Socialist Countries Face the European Community: Soviet-Bloc Controversies over East-West Trade. By Suvi Kansikas. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2014. 224 pp. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. €49.95, hard bound.

"At the 1974 Session," Suvi Kansikas writes, "after five years of negotiations, bargaining and deliberation, the CMEA finally sealed its attempts at rapprochement" (177). The reader will greet this development with some relief after observing five years of deliberations among the countries of the CMEA (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) on whether or not to make direct contact with the European Commission in order to protect the privileged commercial access that the eastern bloc had been enjoying to western European markets. This should have been a simple decision, but Brezhnev and his colleagues feared that western Europe's newly established Common Commercial Policy would put individual eastern bloc countries at a disadvantage at the negotiating table against this freshly aggregated economic behemoth. So communist leaders did what they had learned to do best: they dithered and deliberated . . . for five years.

These deliberations form the bulk of Kansikas' thorough and useful book on the CMEA. The plot itself may be a bit repetitive, and ultimately disappointing, though this has little to do with the author's scholarship and everything to do with the nature of the CMEA. When the bloc countries finally decided that expediency dictated relations with the supranational entity from Brussels, the actual meeting led nowhere. It took three years, from 1969 to 1972, to get the Soviets to admit the existence of the Commission, and another three for Commission and CMEA leaders to finally meet, which they did in Moscow in February 1975. The problem was that while the Commission represented a disciplined bloc of countries that were successfully integrating the management of their external commerce (along with many other economic matters), the CMEA worked on the basis of national autonomy and unanimity, making deliberation its main occupation, and resolution rare. The communist organization was simply no equivalent to the EEC (European Economic Community); it never transformed bilateral trade practices among its members into something more multilateral that could then find representation internationally in the organization's executive committee.

The CMEA's attempts at integrating the bloc form the first half of Kansikas' narrative. Instigated first by a Polish request and driven thereafter by the Soviet Union, the attempt led, after much deliberation, to the Comprehensive Program for Socialist Economic Integration, characterized accurately by the author as "an instruction as to how the CMEA members could establish a coordination mechanism for foreign trade ties"—an agenda for further deliberations, in other words (90). Kansikas is not interested in the rather ineffectual institutions, such as the CMEA's International Investment Bank, that did result from this initiative. Her focus, and that of the book generally, is on the influence of west European integration on the internal politics of the eastern bloc. Despite British fears that the Soviets would try to exploit divisions in Europe in order to forestall European economic integration, Kansikas amply shows the opposite was true: the European Economic Community's Common Market initiative sowed tensions and divisions within the CMEA bloc. This is because possible new obstacles to trade would not fall evenly in the east. Romania, Bulgaria and Poland, for example, derived important hard currency from their sales of agricultural products to western Europe and would thus suffer from tariffs. They therefore lobbied the CMEA for a practical policy of negotiation with Brussels. The Soviet Union attempted to maintain discipline against recognition because its exports of oil, gas and other resources were not threatened by the Common Commercial Policy. The tension frayed relations in the CMEA, with Romania as the most consistently recalcitrant ally.

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The need for western Europe's technologically advanced goods that were at the heart of all the tension went unquestioned. Kansikas shrewdly notes that when Brezhnev finally signaled his willingness to negotiate with the Commission in a March 1972 speech, the reasons owed less to Cold War maneuvering than to the need to reestablish Soviet authority in the east and maintain a semblance of leadership by getting ahead of the allies in order to forestall any potential insurrection in commercial policy.

In the end, they found the Common Commercial Policy to be rather flexible. Since 1969, the Commission had twice delayed its full implementation. The deadlines created pressure on some CMEA countries to act, but in the end everyone decided to continue with the bilateral arrangements at a national level that had promoted commerce between the blocs. Kansikas has very profitably reminded us the politically important role commerce played in knitting the continent back together again after its division in the 1940s, and has advanced our understanding of the ways in which technology and economic organization constitute and truncate political power.

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Stalin: New Biography of a Dictator. By Oleg V. Khlevniuk. Trans. Nora Seligman Favorov. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015. xvi, 392 pp. Notes. Index. Plates. $25.00, paper.

Oleg Khlevniuk's previous works have been monographs and document collections with extensive critical and comparative documentation. These works have been the best scholarly studies of Soviet history to emerge in Russia since perestroika. The foremost expert on Soviet-era archives offers here a different kind of book, a more popularly written biography that saves the reader from "fat tomes that will never be conquered" (xvi).

The book is attractively organized and presented. Moving back and forth between Stalin's death and previous chronological events, many of the chapters begin with a progressive hour by hour dramatic description of Stalin's death agonies in March 1953 before resuming the biographical chronology of earlier times. Nora Favorov's translation is excellent.

This is a brisk, exciting and compelling read. Khlevniuk apologizes that space constraints forced him to omit exhaustive documentation, "many telling facts and quotes," and engagement with the works of other scholars (xv-xvi). He is also frank about the book's purpose. Fighting an ongoing polemical battle in Moscow today against any rehabilitation of Stalin, Khlevniuk informs the reader on the second page against "pseudo-scholarly apologias" and views of a "modernizing Stalinism" whose great power goal was worth the human cost (x).

The text is pleasant and makes for a spirited read, but this comes at a scholarly cost. Many current biographical works have left Great Man history behind and attempt to put the life in question into a broader historical context. Ronald Suny, Alfred Rieber, and Jörg Baberowski have emphasized Stalin's roots in the tumultuous Caucasus borderlands. Khlevniuk dismisses such contextualization in three sentences, by arguing (wrongly, in my view) that the whole empire was a borderland with a "Russian culture of extremism and violence." Khlevniuk notes that he does not want to "relieve young Jughashvili [Stalin] of personal responsibility for his choices" (22). Khlevniuk thus shares the conservative western view that by broadening the focus beyond the individual we somehow excuse him. Here and elsewhere, Khlevniuk's

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