

MYKOLA SKRYPNYK. By *Ivan Koshelivets'*. Munich: "Suchasnist'," 1972. 342 pp. \$9.00, cloth. \$7.00, paper.

This biography of Mykola Skrypnyk, an Old Bolshevik and probably the most prominent Ukrainian Communist of the pre-Stalinist period, constitutes the first part of a two-volume project, which will soon be concluded with a selection of Skrypnyk's works on the national question.

The author, a literary critic rather than an historian, has attempted to provide his readers with a political biography. In this he is not always successful. Given the important role played by Skrypnyk, not only in the Ukraine but in Soviet politics as a whole and in the Comintern, such an undertaking requires thorough analysis of the political culture of the 1920s and the major issues in Soviet politics at that time. This is often lacking in Koshelivets's book. He tends to concentrate on specific problems (for example, Skrypnyk's role in the organization of the Communist Party of the Ukraine, his participation in the debates on the formation of the USSR, his work in the area of Ukrainization), sacrificing a sense of continuity in the process. Thus although Skrypnyk's position on numerous controversial issues is presented clearly and comprehensively, there is little discussion of how and under what circumstances his ideas were formulated. The author's characterizations of Skrypnyk as a "fanatical revolutionary" and a "national utopian" are, needless to say, insufficient.

Nonetheless, the publication of this work represents an important contribution to the study of Ukrainian communism. The author deals extensively with various aspects of the national question and Skrypnyk's approach to this problem. Thus far only one book-length title devoted to Skrypnyk, a slender volume published in 1967, has appeared in the Soviet Union. Although posthumously rehabilitated (Skrypnyk committed suicide in 1933), he continues to be treated for the most part as an "unperson" by Soviet historians. Koshelivets's book is therefore the first serious attempt to evaluate Skrypnyk's political life, and it should provide a welcome addition to the growing literature on the Old Bolshevik elite.

The author has included Skrypnyk's autobiography, written in 1921, as an appendix, as well as an exhaustive bibliography.

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SOVETSKOE KREST'IANSTVO V GODY VELIKOI OTECHESTVENNOI VOINY. By *Iu. V. Arutiunian*. 2nd edition. Moscow: "Nauka," 1970. 466 pp. 2.21 rubles.

It is a pleasure to welcome an important contribution to the economic history of the war and to our knowledge of the achievements and sufferings of the Soviet peasantry. This is an irreplaceable book, full of hitherto unpublished statistics and many quotations from inaccessible archives. Nothing so full or so comprehensive has been published before, except perhaps in the first edition of the same author's work, which appeared in 1963 and which is not available to the reviewer. It is greatly to the author's credit that he has made many independent calculations based on archival materials, and also that he is openly critical when the evidence shows that mistakes were made or injustices committed.

Soviet peasants had to bear extremely severe burdens in 1941–45. Most men were mobilized for army service. So were many horses. Tractors lacked drivers,

maintenance men, spare parts, fuel. Fertilizer supplies fell to near zero. There was also a great shortage of simple implements. The major granaries of the Soviet Union were lost to the Germans in 1941–42, and production had to be based on less fertile areas, some of which were sparsely populated. The government faced serious difficulties in feeding the army and the towns, and its exactions left little for the peasants. It is true that some were able to obtain very high prices for food in the free market, but they found it very difficult to spend the money, since shops had little to sell. Indeed, to quote the author, the state retail stores were “in essence closed to the mass of the rural population.” (On the other hand, some peasants were able to obtain goods by barter.)

The workload was heavy, with the burden carried primarily by women, with the help of juveniles, under the harsh discipline of wartime. Plowing was often done with cows. In some cases, half a dozen women hauled at the reins. The author presents a vivid picture of the hardships endured, and judiciously balances genuine patriotic enthusiasm and coercion. Numerous tables give us the changing composition of the labor force. Lack of machines, and the urgent need to encourage individual responsibility for the harvest, led to the widespread break-up of the brigades and the use instead of the *zveno* as the basic organizational unit, a practice which was attacked after the war. References are made to various decrees concerning the minimum number of workdays required of the peasants, and to court cases involving those who failed to obey. Townspeople were mobilized to help with the harvest, with the minimum age set at fourteen; there were 4 million mobilized in 1942, and nearly half of them were secondary-school pupils.

Of course, harvest losses were high. The author estimates them at a third of the “biological” crop on the average. In some areas exaggerations reached remarkable heights: thus, according to evidence cited by the author, the grain harvest in Kazakhstan in 1942 was not 9.1 centners per hectare, as officially claimed, but 3.9 centners. Yet because payments for tractor-work and delivery obligations were related to the mythical biological yield, “the collection of any data on the size of the harvest [other than the official biological estimates] was totally forbidden. Even the making of a food and feed balance based on data expressed in threshed grain was considered to be a breach of this ruling.” A petty official who tried to calculate the availability and utilization of grain in a kolkhoz was denounced and recalled as “untrustworthy.” The author also shows that plans and targets were usually set at unrealistically high levels, related in many cases to an expanded sown area which could not be cultivated for lack of labor, tools, or haulage power. Compulsory procurements at very low prices enabled the state to obtain produce “in essence for nothing.” Excessive procurement quotas caused kolkhozes to take evasive action, “sensibly seeking to retain a minimum of food and seed, without which further production would have been impossible.” Yet the fact remains, as the author says, that the peasants did deliver over 43 percent of the total grain to the state in 1941–43, which contrasts with 17 percent which the state was able to obtain by requisitioning in 1920 (“and in 1920 the villages replied with kulak risings”). Incidentally, the tables quoted in the text give many valuable details on the channels by which grain was obtained, and how it was used, in the war years.

There are also precise figures for payment in cash and kind to kolkhoz peasants. These payments are rightly characterized as “totally insufficient for subsistence.” Whereas 90 percent of consumption by kolkhoz peasants of bread-grain and 30 percent of potatoes were covered by the kolkhoz in 1940, the total

figure fell to one-third in wartime. No wonder the peasants sought in every way to expand their private plots: they were necessary for survival. There were many instances of the appropriation of collective land for this purpose—enough to lead to countermeasures in 1946. The author also reports pressure to compel peasants to sell livestock to the collectives, which in the case of Kazakhstan led to a decline in privately owned cattle by half between 1940 and 1943.

Many pages are also—unusually—devoted to an account of German policy in occupied territories, showing the invaders' use of the kolkhoz system to maximize procurements for their needs. There is plenty of evidence of German ruthlessness. But some readers may be struck by the parallel with the Soviet authorities' own procurement methods.

Arutunian provides not only many statistical tables of great importance and interest but also an extensive bibliography, together with a critical review of the literature. His is a fine piece of research, well presented, by a bold and critical mind. Needless to say, it is not "anti-Soviet." The author rightly stresses the appalling difficulties faced by the authorities as well as by the peasants; and the sufferings and sacrifices of the rural population are an important part of the history of wartime Russia. So are their achievements, in unimaginably harsh conditions.

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STALIN: THE MAN AND HIS ERA. By *Adam B. Ulam*. New York: Viking Press, 1973. vii, 760 pp. \$12.95, cloth. \$4.95, paper.

Probably the most prolific academic specialist on the Soviet Union (and its revolutionary antecedents in tsarist times), Adam B. Ulam has added to his laurels with this impressive and monumental life of Stalin. It clearly supersedes the heretofore "standard" biography by Isaac Deutscher. A comprehensive work has long been needed, but the principal investigators in recent years have tended to be either popularizers aiming at a mass market (Robert Payne, H. Montgomery Hyde) or serious scholars whose contributions have been limited chronologically or by subject matter (Edward Ellis Smith, Robert Conquest, Robert C. Tucker). Tucker's work is projected to three volumes and may yet become the definitive biography, insofar as such a feat is possible.

Ulam has approached his formidable task within a rather conventional "life and times" framework, but the finished product is a masterful synthesis that equals or surpasses his highly regarded life of Lenin. The verve and pace of his narrative seldom falter, even though he makes few concessions to the hypothetical "general" reader, who would presumably choose a colorful and dramatic chronicle to an intellectual feast overly rich in analysis and interpretation. And in opinion too—for the deftness and originality with which Stalin's motives and aspirations are so lucidly expounded frequently stray beyond the existing evidence. Can we be so confident, for example, that the Great Purge was brought on by the danger of war instead of the dictator's growing paranoia? And what of the Kirov affair, where the evidence, if not conclusive, tends to implicate Stalin? We are allowed to assume, almost paradoxically, that the murderer, Nikolaev, worked alone (perhaps the Kennedy assassinations induced in the author an overreaction against conspiracy theories).

This is a thoroughly hostile biography of the great tyrant, and in view of the