
BACKGROUND BOOKS

REFORM IN RUSSIA

The origins of the first Russian state remain a mystery. Scholars differ over whether the early *Rus'* people were descended from Nordic invaders or tribal Slavs from southern Russia, as Nicholas Riasanovsky notes in **A History of Russia** (Oxford, 1984). What is clear is that the *Rus'* were first united by the warrior-princes of Kiev during the ninth century. One of these princes, Vladimir (980–1015), converted the Kievan *Rus'* to Orthodox Christianity in 988, “thus opening the gates for the highly developed Byzantine culture to enter Russia.”

James H. Billington's **The Icon and the Axe** (Random, 1970) chronicles the disintegration of the Kievan state under Mongol occupation (1240–1380), and the emergence of Moscow as a center of national leadership. Although Russia's key institutions—the tsarist autocracy, landed gentry, and the rural serfs—took shape during the Muscovite period, the most important unifying force in Medieval Muscovy was the Russian Orthodox Church. Deeply influenced by “radical monasticism” and by a popular myth identifying Moscow as the Third Rome, Billington writes, “Muscovy at the time of its rise to greatness resembled an expectant revivalist camp.” Orthodox monasticism stimulated a rich culture, but it also largely isolated Muscovy from the West and from the effects of the social and economic transformations of modern Europe. Robert Crummey's **The Formation of Muscovy: 1304–1613** (Longman, 1987) is a detailed history of early Muscovite society.

Russia's imperial pe-

riod brought a new interest in modernization. Tsar Peter I (1682–1725) created a Governing Senate, a network of bureaucratic ministries, and a system of state-sponsored education. B. H. Sumner, in **Peter the Great and the Emergence of Russia** (Macmillan, 1962) argues that Peter, despite his fascination with Western Europe, was a patriot who hoped to transform Russia into an international power.

Catherine the Great (1762–96) prided herself on her affinity for the French Enlightenment and her friendship with Voltaire, but she presided over the consolidation of the gentry's privileges and suppression of the Pugachev peasant rebellion in 1773. Alexander Radishchev, an exiled intellectual, described the serfs' plight in **A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow** (Harvard, 1958), asking: “Can a country in which two-thirds of the citizens are deprived of their civil rights, and to some extent are dead to the law, be called happy?”

Except for the short-lived interest of Alexander I (1801–1825) in constitutional revision, autocracy reigned in Russia until 1861. Following the shock of defeat in the Crimean War, Alexander II (1855–1881) introduced an array of judicial and administrative reforms, notably the emancipation of the serfs. Daniel Field, in **The End of Serfdom** (Harvard, 1976), observes that Alexander II's “Great Reforms” paved the way for Russia's belated industrialization, but left the Russian peasant financially destitute.

By the turn of the century, the Russian empire reached to Po-



AN EMIGRÉ'S VIEW

Western analysts should not blame contradictions in current Soviet policy on some imagined "conservatives-versus-reformers" struggle, contended emigré author Vladimir Bukovsky in The Washington Quarterly (Winter '89). He wrote:

"The [domestic] problems that the Soviet leaders have to solve simply have no solutions. One can hardly expect significant improvements resulting from any within-the-system reforms because the very idea of this [Soviet] system has outlived itself. The only way to liberate the economy . . . is to introduce a full-fledged market economy The only way to reduce the role of the Communist Party is to allow a multi-party system But then there will be no Soviet Union as it is known, no Communist Party, no general secretary, and no need for *perestroika* and *glasnost* because they are superfluous"

land, the Black Sea, the Pacific, and Turkestan, encompassing scores of nationalities and religious groups. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick in **The Russian Revolution** (Oxford, 1984), although Russia remained largely rural, it was beginning to feel the effects of early industrialization: An influx of impoverished peasants swelled the ranks of a small but militant urban working class and labor unrest fueled the revolutionary ambitions of Russia's radical intelligentsia.

World War I brought Russia repeated military defeats. Combined with Nicholas II's disregard for the parliament he had established in 1906, they "threw the anachronistic traits of the Russian aristocracy into sharp relief, and made Nicholas seem less like an upholder of the autocratic tradition than an unwilling satirist of it," writes Fitzpatrick. The Tsar's life is chronicled by Robert Massie in **Nicholas and Alexandra** (Atheneum, 1967).

Finally, as Russia's armies collapsed under German attack, the old regime gave way in February 1917 to Alexander Kerensky's Provisional Government, and eventually to Vladimir Lenin and the Bolsheviks. Communist John Reed's **Ten Days that Shook the World** (International, 1967) is a vivid, admiring portrait of the

Bolshevik coup of October 1917. A scholarly account is Adam Ulam's **Bolsheviks** (Macmillan, 1968), while Richard Pipes, in **The Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism** (Harvard, 1964), takes the drama from 1917 to the end of the bloody "Red" versus "White" civil war five years later.

The Bolsheviks quickly took over industry and finance, but persistent food shortages compelled Lenin to declare a "retreat" in 1921. Under his New Economic Policy, private traders could sell foodstuffs, small-scale private farming was encouraged, and some private industrial production was permitted. Stephen Cohen, in **Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution** (Oxford, 1980), argues that the NEP represented not merely a "retreat," but an alternative approach advocated by Bolshevik ideologist Nikolai Bukharin. The Soviet economy's evolution into a clumsy heavyweight from the NEP through the Brezhnev era is traced by Alec Nove in **An Economic History of the USSR** (Penguin, 1972).

Stalin's rise to power after Lenin's death in 1924 is chronicled by Roy Medvedev, a Soviet historian, in **Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism** (Knopf, 1971). "Stalin broke all records for political terror," writes Medvedev. "In 1936-39, on the most cautious estimates, four to five million people were subjected to repression for political reasons," while the peasantry was decimated during the forced collectivization of agriculture.

Medvedev argues that Stalinism was a "perversion" of the teachings of Marx and Lenin. But others, such as Merle Fainsod in **How Russia is Ruled** (Harvard, 1963) and Robert Conquest in **The Harvest of Sorrow** (Oxford, 1986), point out that Lenin, in fact, introduced key elements of Stalinism—the secret police, the use of terror, and party conformity. Robert Tucker supplies the classic profile of **Stalin as Revolutionary: 1879-1929. A Study in History and Personality** (Norton, 1973), while Arthur Koestler's novel, **Darkness at Noon** (Modern Library, 1956), and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's **The Gulag Archipelago: 1918-1956. An Experiment in Literary Investigation** (Harper & Row, 1974-75) chronicle the

terror from the victims' point of view.

"Not until 1956 could we rid ourselves of the psychological after-effects," says Nikita Khrushchev in **Khrushchev Remembers** (Little, Brown, 1974). The cathartic event was his own "secret speech," denouncing Stalin before the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in Moscow. Khrushchev introduced "destalinization"—the easing of police repression, a literary "thaw," and a revival of intra-Party debate—that lasted until Khrushchev's ouster in 1964.

Leonid Brezhnev (1964–1982) inaugurated what Mikhail Gorbachev now describes as an "era of stagnation." Andrei Amalrik, a dissident imprisoned by Brezhnev, describes the regime's heavy hand in **Notes of a Revolutionary** (Knopf, 1982). Yet Amalrik's work also testifies to the survival of irrepressible networks of dissent in the Soviet Union.

Although the Soviets attained military superpower status during the 1960s, Brezhnev and Co. commanded a civilian economy beset by shortages, low productivity, and technological backwardness, according to Bruce Parrott's **Politics and Technology in the Soviet Union** (MIT, 1985). Blair Ruble and Arcadius Kahan's **Industrial Labor in the USSR** (Pergamon, 1979) shows that "the Soviet worker in the mid-

1970s enjoyed a standard of living not unlike that of the American worker in the 1920s."

Nevertheless, economist Ed Hewett in **The Politics of Reform: Equality versus Efficiency** (Brookings, 1988) contends that by the time Gorbachev came to power in 1985 "the Soviet system could boast many successes." In particular, he says, it guaranteed full employment and a fairly egalitarian wage structure. Reform, Hewett predicts, will necessarily erode the average worker's financial security. Gorbachev's success will depend on his ability to "[dilute] the egalitarian basis of the system . . . without jeopardizing the very foundations of the Party's legitimacy."

For his part, Jerry Hough, in **Russia and the West: Gorbachev and the Politics of Reform** (Simon and Schuster, 1988), argues that Gorbachev's *perestroika* is analogous to the American New Deal—it is meant to rescue the Soviet system without "replacing basic political and economic institutions." Gorbachev's greatest difficulty, according to Hough, will be resisting pressures for more radical change.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: For related titles, see Background Books essays in "The Soviet Union" (WQ, Winter '77), "The Soviet Future" (Winter '81), "The Soviets" (Autumn '83), "Soviet Life" (Autumn '85), and "Soviets and Americans" (New Year's '89).

The most up-to-date discussion is in specialized journals. Prominent Soviet sociologist Tatyana Zaslavskaya's "Novosibirsk Document" (Survey, Spring, '84) accused Soviet workers of indifference and passivity, blaming central planners for being "tuned, not to stimulate but to thwart the population's useful activity." In 1987, Soviet economist Nikolai Shmelyov called for radical reforms—of prices and currency—in his influential article "New Worries" in Novy Mir (trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Daily Report Annex, April 22, 1988).

Western analyses include Soviet Economy's special issue on last summer's "Nineteenth Party Congress of the CPSU" (July-Sept., '88), Gertrude Schroeder's "Gorbachev: 'Radically' Implementing Brezhnev's Reforms" (Soviet Economy, Oct.-Dec., '86), and Peter Hauslohner's "Gorbachev's Social Contract" (Soviet Economy, Jan.-March, '87). "Gorbachev and Glasnost," a special issue of Survey (Oct., '88) features Peter Reddaway and Richard Pipes on political reform and its historical precedents.