

Face to the Village: The Riazan Countryside under Soviet Rule, 1921–1930. By Tracy McDonald. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011. xvii, 422 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Photographs. Tables. Maps. \$75.00, hard bound.

Tracy McDonald's rich monograph focuses on transitions in village culture and relations between the state and local society in the 1920s in Riazan' province. She traces the developments contributing to dekulakization and collectivization, which she views partially as responses to local realities as Moscow's leaders perceived them. Local complexities and intensifying estrangement between the countryside and Moscow are central to her analysis of the "brittleness of Soviet power in the 1920s" (300). The research is formidable. It comprises over a decade's work in Riazan's and Moscow's archives, exhaustive reading in published sources and secondary studies of the Russian and Soviet countryside, comparative peasant and resistance studies, literary works, and some oral history interviews McDonald conducted with elderly citizens in Riazan's villages.

McDonald asks the right questions, grounded in the local context. Three struck me as especially important. What characteristics defined the persons who assumed local policing and administrative positions in the 1920s? Which reports from the localities reached policymakers in Moscow? How did villagers' attitudes toward collaboration with the Soviet state shift in response to the center's signals across the decade?

McDonald identifies continuities in village culture and the state's understanding of that culture from the late imperial period, drawing on the work of Christine Worobec, Jane Burbank, Gareth Popkins, Corinne Gaudin, and Stephen Frank. Local attitudes toward petty crime, arson, horse theft, and vigilante justice resembled those of the prerevolutionary village and generated much the same frustration among Soviet officials they had provoked among imperial officials. "Hooliganism" of the late imperial period became *nekul'turnost'* in the Soviet state's view of village mischief makers. Despite Riazan's proximity to Moscow, the state continued to be "far away" and the villages continued to be undergoverned.

The village inhabitants who assumed local governing positions continued to be "of the village" throughout the 1920s, embedded in local community and family webs. Right up to the onset of dekulakization and collectivization, the state could not count on local officials to pursue state policies expeditiously if they were too costly for local familiars. With that condition, peasants still stepped forward; their engagement indicated their decision that local government was "worth working with nonetheless" (121). But engagement did not mean abandoning local loyalties. McDonald argues that the relatively low incidence of violent resistance to dekulakization and collectivization in Riazan's villages was due to the predominance of local men as would-be agents of the state, who dragged their feet when executing orders from the center. The spectacular uprising in Pitelino, which McDonald subjects to Geertzian thick analysis, was exceptional in the region. She argues that it resulted from the Pitelino soviet's recent changeover to leadership by activists, rather than by traditional heads of stable and prosperous households.

McDonald's years of reading archival documents in Riazan' and Moscow enabled her to track the information flow about life in the countryside in the 1920s as it moved from the localities through districts and the provincial capital en route to urban policymakers in Moscow. She discovered the tendency of each successive level of officialdom to select only the most striking and negative vignettes, data, or commentary to send up to the next level. By the time reports reached Moscow, this editing had reduced life in the countryside to its most benighted and alarming aspects, which hardened Bolshevik officials' conviction that only aggressive cleansing could clear the way and make the Soviet countryside a modern and compliant resource for its political and economic ambitions. Hence the wholesale excesses deployed by activists during dekulakization and collectivization.

Face to the Village also historicizes local attitudes toward the center during the New Economic Policy (NEP). McDonald analyzes local documents to display the peasants' initial confidence that they could negotiate with a relatively indulgent state in early NEP, followed by growing mutual distrust and frustration in the face of the state's implacability by 1929. She deems 1924–1925 the "window of potential negotiation between peasant and state" (300).

Face to the Village includes excellent maps, photographs, and tables. For my stylistic preferences, McDonald writes too often in the passive voice and explicitly states her argument too frequently within and across chapters. She could also have reduced the text to a more assignable length by shortening her synopses of existing scholarship and eschewing some of her excursions into methodological issues. Readers who anticipate these additions to an already detailed study will find *Face to the Village* an illuminating examination of the still-more-Russian-peasant-dominated-than-Soviet-controlled countryside of the 1920s.

CATHY A. FRIERSON
University of New Hampshire

Would Trotsky Wear a Bluetooth? Technological Utopianism under Socialism, 1917–1989. By Paul R. Josephson. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. ix, 342 pp. Notes. Index. Figures. \$65.00, hard bound.

As a historian, Paul R. Josephson is an explorer and an adventurer. In earlier publications, he was at his best when visiting offbeat places, exploring unopened archival collections, and reporting previously untold stories. This book undertakes a very different task: to offer a synthetic review of socialist societies' experiences with advanced technology and industrial modernity. Alas, the text shows obvious signs of being composed in a hurry, as if the author was filling up pages without pause, having lost his patience for careful analysis of sources and disciplined thinking. What the book lacks in the former, it substitutes with vague generalities, touristic memories, and superficial anecdotes.

The reading is nevertheless instructive in a different sense, for behind its inconsistencies and contradictions, one senses the familiar intellectual trauma of a scholarly generation still shell-shocked from the collapse of communist power in eastern Europe twenty years ago. That momentous experience and its strong passions have become a fixation for a new variety of whig historiography. The popular "we now know" genre derives its primary lesson from 1991, as if the latter were the end of history and the ultimate criterion through which to understand, teleologically, two centuries of socialist ideas and movements. I will leave aside for now the wishful futurological aspect of this approach and focus instead on its historiographic problems and rhetorical tools.

Earlier generations of anticommunist historians acknowledged, if grudgingly, that the USSR had managed to transform itself from a largely agrarian into a highly industrialized country, without the advantage of external resources or investments, by imposing severe deprivations on its own population, especially peasants. The Soviets accomplished this stressful task in record manner, just barely in time to match technologically the looming military onslaught by Nazi Germany. Historians writing under the influence of the 1991 shock wish to reinterpret the above story into a failure of some kind. Josephson achieves this goal easily, without recourse to statistics or economic data, simply with a rhetorical shift of focus. "Granted," the Soviet Union industrialized, but it is much more important, he declares, to understand that the effort "fell short" (10, 13) of the exaggerated utopian expectations of its leaders.

Any committed undertaking in world history can be dismissed in a second with such a trick, given humans' notorious penchant for wishful thinking, and the Soviet case is no exception. Still, Josephson hastily ascribes to early Soviet leaders a deliberately crude version of "technological utopianism." Vladimir Lenin and Lev Trotskii urged their followers to adopt and master bourgeois technology because they were keenly aware that Russian socialists had come to power prematurely, in a country that lacked a fully developed capitalist industry. Josephson claims, however, that they saw bourgeois technology as "value-neutral," a "panacea" (7) capable just by itself of liberating workers—a technocratic view that the Bolsheviks did not share but ridiculed as non-Marxist and utopian.

The second chapter focuses on Nowa Huta near Kraków and other model towns, flagship sites of postwar industrialization in eastern Europe. The Polish architects who designed this visionary urban project with its improved living conditions for workers proudly looked down upon the slums typical of western European cities during the earlier periods