

access to previously unavailable archive material as well as to many protagonists of the events they relate, oral sources being particularly important for the early history of the informal CCOO. However, information and description are not always accompanied by analysis in the uneven regional accounts. Due to the absence of rigorous editing and a general chapter covering the evolution of CCOO between 1958 and 1977, these are also prone to some unnecessary repetition. Although not hagiographic, this is certainly sympathetic towards CCOO. Rival union organizations merit scant attention, unless it is to subject them to often justifiable criticism, making it difficult to follow their changing relations with CCOO, and hence the background to the 1988 general strike with which this book ends. This is a crucial area scarcely considered in Soto's none the less stimulating chapter, which can also be read as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the future strategic, organizational and ideological orientation of the movement. This volume suggests that many of the issues at the centre of the current debate have historical precedents and roots. By casting light on these, therefore, this book aids comprehension of the present. And the future?

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**Rapports secrets soviétiques. La société russe dans les documents confidentiels 1921–1991. Recueil de pièces d'archives provenant du Centre de conservation de la documentation contemporaine, des Archives d'État de la Fédération de Russie. Textes réunis, trad. et prés. par Nicolas Werth et Gaël Moulec. Gallimard, Paris 1994. 699 pp. F.fr. 190.00.**

This is the first collection of Soviet secret documents aimed at a large Western audience. It includes more than 300 reports written by the secret police and other state and party organs between the launching of the NEP and the collapse of the USSR. The editors have arranged these documents under seven major headings, and, within these, chronologically. The first, "Ordre et désordre socialistes", includes reports on alcoholism, juvenile delinquency and corruption, etc. It is followed by sections on agriculture, industry, religion, forced labor and resistance and dissidence. The book concludes with a selection of documents relating to the most famous "affairs" which marked Soviet history, from the Kirov affair to the "doctors' plot".

The material contained in this book is extremely rich. Here, I shall merely point to some of the historical problems on which this collection casts new light. However, the reader who browses through this volume and gets lost in an unsystematic reading of the documents offered by Werth and Moulec will be amply rewarded.

Before beginning, a general remark is in order. The fact that police reports are among the main sources for the study of Soviet history says, in itself, something important about the character of this history. It presents itself, and in the documents it left even more than in its reality, as the history of a state which tried to reduce to a minimum the autonomy of the society upon which it was feeding. This explains why today we are forced to look at that society through the glasses built and used by the powers-that-be to spy upon and, if necessary, to repress it.

Of course, we do have other sources, from printed and literary ones to memoirs, and there are the documents left by different generations of *émigrés*. But they, and their limitations, have been known for quite a while. The opening of the former Soviet archives presented us with a new, huge mass of documents which either bear witness to the activities of one of the many Soviet bureaucracies or “spy” upon society, looking at it from above and – as far as this is possible – from without. As the editors rightly remark, this activity produced information essentially “sur les réactions ou l’absence des réactions” of this society “aux impulsions, aux initiatives, aux sollicitations dont elle fait l’objet de la part du pouvoir”.

This means that, interesting though they can be, Soviet police reports are documents of a very peculiar type, much more so than their equivalents in other countries. Their use thus raises serious problems, the more so if we think of the ways in which many of them were prepared: using the periodical reports made by inferior bodies, superior agencies compiled recapitulatory reviews (*svodki*) of an increasingly general and generic nature. Often, materials were also selected on the basis of the interests of the political police itself or on the basis of the priorities set by those who controlled it. These facts are well known to scholars now using these documents as historical sources, and especially to those working on critical editions of collections of them (V.P. Danilov, for example, is directing a multi-volume publication of the police reports on the peasantry, the so-called *selsvodki*, between the civil war and World War II). In fact, several essays devoted to these problems have recently been published. I will mention only two here, both published in 1994: one is by Werth himself, in the *Revue des Etudes Slaves*; the other is by Markus Wehner in the *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismusforschung*.

Returning to the documents assembled in Werth and Moullec’s volume, one has to say that their decision to ignore the civil war was not a felicitous one. This absence is all the more apparent because it was precisely in those years that many of the new regime’s cultures and practices, and those of its leaders, came to light. The latter included the *svodki*, whose forerunners can be found, however, in the records kept by the Tsarist army and the police.

The absence of World War II is also regrettable, the more so since the few documents relating to it are extremely interesting – see, for instance, those on the moods and reactions of workers in 1941 (pp. 228ff.) and the exceptional 1945 report on the activities of the GULag during the war (p. 385) (one can find an even richer report dating from August 1944 in *Istoricheskii arkhiv*, 2 (1994)). Unlike in the case of the civil war years, however, the absence of material relating to the World War II period is one imposed on the editors as a result of the secrecy rules which still apply to much of this material.

Nevertheless, the civil war can be heard. Documents such as that on the Siberian countryside in 1922 (p. 96) and that on the political situation in June 1922 (p. 185), which tells us of workers’ “*activement opposés au régime et au parti*” and of an “*immense vague de grèves*”, confirm the recent revisions made by many scholars in the traditional chronology of Soviet history. Rather than 1921, it is now 1922 – a year marked by famine and the end of the great anti-Bolshevik revolts – which is judged the true turning-point of the period starting in 1914.

Many documents (pp. 107ff.) also seem to confirm the new image of the state-peasants’ relations during the NEP’s supposedly “happy” years which can

be found in the work of such young historians as Markus Wehner or Andrea Romano. A hard, mutual aversion, a general climate of distrust dominated the few years' truce separating the two acts of the greatest peasant war of modern European history.

One of the first documents (p. 35) also concerns the civil war. It tells us of local powers "totalement gangrenés" in 1925 "par un alcoolisme généralisé, la pratique courante des pots-de-vin, la connivence avec les koulaks [. . .] et une attitude de grossièreté générale vis-à-vis des masses paysannes". In 1928 this image was to be confirmed by the Smolensk "affair", which extended it to sex while involving too the local party committees. Leaving aside the "kulak" question – kulaks were the usual scapegoats and the more so in 1925, when the OGPU was fighting against Bukharin's moderate policies – reports like this actually speak of the "culture" (or of the lack of it) and of the behaviors of a "natural" elite of plebeian origins which had come to power thanks to the civil war and which continued to dominate the Soviet scene in the following two or three decades.

Switching to another issue, even those who have always doubted the quality of Soviet statistics, even that of secret, supposedly "true" statistics, will be no doubt amazed by their "margins of errors" in the 1930s. In 1934, for example, Magnitogorsk was "known" to have about 250,000 inhabitants. When internal passports were introduced it was discovered that the population was no more than 75,000, while in Sakhalin 60,000 were counted instead of the expected 120,000 (p. 45). Such discrepancies are hard to explain, even if the magnitude of the illegal, underground world created by dekulakization is taken into account. And they are quite impressive if we recall that it was on the basis of such data that economic plans were built and food cards were handed out (but not to people who retained a link with the countryside – see p. 215).

Important confirmations emerge too from the documents relating to the first wave of collectivization and dekulakization, of which I recommend the three reports signed by Vareikis in 1930 (pp. 116ff.). Confirmed, for example, is the picture of dekulakization as a true pogrom instigated from above, already present in the works of scholars like Moshe Lewin. And confirmed too is the extent of the peasants' hostility and resistance to Stalin's attempt to burden them with a new serfdom (on these matters see also the *Cahiers du monde russe*, 3 (1994), where Danilov presents his research and some of the Ukrainian GPU reports from February–March 1930 are published).

Quite beautiful, and very sad, are the letters the victims of dekulakization sent to the highest state organs (pp. 132ff.). Scholars were already familiar with them from the *Kommunist* or *Neizvestnaia Rossiia*. But the non-specialist reader will, I believe, be upset by the bitter fate of the deported children, by the courage shown by those communists who did denounce – sometimes even signing their own names – the crimes perpetrated by a state which claimed to be socialist and by the *parti-revolver* (as the peasants dubbed the party, thus intuitively grasping its progressive criminalization) leading it.

Included among the documents on the countryside in the 1930s is one which I believe to be one of the most important in the collection. It is a report made by a high state official who, in May 1933, described how the famine was being used to "break" the peasants, both psychologically and as a force. This document, which bears an impressive resemblance to another report sent to Mussolini by

an Italian diplomat around the same time (see *Lettere da Kharkov* (Turin, 1991), p. 157), explains how hunger and the calculated distribution of food from above “convinced” the peasantry that in the country there was a new, stern “father” to whom it was necessary to yield. This psychological submission to Stalin, another bitter fruit of the 1932–1933 harvest, resurfaces in the documents devoted to the reactions of the countryside to the famine of 1946 (pp. 162ff.), when many extolled the “benevolence” then showed by the generalissimo to his subjects.

Many of the documents on the relations between the regime and the workers are also very interesting. Consider, for example, those on the “normalcy” of workers’ opposition to the policies of the regime in the 1920s (pp. 187ff.). Contrary to what propaganda said and ideology predicted, this opposition was strongest among the skilled workers of the large factories which, like the Putilovs, had been the hotbed of the Russian labor movement (p. 196). This should not come as a surprise: after all, in private, the regime’s leadership judged these workers *poids mort* on the way to the country’s transformation (this opinion, quoted by Werth in his article on the *svodki*, was voiced by Dzerzhinskii, then heading both the political police and state industry).

Noteworthy too are the documents on the 1932 strikes in the region of Ivanovo (p. 213), which was to be the theater of workers’ unrest again in 1941 (p. 230). And remarkable is the 1930 report (p. 431) on the reactions of foreign workers – many of them communists – who arrived in the USSR to help in the “building of socialism”: strikes, departures, protests were even more frequent and came even sooner than formerly believed. In this case, too, the documents do more than simply “confirm” what we already know, they strengthen substantially the picture previously sketched by scholars (see, for example, the articles on this topic published in 1988 by the *International Labor and Working Class History* and the *Cahiers du monde russe*).

Astonishing are the cracks these documents open on the veritable explosion of “wild” religious movements and of apocalyptic millenarianism in the 1930s (pp. 274ff.). Unfortunately, it seems that these phenomena – which become obvious once we recall the repression of the official church and the established sectarian movements, the dizzy urbanization, the collapse in living standards and the assault on traditional cultural values – were of but small interest to the powers-that-be. It is thus possible that we shall never possess adequate documentation on them.

In addition to the letters already mentioned, the official documents on deported peasants are also of great interest. The experiences of these peasants have recently been the subject of many distinguished Russian publications – by V.P. Danilov, N.V. Teptsov and V.N. Zemskov among others. And outstanding are the reports on the forced labor system and on its economic significance.

It is, for example, revealing to hear (p. 355) the OGPU complain as early as 1928 about the paucity of its workforce (soon it was to pretend, and to get, control over the entire deported and imprisoned population, as O. Khlevniuk’s recent works have shown). And remarkable are the documents on the deportees’ and the prisoners’ first revolts: the former acted as early as the summer of 1931 (pp. 357ff.), rallying behind slogans identical to those used in the great revolts of 1920–1922; the latter began to move instead in 1941–1942. Not surprisingly, prisoners of German and Baltic origins then started the great wave of inmates’ revolts which was to rock the GULag up to 1954.



I already mentioned the exceptional document on the GULag during World War II; others (pp. 258, 350, 426, 430) show that while it is true forced labor was dealt an almost deadly blow in 1953–1956, it is wrong, however, to think it disappeared altogether. As late as the 1960s the Soviet penal system forced more than a million people to work. Some of the convicts went as far as to tattoo on their foreheads things like “esclave en URSS au XXe siècle”, and in 1968 Soviet “managers” continued to complain about these special workers’ low productivity.

The documents on the 1953 “doctors’ plot” (pp. 585ff.) leave but few doubts about Stalin’s intention to settle once and for all accounts with the Jewish community, which was saved only by the despot’s death. In this case, too, more than disclose new facts they reveal the surprising intensity of the anti-Semitic drum-beating and the virulence with which this “passion” had already infected the party and state apparatuses and at least part of the population. The positive role played by Beria after Stalin’s death is also confirmed. Beria knew he was to be among the designated victims of the “new 1937” then in the making, and firmly operated to stop its mechanism.

As is well known, after Stalin’s death an amnesty freed hundreds of thousands of common inmates, real criminals as well as former workers and peasants hardened and made wicked by years of captivity. Their return, accompanied by a general relaxation of repression, caused a sudden jump in crime rates and heightened the fear of crime among Soviet citizens already shaken by the death of their despotic “father” (p. 613). I believe both phenomena, which are attested by several documents (pp. 50, 409, etc.), help us understand the survival of Stalin’s myth among some sectors of the population in the following decades.

I will conclude by pointing out the sense of void and dreariness emanating from many of the post-1953 documents, which bear witness to the progressive degradation – of a disconcerting banality when compared to the tragic beginnings – of the Soviet system and of its leadership. The latter’s tartuffism in the 1970s and 1980s is really amazing. Even an uncommon person like Gorbachev signed reports of distressing hypocrisy and dullness (p. 261).

In general, one leaves the book with a very strong feeling of the system’s deeply engrained and *original* anti-popular nature – a nature underlined, among other things, by the character of these documents, which spy upon society as if it were an enemy. By the way, it is worth recalling that, at least up to World War II, the Soviet leadership called *konspiratsiia* the screen of secrecy measures behind which it operated. The term certainly originated during the period of the anti-Tsarist underground. And yet, perhaps also because of it, even more paradoxical may seem its use by a “socialist” government that evidently felt surrounded by a hostile population against which all sorts of defenses were to be deployed.

This book is therefore rich, useful, welcome. However, the character of the documents it contains calls out for a more thorough critical apparatus. It is certainly true that the editors have aimed this collection at a larger public and did not intend to prepare a scholarly edition of texts addressed to the academic community. But precisely for this reason their critical comments should have been, if not pedantic, certainly more accurate than those on the few pages (out of a total of around 700) reserved to the task of introducing the reader to such

problematic sources. The more so since it seems the editors have often taken the liberty to cut the documents without explaining the principles which informed their selection.

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