

Scholars of the post-1953 era in Soviet history seem to have been particularly pre-occupied with periodization. Perhaps the time has come to start asking different questions. For example, how do policies and experiences of Soviet society from the 1950s onwards compare with those of other cold-war societies? Or, as Bittner provocatively asks, how and when were the seeds of 21st century Russia sown?

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Stalin and the Struggle for Supremacy in Eurasia. By Alfred J. Rieber. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. x, 420 pp. Notes. Index. Maps. \$39.99, paper.

This is an ambitious and overarching reinterpretation of Stalin's domestic and foreign policies—or actually the connections between the two—from the revolution and civil war periods through World War II and the dawn of the Cold War. It appears to be the second installment to Alfred Rieber's well-received *The Struggle for Eurasian Borderlands*, a comparative study of the Hapsburg, Ottoman, Russian and Xing empires. Like that volume, this new book has a wide geographic scope, but with a greater focus on the internal politics and security calculations of a single power—the USSR. Based on documents from archives in Russia and a broad array of memoirs and secondary literature, Rieber highlights the importance of border security as a central theme in Russian history and one that transcends the revolution and political ideologies. His definition of Eurasia is certainly broad: it includes the western borderlands of Poland and Finland, European territories that were annexed formally into the USSR (the Baltics and Moldova), the southern frontier with Turkey and Iran, and the Asian frontier with China and Japan, ranging from Central Asian through Siberia to the Russian Far East.

Stalin's main foreign policy tasks in the 1920s and 1930s were to re-build what was left of the Russian empire, transform it into a multi-ethnic state, and to secure that state from hostile neighbors, many of whom were smaller successor states to the empires of Rieber's previous book. Even though some of those successor states were weak, they had strong ties to the major powers of the day and many were revanchist—which posed potential insecurity in the Soviet frontier. Rieber identifies Stalin's key approach to this foreign policy challenge as his “borderlands thesis”: a remarkably flexible series of attempts to protect the Soviet border regions from incursions and foreign influence, to expand Soviet power both within the USSR's borders and beyond, and to punish borderland peoples who showed any sign of disloyalty.

Stalin's policies towards security in the borderlands were rooted in his own past as a Georgian revolutionary in the multi-ethnic Caucasus—an experience that set him apart from Lenin, Trotsky and other early Soviet leaders and were key to his evolution as a thinker and political leader. This led him to take uncharacteristically flexible—and at times contradictory—approaches towards relations with the Soviet Union's neighbors and eventually with the major powers of Europe and Asia, particularly once German and Japanese militarism and expansionism became a clear threat to Moscow's influence in the country's periphery.

This flexibility evolved with time, dictated in large part by circumstances. It included cutting security deals with foreign rivals, installing friendly regimes in some buffer states, annexing neighboring lands and peoples, and in some cases choosing not to annex such territories—particularly because of a postwar realization that annexing too many hostile nationalities and could prove difficult to absorb them and thus pose demographic challenges.

The book's wide geographic scope is a welcome addition to the historiography of the Soviet borderlands and our understanding of Stalin; it conveys the need to transform the borderlands (on both sides of the USSR's borders), or at least to influence what was going on on the other side in buffer states that were seen as key to the security of *all* Soviet frontiers and ultimately to the Soviet state. At the same time, the treatment of some regions appears cursory: Stalin's approach to the Caucasus and western borderlands are dealt with in great depth, while the Central Asian and Far Eastern borderlands receive much less attention. That, however, is a relatively minor fault and a sheer by-product of a comparative study.

Finally, just as Rieber highlights the importance of border security as a central theme in Russian (tsarist and Soviet) history, reading this book in 2016 reminds one of the similarities of today's Russia with its Soviet and tsarist predecessors. Although Rieber ends his study long before the Soviet collapse, one can see that Putin's increasingly aggressive policies since 2014 are not simply expansionism for expansionism's sake. Rieber's book provides some insights and historical background to the current Kremlin's profound and clearly long-standing fear of hostile states on its periphery, and the belief that a ring of friendly buffer states around Russia are vital to the security of the state.

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The High Title of a Communist: Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime. By Edward Cohn. Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2015. xvii, 268 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Figures. Tables. \$49.00, hard bound.

Why is an American historian of the 21st century interested in the behavior of Communist Party members in the Soviet Union after World War II? Edward Cohn could have mentioned the obvious fact that the protagonists of his book are the parents of the current Russian ruling class surrounding President Putin. As far as we know the young Vladimir has been secretly baptized by his mother without permission of his politically active father. In the past, a generation of Soviet historians had undertaken efforts to retell the achievements of the CPSU after the October Revolution and to envision the falsifications of Western historiography. Therefore, post-Soviet historians today are reluctant when it comes to researching a formerly canonized utopia. Nevertheless, their scientific predecessors may be forgiven for their limited and controlled access to archival sources and propaganda literature. As an irony of history, people from "outside" have to shed light on the inner development of Soviet Communism by pointing to the sins of Putin's ancestors.

Using archival resources, including the records of the Committee of Party Control in Moscow, the files of central party institutions, and the protocols of party organizations at the provincial level, such as from Kyiv and Saratov as well as from Tver' (Kalinin) and Perm' (Molotov), Cohn without doubt has written an excellent book on "Postwar Party Discipline and the Values of the Soviet Regime." Regarding the Moral Code of the Builders of Communism announced by the Twenty-Second Party-Congress in October, 1961, the main title of the book could rather be: "He who does not work does not eat." As mentioned in the introduction of the book, during the twenty years after World War II the Communist Party of the Soviet Union expelled more than 1.7 million of its members for not corresponding with "communist morals" in their everyday life, in private as well as in the professional sphere (3). The twelve com-