

Morrison states his goal as reinvigorating military and diplomatic history. He certainly does. Morrison's "microhistory" approach captures well the texture of imperialism in Central Asia and how the region's environment helped shape the empire's expansion. He conveys the experience of fighting in the tsar's army, including the soldiers' diets and the challenges of desert campaigns fought with supplies carried entirely by camels. Although Morrison acknowledges that most of his sources are in Russian, his substantial work in Central Asian languages makes him sensitive to natives' experiences of conquest and how Russian military power aggravated fissures in local societies. His careful attention to military technology helps him to explain, for instance, how Russians' use of rifled guns and better artillery allowed vastly outnumbered Russian forces to inflict many more casualties than they suffered themselves.

Throughout the book and especially in the conclusion, Morrison succinctly compares Russian conquest with nineteenth-century imperialisms around the world. His command of the material makes one wish he had ventured to produce a grand theory to rival those he debunks, since he seems particularly qualified to attempt such an explanation. This large-scale but finely textured study is too hefty to assign in any but the most specialized undergraduate courses. Nonetheless, Morrison's research and synthesis of recent scholarship on Central Asia make his book a major achievement, one that will long stand as a definitive study of its subject.

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Russian Utopia: A Century of Revolutionary Possibilities. By Mark D. Steinberg. Russian Shorts. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. xii, 138 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Figures. Maps. \$17.95, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.139

What does "utopia" mean? We probably *think* we know what it means. A vision of perfection, somewhere in the future, dreamlike and unattainable? That sounds about right. As Mark Steinberg tells us at the outset of this wonderfully thoughtful book, most of the utopian thinkers he writes about did not recognize themselves as such, because they thought utopia meant "fanciful wish having nothing to do with reality" (3). For Steinberg, however, they were utopians insofar as utopia is not actually about the fanciful or the unreal. It is instead grounded in descriptions of the really existing, it signifies a "radical rethinking" of what is possible, a "disruption of assumptions" (x). The dynamic and often taut interplay of the real and the not-yet-real is one of the themes that binds this history of Russian utopian thought. Utopia requires faith to "leap into uncertainty" (3), thereby naturally lending itself to revolution. It also involves temporal unsettling, a rejection of linear structures of time in favor of a reclaimed and rejuvenated past—or a vision of the future brought into the present. But, crucially, utopia is necessarily a critical method as well as an imagined space. It is as much about the harsh conditions that inspire it as the content of its alternative, and true utopia is never blind even to its own inadequacies. The fundamental premise of Steinberg's book is that utopia as an idea, an impulse, and a method should be taken seriously, even celebrated. Its degeneration into dystopia is not inevitable.

The four thematic chapters spiral around the meaning of utopia on "Russian" soil by exploring images of flight, dreams of a "new person," designs for a new city, and that question always looming large in Russian history—the role of the state. Flight and wings symbolize the utopian impulse to unloose the tethers of existing reality and unleash hope and freedom. Long represented in Russian culture, it was during

the turbulence of the Russian revolution that flight acquired particular resonance. So too did the concept of the “new person” (the gender-neutral *novyi chelovek*), which, according to Steinberg, stands for the persistent *intelligent* ideal of human dignity. How the individual personality (*lichnost'*) fit with the collective social body, however, became a pressing question after 1917. From here the book takes a spatial turn to consider the configuration of living space for the “new person.” “Architecture and utopia have long been allies” (53), Steinberg tells us, illustrated by the foundation of St. Petersburg as Peter’s Promethean, Europeanized imperial capital, and by the transformation of “New Moscow” under Stalin as the centered showpiece of socialism. The city also brings into relief the contradictions of modern life: possibility and liberation but also danger, disease, and disorder. It supplies the lived experience that “inspires and shapes” the utopian impulse to overcome these contradictions (53–56). Finally, the dynamic between utopia and dystopia necessarily embraces the state. Here Steinberg unpacks the “ideal Russian state” in its several iterations, “spiritually at one with the people and devoted to their happiness, but with no limits on coercive power” (79).

Written for Bloomsbury’s impressive “Russian Shorts” series, the challenge for the author is to combine breadth with depth in relatively few words. With his customary acute insight, erudition, and elegant prose, Steinberg succeeds with aplomb. Nonetheless, by his own admission he has chosen depth over breadth, focusing on a selection of individuals and episodes. This has been a judicious choice, allowing Steinberg to draw upon his own original research. At times, however, I wanted a wider lens that looked beyond the “revolutionary era” (c.1880–1930s). Was perestroika an era of utopian imagining? Is the Putin age one of conservative utopia? Then there is the question of Stalinism as utopia, which Steinberg intriguingly leaves somewhat open, hesitant about the lack of critical challenge to the existing state of things. Does this suggest that Stalinism was a calcified socio-political order? Socialism may have been fully welcomed in 1936, but this was still a society supposedly transitioning towards communist utopia.

However, the enduring significance of this sparkling and inspiring book will be beyond what Steinberg could have imagined when writing it. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the tendency to read Russian history “backward from outcomes,” by reducing it to pain and brutality, has been very great. But the history of Russian utopia reminds us that this too is a country that has been shaped by the pursuit of “liberty, justice, morality, community, and the dignity of the individual” (6). Let us hope it will be again.

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Eric Blanc’s *Revolutionary Social Democracy* is an important book that everyone with an interest in Soviet history, Marxism, the political sociology of class, and prospects for working-class organization should read. It seeks to challenge “long-held assumptions about the Russian Revolution and the dynamics of political struggle in autocratic and parliamentary conditions,” (1) and succeeds brilliantly in fulfilling its ambitious agenda. It does so by extending the coverage of social democratic party history to