

Red Leviathan: The Secret History of Soviet Whaling. By Ryan Tucker Jones. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022. xvii, 269 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$30.00, hard bound.
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The near destruction of the world's whale populations during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries represents a stark entry on the long list of humanity's environmental and ethical sins. By the 1970s, massive overhunting had largely emptied the world's oceans of many whale species. The central part played by the US, Britain, Japan, and Norway are well known. But *Red Leviathan* reveals the outsized role also of the Soviet Union, whose hunters killed well over 500,000 whales—mostly between the end of the Second World War and the 1980s [xv], a period when other countries were reducing their catches amid rising protest and decreasing profitability. Like so much of life in the USSR, Soviet whaling was “entirely hidden” [xi] from the world, conducted in a culture of secrecy, denials, and cover-ups. Ryan Tucker Jones is not the first to reveal the above facts, but his is the first in-depth study.

Soviet whaling dates to the second Five-Year Plan (1933–37). Stalin's government saw the enterprise as critical to developing the Far Eastern provinces. Whaling promised jobs for migrants, income for the state, and a deeper Soviet presence on the Pacific coast (41). Ever-increasing whale quotas became a facet of state economic planning thereafter; but waste was endemic. As catches increased, the ability to transport, process, and preserve whale products could not keep pace. Huge numbers of whales rotted. Improperly processed blubber was discarded. “In 1940 production for human consumption was abandoned altogether” (47). But the hunt accelerated. Whales would now “die to feed dogs and foxes, or help produce paint” (47). Although American and British whalers had earlier greatly reduced Pacific populations of Gray, Bowhead and Right whales, other species—including Humpback, Fin, and Sperm—were still “abundant” (42). Soviet hunting would change this, prompting a shift to Antarctic whaling in the post-war era.

Tucker Jones asks why the USSR ramped up whaling when other states were reducing catches. Part of the answer he finds in the planned economy (xi). From the 1970s, at least, whaling declined globally because it was less profitable; but the planned economy was not sensitive to market forces. The Soviet Union's political culture was also important. Organized, popular protest discouraged western whalers; but the Soviet system largely excluded these voices. Interestingly, Tucker Jones also emphasizes repeated Russian efforts to develop Pacific whaling during the seventeenth–nineteenth centuries and their failure in the face of aggressive competition from British and American whalers. This implies another potential driver of Soviet-era whaling: pent-up national hurt or rivalry.

As with nearly everything else in the USSR, the whaling situation began to change during the Gorbachev era. Public protest and glasnost increased pressure against hunting. The subsequent economic collapse largely ended it. Combined with bans or limitations on whaling all around the world, this has facilitated a significant recovery of some populations. History is never simple. In one of several ironies Tucker Jones notes, destructive Soviet whaling helped create vital knowledge of cetacean behavior that has in turn benefitted modern whale conservation.

This is an outstanding book. Eminently readable and deeply-researched, it draws on long study in archives from Kaliningrad and Odessa to Kamchatka, Alaska, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. A characteristic feature is the high degree to which the author has also immersed himself in the various situational contexts of his subject—and the deep sense of empathy he has derived from these experiences. Visits to whaling yards and Russian coasts evoke the perspective of the whales and of the ocean itself. Tucker

Jones validates the perspective of the whalers, too. Having interviewed and socialized with many of them, he describes likeable men and women who felt a deep bond with the sea and who, through difficult economic and political times, enjoyed the bonds of camaraderie and a good income plying the waters in search of their prey. Some readers may feel this sense of empathy compromises Tucker Jones's ability to sufficiently apportion blame for the mass slaughter of sentient creatures. On the other hand, he clearly emphasizes the heroic role of many Russians (some of them whalers) who acted at personal risk to preserve and transmit records and to confront state whaling. In other words, there are definite heroes in this story, but the villains are harder to find.

This is an important read for anyone interested in Soviet or environmental history, marine conservation, or oceanography.

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La société des voleurs: Propriété et socialisme sous Staline. By Juliette Cadiot. Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, 2021. 321 pp. Notes. Bibliography. €24.80, paper. doi: 10.1017/slr.2023.218

In this meticulously researched book, Juliette Cadiot traces how the concept of “socialist property” evolved from a political slogan about the necessity of protecting scarce resources to a concept enshrined in Soviet law. Cadiot suggests that the Stalinist state increasingly derived its legitimacy from the protection of socialist property (10). State decrees, the main of which were issued in 1932, 1940, and 1947, penalized an expanding “universe of theft,” that is, illegal economic activities ranging from petty thievery to large-scale systematic embezzlement. Theft of socialist property took on major importance in the Stalin period; anything that involved “the seizure of resources that could be seen as representing social or political danger” was harshly punished, often more so than murder or other serious crimes (12).

Cadiot begins by looking at how socialist property was defined and how thefts of it were policed in Chapter 1. The Department against the Theft of Socialist Property (*Otdel po bor'be s khishcheniiami sotsialisticheskoi sobstvennosti*) was created in 1937 and given expansive powers. At the same time, those responsible for policing thefts of socialist property, from the police all the way up to judges, were frequently embroiled in scandals, as they were (or were perceived to be) engaged in theft themselves because they often helped themselves to confiscated goods.

Chapter 2 explores the application of ever stricter penalties for theft, resulting in a major increase in incarceration of thieves, including many minors and other vulnerable groups. Even as the penalties stiffened, there was widespread sympathy for petty criminals, Cadiot finds; the figure of “the apple thief as a victim of Stalinist repression” was later used to push for carceral reform (114). This chapter also looks at how the accused and their families coped with stringent punishments, in particular, by trying to cultivate patronage relations with judges along ethnic and regional lines. Judges had latitude to soften sentences and often did, but this flexibility sometimes increased their corruption.

Chapter 3 covers the relationship between theft of socialist property and the underground economy. Opportunities for, as well as forms of, economic crime involving stolen socialist property, including diverted funds and resources, multiplied in the postwar period, as Cadiot notes. Many fraudulent enterprises took cover behind legal and grey-market activities or by creating fake receipts for sales of goods that