

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Kate Transchel. *Under the Influence: Working-Class Drinking, Temperance, and Cultural Revolution in Russia, 1895-1932*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006. 209 pp. \$35.00. ISBN 0-8229-4278-X.

Kate Transchel's carefully crafted study of worker drinking and temperance policy in several Russian regions offers important findings about elite views of lower class habits and about the persistence of a drinking culture among Russia's lower classes from tsarist times into the early Stalinist era. The book's central concern is how tsarist and Soviet authorities viewed drinking and how those views shaped official policies and affected Russia's workers. Transchel conscientiously combines close examination of archival and published primary sources with consideration of secondary works about her subject and she shows how her work fits into theoretical debates about culture, identity, and resistance in tsarist and Soviet Russia. Excessive drinking exacerbated other problems Russians experienced as their county modernized and industrialized. Therefore, various reform efforts attempted to combat alcoholism. While individuals depended on vodka for bonding with their group and for escape from their worries, the state relied on it for revenue. Therefore, the state's need for revenue to finance modernization conflicted with reformers' attempts to change drinking culture. Transchel views the failure of reform efforts to ameliorate alcoholism as due not only to the state's need for revenue, but also to lower class Russians' resistance to official attempts to change their culture.

There have been other recent studies of the role of drink in Russian politics and culture. Laura Phillips has studied working class drinking in St. Petersburg in *The Bolsheviks and the Bottle: Drink and Worker Culture in St. Petersburg, 1900-1929* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2000) and Patricia Herlihy has examined the relationship between the state and the vodka industry in *The Alcoholic Empire: Vodka and Politics in Late Imperial Russia* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Transchel's work is important because not only is she able to compare and contrast tsarist-era and Soviet reformers' approaches to promoting temperance, but she is also able to study the impact of policies and the patterns of drinking across several regions of the Russian empire and USSR: Moscow, Saratov, Tomsk, and Khar'kov. Transchel does not claim to have completed a comprehensive comparative history, due to an unavoidable lack of uniformity in the sources available to her, but she has made a significant contribution towards a comparative study of drinking and policy related to it. While Phillips found that after the revolution, St. Petersburg workers responded positively to Soviet anti-alcohol measures and decreased their dependence on alcohol, Transchel's examination of other regions reveals that not only did drinking remain an important part of worker and peasant culture long after the revolution, but that resort to drink even represented a sort of defiance of Bolshevik attempts to construct a "new socialist man." This book underlines the importance of conducting further research into Russian drinking patterns across geographic regions and historical eras.

As Russia modernized and its peasants moved to the cities, excessive but infrequent ritual communal drinking changed to frequent heavy drinking that was often spontaneous and centered on the tavern rather than the village community. Tsarist-era reformers paid greater attention to alcoholism as the number of lower-class urban residents increased in the late nineteenth century and the number of taverns grew. They regarded alcoholism as a lower class problem, although surveys showed that the upper classes drank just as much. Liberal reformers and physicians both attacked alcoholism, but disagreed as to its roots. Liberals saw it as a moral problem that could be addressed through programs of self-help and education, while doctors distinguished between occasional drunkenness and chronic alcoholism and thought the latter was a disease that could be treated. A few professionals who were also revolutionary socialists thought that capitalism exacerbated the problem of alcoholism. Both moderates and radicals increasingly blamed the government for profiting from the alcohol monopoly that contributed to social ills and health problems among the lower classes. Socialist political leaders showed little interest in the problem of drinking among workers until excessive drinking during the 1905 Revolution caused uncontrollable street violence. Alcohol-related violence was not always irrational, however. During times of unrest, lower class Russians sometimes attacked liquor outlets as surrogates of the state. Alternatively and less violently, Russians boycotted vodka to deprive the state of revenues.

The tsarist government implemented prohibition in 1914 to aid mobilization for war and the Bolsheviks maintained it until 1925. Moonshine production flourished during both tsarist and Soviet eras of prohibition. Beginning as a means of obtaining personal supplies of liquor, it evolved into a commercial enterprise. As world war and civil war disrupted other means of making a living, people depended increasingly on sales of illegal brew to make a living. Transchel notes that women played an especially prominent role in production of spirits. This occupation was a reliable way of providing income for women during periods of economic and social crisis, yet it encouraged authorities to view women as contributing to the problem of backwardness. As the Bolsheviks grappled with financial crisis, they were forced to end prohibition. First, wine and beer were legalized in 1921 and 1922. By 1925 vodka was again being produced and sold. At the same time that they legalized alcoholic drinks, the Bolsheviks campaigned to convince workers to reduce alcohol consumption, which many socialists saw as a threat to revolution. Those who sold illegal alcohol were punished with fines, jail and confiscation of property.

There were important continuities between the tsarist-era temperance movement and the Bolshevik campaigns against drinking, according to Transchel. Tsarist era liberals saw a central role for the temperance movement in achieving a more modern and rational society, while Soviet activists saw control of drinking as a means to implement a cultural revolution that would help to bring about socialism more quickly. Debates about the causes of alcoholism also continued after the revolution. Psychiatrists saw it as a mental illness, but disagreed on whether outpatient treatment was preferable to inpatient. Social hygienists regarded alcoholism as a social disease rooted in the capitalist past. As time passed and alcoholism did not wither away under socialism, however, the political implications of the social hygienists' stance became more

threatening to the regime. By 1930 social hygienists lost to psychiatrists in the debate over how to explain and treat alcoholism. Aside from posing an ideological threat, Transchel writes, social hygiene had not shown success in treating alcoholism. Finally, its gradualist approach was incompatible with the frenetic pace of Cultural Revolution and of the intensive industrialization of the First Five-Year-Plan period.

The party and state also waged war on alcoholism, primarily through the voluntary Society for the Struggle with Alcoholism (OBSA), founded by Yuri Larin in 1928. Nikolai Bukharin and other famous Soviet figures were on the board of directors. Transchel notes that OBSA provided an outlet for the energies of Bukharin and other disgraced “rightist” leaders as Stalin edged them out of decision making on economic policy, but she does not discuss whether the political defeat of the “rightist” leaders hurt their efficacy as OBSA leaders. Most members of OBSA were male workers; neither youth nor women proved reliable OBSA allies. It is unclear as to how enthusiastic members were about OBSA’s mission. Transchel finds some evidence that groups of Moscow workers were enrolled in the society without their knowledge. Others might have joined to receive the perks and opportunities for social mobility available through voluntary societies.

OBSA methods ranged from administrative measures to propaganda. With the sanction of Sovnarkom, OBSA promoted restrictions on distilleries and liquor outlets and on the use of alcohol at official meetings. The success of this campaign varied. In Moscow, it was somewhat effective, but in Tomsk, construction of new taverns and beer halls often accompanied the rise of new factories. Transchel explains that because Tomsk was further than the center, local officials may have had more autonomy to make their own decisions rather than follow those of the state. Transchel thinks that OBSA’s propaganda campaign might have hurt its goals by going overboard. The campaign presented drinking as the path to degradation and as contrary to the interests of building socialism. OBSA sponsored agitational trials to combat drunkenness; audiences enjoyed the drama of the shows, but Transchel found no evidence that the shows convinced them to stop drinking. Aside from propaganda, OBSA brigades investigated worker absenteeism to determine if it was due to drinking and if so, workers were often fired. In addition, the party disciplined its members for drunkenness, which by 1928 was the reason given most frequently for expelling party members. Transchel allows that drunkenness might have been a cover for other reasons to expel members. In one case a party organization expelled a nonconformist member for drinking after it had found insufficient evidence to expel him for Trotskyism (p. 112). Despite the efforts of OBSA and the party to reduce alcohol production and distribution and to stigmatize drinking through propaganda and punishment, statistics showed that urban industrial workers drank more state-produced alcohol in 1932 than in 1927.

Transchel attempts to set worker drinking patterns within the context of transformations in the working class during NEP and the FFYP. Due to the absence of direct evidence on how workers and peasants interpreted their decisions to drink and to the fragmentary nature of archival records, however, Transchel is forced to rely on Soviet publications, on Foucault’s theory on power relationships, and James C. Scott’s work on hidden discourses to explain the role of drinking in lower class Russians’ lives and the relationship between drinking and their attitudes toward the tsarist and Soviet re-

gimes. Elite sources from the 1920s and early 1930s portrayed new peasant immigrants to the factories as sloppy backward drunks, while hereditary skilled workers were represented as sober and enlightened. Transchel reveals a more complex and nuanced situation. While skilled workers' privileges allowed them to drink on the job without consequence, new arrivals from the countryside could be dismissed for doing so. Transchel emphasizes that a social gap existed between hereditary skilled workers and new arrivals from the countryside and she thinks that the former might have exaggerated and attacked drinking by the latter in order to maintain their own privileges at work. As evidence of the social barrier between the two groups, Transchel points out that they drank separately. Perhaps she goes too far in identifying hereditary skilled workers as "oppressors, more clearly aligned with bosses and supervisors than with new workers." Hereditary skilled workers were a diverse group with varying temperaments, personalities, and political inclinations, as no doubt were the new arrivals. Conflicts within the workplace stemmed from a range of factors, not only from tensions between "old" and "new" workers. Transchel makes a stronger case that worker drinking patterns represented defiance of the regime. She shows that when the regime attempted to reduce drinking by limiting the number of approved venues for it, workers responded by drinking in public places, including dining halls, parks, streets, and worker clubs.

The Soviet anti-alcohol campaign ended partly because most workers did not support it, but also because revenue from vodka sales was an important means for accumulating state capital. The government showed its ambivalence toward the anti-alcohol campaign by giving contradictory orders: the finance and alcohol administrations were ordered to deliver revenue from liquor sales while moving at the same time to reduce alcohol production. Stalin's actions signified changes of direction in Soviet alcohol policy. In September 1930, Stalin ordered an increase of vodka sales in order to spend more on the military. In 1933, he called on workers "to reward themselves for a job well done with a 'little glass of champagne'" (p. 145). Thus, the anti-alcohol campaign ended. To the Soviet state and Communist Party, alcoholism was no longer a social disease, but a mental illness rooted in individual deviance, a problem that was swept under the carpet. Transchel concludes that the Soviet state's inability to sober up the proletariat "reflects the tenacity of traditional cultural practices and underscores the limitations of revolutionary vanguardism" (p. 153).

Under the Influence is a solid examination of the persistence of drinking culture despite revolutionaries' attempts to eliminate it, using a wide range of all available sources. It should be read not only by those who study Russia, but also by those who study working class culture in other areas of the world. Concise and clearly written, the study would be a useful supplementary text in upper-level undergraduate Russian history classes.

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