

Oleg V. Khlevniuk, *In Stalin's shadow: the career of "Sergo" Ordzhonikidze*, edited and introduced by Donald J. Raleigh. M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, and London, 1995. xi+193 pp. ISBN 1-56324-563-9

Khlevniuk is a leading representative of the new generation of Russian historians, and has already done a great deal to enlarge our understanding of the inner working of the Stalinist system. This book is a translation of his monograph originally entitled (in Russian) *Stalin and Ordzhonikidze: conflicts in the Politburo in the 1930s*, published in Moscow in 1993. The original title was more accurate, because the book is mainly about those particular aspects of Ordzhonikidze's career which first formed him in the Stalinist mould, then brought him into conflict with the boss himself. There is much less about Ordzhonikidze's role as the architect of Soviet industry, except insofar as it reveals his relationship to Stalin and to his own subordinates.

The historiographical context of the book is roughly as follows. Historians have long perceived that Ordzhonikidze represented a pole of tension in the Stalinist system. At issue was first the heavy cost of collectivisation and forced march industrialisation, then the repressive way in which industrial managers and specialists were scapegoated for difficulties which they had not caused. His death in 1937, attributed to illness at the time, later revealed to have been violent (whether suicide or murder), was widely understood to have been "no accident".

However, the nature of the tensions and their implications remain controversial. Did Stalin preside over the Politburo as a despot, or as an arbitrator among competing tendencies? Once the oppositions of the 1920s had been defeated, to what extent did the system become factionalised between new radical and moderate currents? Did Ordzhonikidze make a real, if failed, attempt to displace Stalin and moderate his policies? Was Ordzhonikidze realistic or naive about the possibilities of Stalinist economic mobilisation without Stalinist terror? How did Ordzhonikidze die, and why does his death concern us?

Khlevniuk uses his wide knowledge of archival documentation combined with the Soviet-era published research of both Russian and western historians to illuminate these issues. He shows that Ordzhonikidze, in common with those around him - Molotov, Kirov, Voroshilov, Kaganovich, Ezhov - were Stalin's men. At the same time the tensions between Stalin and Ordzhonikidze were real and durable. Ordzhonikidze, in his own way a crude and brutal servant of socialist construction, simply did not see why it was necessary to betray old friends and destroy dedicated colleagues in order to pursue radical social and economic transformation. He did not speak for anyone but himself, but this does not mean he was the only one who thought as he did.

Stalin, Khlevniuk argues, was the conductor of the orchestra, and prepared the purges with "singleminded determination". But in the mid-1930s Stalin still had to invest time and effort in persuasion and manipulation of his colleagues as well as in bullying and coercion. Ordzhonikidze had no prospect of forcing Stalin to change his policies or stand down at the February-March 1937 plenary session of the Central Committee, but hoped to persuade him to change his mind and call a halt to the swelling purges. This was a realistic historical alternative, as is suggested both by the existence of competing alternative development programmes in the 1920s, and the immediate repudiation of

mass terror by the post-Stalin leadership. Ordzhonikidze died on the eve of the Central Committee plenum because he had failed, probably by his own hand, ill, isolated, and himself under threat of accusation, in the tradition of suicide as a protestation of innocence.

The documentation of Khlevniuk's argument is not absolutely complete, but the gaps are presented scrupulously, together with discussion of the alternative hypotheses. The most serious hole appears to be the alleged attempt to replace Stalin by Kirov at the January 1934 Seventeenth Party Congress, dealt with in two paragraphs. If the attempt took place, and if Ordzhonikidze took an active part, it surely represented a more serious historical alternative than the February-March 1937 Central Committee plenum.

This is a subtle historical study of high quality, written with cool and penetrating objectivity. The historical actors' ideals are tested by their experience, without retrospective moralising. The translator and editor have also done a good job, with helpful footnotes to guide the path of less experienced readers.

*University of Warwick*

*Mark Harrison*