.95.

In this volume, George Neimanis, a Professor in the Department of Economics and Commerce at Niagara University, endeavors to both explain the collapse of the Soviet Union and provide a personal account of his experiences in Latvia before, during, and after the abortive *coup* against Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in August 1991. As a personal account this book succeeds, but as an interpretation of the Soviet Union's collapse or of Latvia's struggle for independence the volume is overly simplistic.

The most pronounced weaknesses of *The Collapse of the Soviet Empire* relate to the perceived audience and focus. With the exception of chapter 5, "The Putsch," most of the volume attempts to explain the Soviet Union's weaknesses. Most of the descriptions of backwardness in the Soviet Union are supported by impressionistic examples of cars breaking down, Soviet employees leaving work to stand in lines, citizens living in communal apartments, the construction industry, building substandard housing, and so on. Little of this is new or news to specialists. In fact, the author documents only a few of these generally accurate yet simplistic descriptions. For much of the volume, the reader has the impression that beginning undergraduates are the target audience. The lack of a clear focus can also be seen in the "Afterword," in which Neimanis assesses the Russian presidential elections of June and July 1996. While this topic is indirectly related to the topic presented in the volume's title, it

bears little relation to the focus on Latvia implied in the subtitle. At the same time, aside from a few impressionistic details of the author's own visits to Riga between 1991 and 1994, the volume provides few specific details about Latvia's economic, social, and political struggles since the country regained independence in August 1991.

One potential strength of this volume is its focus on Latvian and Baltic history. Yet even here the volume fails to add substantially to the work of such scholars as Misiunas, Taagepera, Raun, Senn, and many others or provide a thorough-going summary of developments in the Baltic region under Soviet occupation. The author even misses some of the obvious basics, such as the spelling of the Estonian capital, Tallinn. He also fails to include the famous Hill of Crosses outside Šiauliai, Lithuania, when assessing the "Subversive Cemeteries," even though the crosses clearly subverted and denied Soviet authority in Lithuania. What the author does include is generally accurate and will certainly benefit those unfamiliar with Baltic history. For example, Neimanis summarizes key events in the Baltic movements for independence of 1988-1991, including annual protests of the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact of August 23, 1939, the adoption of resolutions of sovereignty, Gorbachev's economic blockade against Lithuania in 1990, and the Soviet attack on the Lithuanian television tower in January 1991. These and other events meant the Baltic region played a central role in pushing Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders to change the Soviet system.

The main contribution contained in *The Collapse of the Soviet Empire* is chapter 5, "The Putsch," in which Neimanis gives a personal account of his experiences living in Riga while advising the Latvian government during the pivotal August 19-21, 1991 attempted *coup* against Mikhail Gorbachev. Ultimately the *coup* failed, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin rose to prominence, and Gorbachev and the Communist Party lost favor, and as a result the Soviet Union was abolished four months later, in December 1991. Neimanis writes this chapter as a series of reflections from the days of the attempted *coup*. The chapter reads like a series of personal notes or journal entries written during the event, although many of the details included could have been known only after the fact. Nevertheless, specialists and non-specialists alike will benefit from the author's observations and very readable summary of the events that transpired in Riga. As it turned out, some fighting occurred in Riga, yet Latvia's government and its Supreme Council remained in session despite the efforts of Soviet OMON elite troops to harass the population. On August 21, Latvia, like Estonia the day before, officially renewed its declaration of independence. Chapter 5 is thus a page-turning account of how the author hurried around Riga trying to understand what was happening in Russia and Latvia amid the possibility of real violence.

Overall, *The Collapse of the Soviet Empire* is a generally accurate if simplistic summary of the complex social, economic, and political factors that contributed to the break-up of the Soviet Union. Those unfamiliar with Baltic history will enjoy the occasional references to Latvian and Baltic history, and virtually all readers will be enriched by the view of the August 1991 attempted *coup* from Riga. Unfortunately, the lack of a clear target audience has left the volume with a variety of focuses while the author's strength, economic policy and assessment, has been ignored. For these reasons, this volume succeeds as a personal account but is less successful in other respects.