

authorities was therefore not a “smoke screen”, not a collection of meaningless slogans designed to mask Stalin’s leadership’s true intentions; it was the very means by which the repression spread. Arguing against the thesis that Stalin and his supporters used democratic slogans to mobilize the lower ranks against regional leaders in order to bring them under Moscow’s control, advocated by J. Arch Getty, Gabor Ritterspon, Oleg Naumov, and James Harris, Wendy Goldman believes that the use of democratic procedures had only the goal of extricating the former oppositionists from the midst of local leaders by eliminating *kooptatsiia* and *semeistvennost’*. While, in her opinion, Stalin’s true intentions cannot be known, a careful reading of his speech at the 1937 Plenum suggests that Stalin “aimed for a ruthless yet limited attack on former oppositionists” (p. 129). However the democratic procedures that gave a free hand to workers quickly amplified the hunt beyond the set parameters. Tragically and predictably, workers lost this battle. Many of them became victims of terror while the “language of terror” could not solve the problems rooted in rapid industrialization.

Wendy Z. Goldman’s *Terror and Democracy* is a great contribution to the social history of Stalin’s repression. It is of high value for scholars of Stalinism and graduate students. Clearly and vividly written, it will also make interesting reading for undergraduate students and a wider audience interested in Russian history.

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PIRANI, SIMON. *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920–24. Soviet workers and the new communist elite.* [BASEES/RoutledgeCurzon Series on Russian and East European Studies, Vol. 45.] Routledge, London [etc.] 2008. xiv, 289 pp. \$160.00; doi:10.1017/S002085900900008X

In 1917, Bolshevik demands for “soviet power” resonated broadly with Russian workers, who embraced participatory democracy as essential to their dream of social liberation. In this multi-faceted study of working-class politics in Moscow from 1920 to 1924, Simon Pirani offers new insight into a “traditional” topic – the revolution’s retreat away from its original democratic promise towards one-party dictatorship. Drawing on rich new materials from local party, factory, and police archives, he documents workers’ ongoing struggles to keep a broader, more politically inclusive revolution alive, against the Bolshevik party’s increasingly intensive efforts to consolidate its rule in the process of rebuilding a shattered economy. While not minimizing the Bolsheviks’ reliance on repressive tactics, Pirani emphasizes the party’s success in forging a new “social contract” with workers under the New Economic Policy (NEP): capitalizing on their shared desire for economic recovery, the party promised workers better working and living conditions in exchange for their political voice.

In late 1920, Pirani begins, the “super-optimism” of civil-war communists was quickly eclipsed by a crippling crisis in food supply and transport. Suffering from hunger and postwar exhaustion, Moscow workers – especially those in the male-dominated and traditionally Bolshevik metalworking industries – were still quick to protest against non-egalitarian policies like unequal rationing and shock work. Rank-and-file communists, like those associated with the strongly workerist Bauman group, spoke out with equal outrage about evidence of increasing privilege and corruption within the party, and (echoing earlier concerns of the democratic centralists) demanded the shifting of more authority to local soviets. Mounting discontent resonated in heated party debates, and in a revival of working-class collective action, most notably, in the mass strikes of February 1921.

Though economic issues predominated through early spring, Pirani shows that the workers' movement took a political turn after the Kronstadt rebellion, reflected in the surprising victories of non-party candidates at all major factories in the April–May 1921 elections to the Moscow soviet. Contrary to Bolshevik claims about undercover Menshevik or SR influence, the rise of non-party oppositionists brought together a diverse coalition of socialist workers and activists who shunned party affiliation. Operating in a unique political space, the non-partyists forged temporary unity with former SRs, Mensheviks, and Bolsheviks based on shared hopes for a “revival of participatory democracy”, and (in their words) a desire to “be in power themselves” (p. 101).

Pirani insists that the rise of non-party oppositionists in Moscow did not constitute “a revolutionary challenge”, as some scholars have suggested, since they were lacking in unity, organization, and offered no coherent alternative vision (p. 72). Moreover, non-partyists relied primarily on non-violent means to defend their right to speak, and to express resentment of political “nannying” (p. 105). Nonetheless, their bold opposition “helped to force the party’s hand” towards the adoption of NEP, and their democratic aspirations clearly frustrated Bolsheviks intent on centralizing control. Using the minutes of the Moscow soviet, Pirani demonstrates how the Bolsheviks used repressive tactics to wear them down on the soviet floor, and then further depleted their ranks by enticing “valuable non-party people” into administrative jobs in production and welfare. Undermined by this carrot-and-stick approach, the non-partyists were further debilitated by the dilemma of being “both for and against their statist alter ego simultaneously”, as “they attempted to articulate workers’ strivings for a more democratic politics, which meant confronting the Bolsheviks, while at the same time working with them to rebuild the economy” (p. 110). Using untapped archives from the AMO car factory, he offers their experience as a reflection of the difficulties workers confronted when articulating their interests to the self-proclaimed workers’ state.

As in the case of the non-partyists, Pirani repeatedly points to the Bolsheviks’ unwillingness to grant workers a part in decision-making, in spite of civil-war promises to the contrary. In order to justify their “vanguardist” role as they moved forward with peacetime construction, Bolsheviks rhetorically recast the working class as insufficiently proletarian, since – in spite of the recent return of many workers back to Moscow – it had been “diluted” by women, recent arrivals from the countryside, and others” (p. 162). In addition, Pirani tells us, the party tried to explain away the expropriation of the workers’ political voice by means of an ideological shift. Redefining workers’ “self-activity” and “consciousness” to mean recognition of the party-state, rather than active awareness of their own power, party leaders convinced themselves that “politics was not about bringing workers into the process of making decisions, but about ensuring that as far as possible they understood the decisions made on their behalf [...]” (p. 163). To support his claim that “the political expropriation of the working class was not a simple act of theft” (p. 138), Pirani also demonstrates how Bolsheviks simultaneously set out to “remould” its political relationship with workers. Key to this process were the big public campaigns launched in 1922 against the Church and the socialist revolutionaries, orchestrated by the party in order to redirect workers’ political energies away from the “fora for working-class political activity”, (the soviets and unions), into controlled exercises of mass mobilization.

With most oppositional voices silenced or isolated by 1922, many workers and socialist activists expressed angry disillusionment with the party, reflected in suicides, withdrawals from the party, and the passionate protests against bureaucratic “stench” and “spiritual stagnation” made by communist students in the Workers’ Truth group. But according to Pirani, as the economy began to improve, most Moscow workers appeared to accept the terms of a new “social contract”. In exchange for freer relations on the shopfloor and greater material reward, they committed to higher levels of productivity and labor discipline. While still able to voice grievances through strikes, and to complain about certain

issues – like inequality and late paychecks or forced bond deductions – they resisted the temptation to criticize the “system”. Although it is not clear how much the ceding of their collective voice was based on trust (versus fear) of Bolshevik rule, or how many shared the perspective of one worker who described himself as devoutly communist but “politically lazy”, it appears that many withdrew from political life from 1922 on. “Whereas in 1921 workers had gone to the soviet election meetings in good faith and elected non-party socialists, in 1923 they simply stayed away.” The use of open voting rather than secret ballots, a practice ensured by GPU agents, further “usurped democracy”, as in the case of the Guzhon steelworks, where Bolsheviks were elected to the soviet by 100 votes to 2, with 1,900 abstentions (p. 155). In this context, the role of soviets and trade unions was increasingly restricted to implementing, rather than making, decisions.

Pirani uses the final chapters to trace the transformation of the party into an “efficient mechanism of administration and control”, and the parallel formation of a new Soviet ruling class, with its unprecedented hold on political power and material privilege. As industrial managers and *spetsy* were rewarded for siding with the party against workers, and tactics like “appointism” solidified party control, the distance between workers and the “workers’ state” grew, and hierarchical class relations re-emerged. When members of the Left opposition protested in 1923, they were shut down by an unprecedented campaign of “slander, frame-ups, and vote-rigging”. Pirani’s account ends with the Lenin enrollment in 1924, which he describes as a “campaign to remould the party cells themselves”, and thus an “extension of the social contract” (p. 232). By then, the waves of new recruits (including many who privileged their careers over socialist ideals) found themselves joining a party “whose authoritarian and hierarchical nature was already well established”. Thus, their role would be less to voice workers’ concerns, than to serve as a “medium through which the party hierarchy, where discussions and decision-making power were concentrated, communicated with and controlled the working class”.

Although Pirani clearly emphasizes the workers’ agency in accepting the social contract initially, he also suggests that the trade-off was greater than realized at the time. The short-term gain of better living conditions ultimately meant the permanent loss of an institutional framework through which to debate and articulate discontent legally and peacefully, as well as important venues for exercising “the collective working-class creativity that was crucial to the revolution’s further progress” (p. 237). Admitting that no opposition group had a guaranteed “formula for socialist development”, Pirani suggests that “different choices in 1921 would have made possible different types of resistance to the reimposition of exploitative class relations and the establishment of dictatorship”. In this sense, it is possible to read Pirani’s analysis as a cautionary tale about the steep challenges involved in laying the groundwork of participatory democracy during a time of great economic crisis and rapid social transformation. But he wants us to draw a distinctly different conclusion, based on his view that Bolshevik ideology was “powerfully impacted by social changes over which it had little control, and to whose operation it often blinded itself” (p. 236). The biggest tragedy for socialists both in the Soviet Union and in all countries that would follow the Soviet path, he concludes, was not the Bolsheviks’ decision to privilege political centralization over democracy in the interests of rebuilding the economy; rather, it was “their sincere insistence that those choices were the continuation of the revolution”.

The greatest contribution of this sophisticated and penetrating analysis of worker-party relations is, in my view, the extraordinarily detailed way that Pirani has reconstructed debates and events at the grass-roots level. He effectively puts the reader “in the room” with rank-and-file communists and – to an unprecedented extent – independent non-party worker and socialist activists, as they doggedly defended the revolution’s democratic premise on the shopfloor and in the factory cell. Through skillful writing and his intimate knowledge of his sources, we get a good sense of the emotional

energy and urgency with which some workers engaged in the political arena at this critical juncture. To be sure, Pirani's narrative of worker-party dynamics is not for the politically faint of heart: indeed, he deliberately charts a complex path of actions and reactions, and spins a tangled web of competing interests and actors, whose views and agenda are shaped by a shifting confluence of ideological, political, and material considerations. Nonetheless, the complexity of his analysis reflects the intense challenges of the political moment, and should inspire others to seek the same level of engagement at different times and places.

In addition, Pirani's prodigious research offers new material and perspectives on many issues central to the workers' movement, including gender conflicts, workerist tendencies, party purging, "spets-baiting", and the challenges inherent to "workerizing" the party apparatus. Although unfortunately the archival citations are not always clearly presented (with several compressed into a single footnote), the book also offers a useful bibliography and index, as well as rich appendices, including almost thirty socio-political biographies of lesser known (and often non-party) worker activists, communists, and factory managers. For all these reasons, it seems likely that Pirani's book will go far in reinvigorating discussion of the "traditional" topic of working-class politics during the first decade of Soviet rule.

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KEMP-WELCH, A. *Poland under Communism. A Cold War History*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge [etc.] 2008. xii, 444 pp. £50.00; \$99.00. (Paper: £19.99; \$39.99.); doi:10.1017/S0020859009000091

The long narrative of Poland's history contains, in most tellings, an implicit argument about cultural survival and national values. In that argument, the communist era (1944–1989) is but a detour from Poland's true path. Recent histories of Poland, such as those by Norman Davies, Jerzy Lukowski, and Herbert Zawadzki, tend to be tone-deaf when it comes to this period. Historians need to take the communist era on its own terms, as an integral part of the Polish experience. Anthony Kemp-Welch's *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* partially fills this need. It is a compelling, well-written narrative of contestation between regime and society in the PRL (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, the Polish People's Republic), and is only the second monograph in English devoted entirely to postwar Poland and the first written in English. (Andrzej Paczkowski's *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park, PA, 2003) was first published in Polish in 1996.)

Poland under Communism has two particular strengths. First, Kemp-Welch integrates Poland into an international context. In this telling, Poland does not disappear into Cold-War storage after a brief appearance on stage at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences of 1945. At every juncture, Kemp-Welch grounds Polish events and trends in transnational or international history. Each is not merely a backdrop, but a shadow (or, occasionally, the puppet-master) to the events in Poland. Kemp-Welch shows how the Polish case diverged from and yet paralleled changes in the communist world, and how decisions or perceptions in the Kremlin or the White House shaped Polish events. Particularly interesting are the discussion of the Titoist deviation in Yugoslavia and its echo in Władysław Gomułka's downfall in 1948; of student unrest in 1968 in the context of protests in Prague, Berlin, and Paris; and of the policy debates in Washington and Moscow regarding the emergence of Solidarity and the imposition of martial law. It cannot be said that there is anything new here, but the non-specialist will find it easier to place Polish experiences into a European narrative.