

James Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian province: a study of collectivization and dekulakization in Siberia* (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan Press Ltd in association with the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, 1996. Pp. xi+271. 7 tbls. 1 map. £45.00)

This book contains a mass of new evidence from central and local Russian archives about the process of collectivising peasant agriculture in the Soviet Union. The focus is on Siberia, one of the most important grain-surplus regions which was not, however, supplying grain in the late 1920s on a scale consistent with the centre's industrialisation requirements. Hughes cites Eikhe, one of the Siberian party leaders, in 1929, citing Lenin: "It might seem that this is a struggle for grain, but in fact, it is a struggle for socialism"; and Stalin's response: "Correct!"

The period covered is from the summer of 1928 (when the struggle for grain in Siberia entered its acute phase) to March 1930 (when, amidst the chaos resulting from all-out collectivisation, Stalin ordered a breathing space). Hughes divides this period into three phases. The first phase lasted from the summer of 1928 through the following winter, and was characterised by a struggle of the regime for "social influence". This involved redistributing the fiscal burden on the peasantry onto the richer, kulak stratum, in order more effectively to divide and rule the village community. It was in part a policy reaction to the experience of the *previous* winter, when the state had raided the Siberian countryside for grain, antagonising the peasants en masse. In the second phase, which began in the spring and continued through the autumn of 1929, the same policy was applied directly to the struggle for grain. This was the so-called "Ural-Siberian method", which, Hughes argues, aimed to mobilise the poorer peasants within the village to exert pressure for grain collections at the expense of the upper stratum. The autumn of 1929 saw the initiation of the third phase of comprehensive collectivisation, accompanied by the decision to bring about the "liquidation of the kulaks as a class". Rather than seeing the collectivisation phase in continuity with the preceding strategy of forcing grain procurements, Hughes argues it marked abandonment of the struggle for "social influence" in favour of a crude confrontation between the state and the peasantry as a whole.

In dissecting this story Hughes wields various analytical knives. These are distinctions between revolution from above and from below, between the kulaks (wealthy capitalist peasants) and the seredniak and bedniak (middle and poor) peasants, and between moral economy and political economy. In this there is much that is of interest, with both village encounters and intra-elite transactions described in riveting detail, but little that is adequately tested despite the new material piled up.

"My main hypothesis", he writes, "is that the Stalin revolution was as much a 'revolution from below' as it was a 'revolution from above'. Previous historians, he argues, have neglected inputs into the Stalin revolution "from below" in two respects - the "empowerment" of the lower seredniak and bedniak strata of the village in relation to the kulak minority as a result of the strategy of "social influence", and the influence of the local Siberian party organisation on central policy. But the idea that this strategy *empowered* the poorer peasants seems far-fetched; the extent of their new *power* is shown by the abrupt abandonment of the strategy at the end of 1929. The suggestion that Syrtsov and Eikhe represented the lower depths of anything more profound than the

political elite seems likewise ill-founded. Here as elsewhere the author's insights are blunted by the use of terms like "empowerment" and "revolution from below" which have no precise general meaning and are not given any precise specialised meaning either. The same applies to his identification of the village strata (his only guide to this vexed issue in its own right is, unhelpfully, a cross-reference to his own *Stalin, Siberia, and the crisis of the New Economic Policy* (1991)).

Most interesting is the use of Mancur Olson's *Logic of collective action* (1965), which tells us that self-interested individuals will act collectively in pursuit of common interests only under coercion or additional inducement; otherwise they will seek a free ride. Hughes argues that it was precisely under a mixture of coercion and inducement that the poorer peasants were mobilised to collective action in support of the grain campaign. But the evidence he has found, while showing the coercion and the inducements, does not appear to show that the additional grain procured was got thereby.

In summary this is a fascinating but flawed work from which students and researchers will have much to learn, but which also requires careful reading.

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