

*Tankograd. The formation of a Soviet company town: Cheliabinsk, 1900s-1950s.* By Lennart Samuelson. Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. x, 351 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Plates. Tables. Maps. Hard bound.

Lennart Samuelson, the author several fine studies of the Soviet military-industrial complex, has now written a history of one of its most important urban centres. Deep in the southern Urals, nearly a thousand miles from Moscow, Cheliabinsk was once a tiny fortification on Russia's eastern frontier. In the nineteenth century the Urals became a significant centre of mining and metallurgy. Under Stalin, Cheliabinsk became a centre of tractor production. In World War II its factories built many thousands of tanks for the Red Army, earning it the unofficial title of Tankograd, or "Tank City." After the war Cheliabinsk continued to build both tanks and tractors; secret settlements in its hinterland developed the production of nuclear weapons and missiles. In 1957, one of the world's worst nuclear accidents happened a few miles away, although Cheliabinsk largely escaped contamination.

*Tankograd* is "about the people who lived in the city of Cheliabinsk." Samuelson aims to show "how the city changed during industrialisation and what every life was like in 'Tankograd' during the war years." He offers "a concrete reconstruction of how Stalin's 'revolution from above' was implemented." Cheliabinsk is presented as a typical "company town" and its tractor factory as typical of "how the Russians thought they could prepare their economy in case of a new war" (pp. 4-6).

The book is based on Samuelson's research in local archives, contextualized by large secondary literatures on the economic, political, and regional history of the Soviet Union. The book is organized chronologically and to some extent thematically. Narrative chapters present the development of Cheliabinsk from a remote fortress on the Miass river to a modern industrial city, with particular focuses on the period from the Russian Revolution and Civil War to Stalin's five year plans, rearmament and war preparations, the "1418 long days on the home front" in the war, and postwar reconversion and development. These chapters portray the people of Cheliabinsk, their origins and fates, and how they lived and worked. Interspersed are chapters on plans for Cheliabinsk as a "socialist city," the origins of the Cheliabinsk Tractor Factory, the impact of the Great Terror, the wartime development of the tank industry, and, by way of conclusion, "Historical memory and historical research in today's Cheliabinsk."

Much of *Tankograd's* detail is new. The detail is often evocative but seldom truly surprising. Although far from Moscow, Cheliabinsk was too important to escape surveillance. Everyday life was grim until well after the war. Somewhat worse were the conditions of forced construction labour for Gulag prisoners and, later, prisoners of war. Civil War, Terror, and peacetime and wartime famines were lethal. Few dry facts of the period are more wretched than the reported fall in numbers of babies born alive in the Cheliabinsk region between 1940 and 1944 (p. 246) in towns (from 46 to 13 thousand) and villages (from 72 to 7 thousand). Wartime evacuation and mobilization were chaotic, and city and factory management was disorderly, but less so than is sometimes assumed. Samuelson shows that in the first half of 1942 the Kirov works (evacuated to Cheliabinsk the previous year) lost half a million work

days from absence), but most of these were put down to illness rather than the flouting of authority (p. 228); illnesses were those typical of poor nutrition and sanitation. Against this backdrop wartime production successes were notable: despite lagging in productivity, Soviet industry outproduced Germany in the number of tanks (and most other weapons), and kept up with Germany in quality. Tankograd played a large part in this.

*Tankograd* also illustrates wider themes. As a dictator Stalin was effective without being either benevolent or wise. Security, both internal and external, was a key motivation, helping to explain how and why Stalin built up the internal security organs, the armed forces, the defence industry, and such “fortresses of the rear” as Cheliabinsk. A question that is left unanswered is the extent to which a micro-study such as this can help explain what went on in the Kremlin as opposed to just illustrating the consequences of Kremlin decisions and policies. It is clear that Stalin learned, but what exactly did he learn from Cheliabinsk?

Samuelson concludes by discussing how young people in Cheliabinsk today have become engaged in learning from their community’s uncensored history and are contributing to historical research. Their example is inspiring. They and we have much to gain from reading *Tankograd*.

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