

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Carol S. Leonard. *Agrarian Reform in Russia: The Road from Serfdom*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. xiv, 402 pp. \$90.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-521-85849-6.

First and foremost a work of economic history, this book examines the implementation and effects of agrarian reforms that were enacted in Russia and the Soviet Union between 1861 and 2010. Proceeding from the assumption that only a crisis has compelled Russia's successive autocratic regimes to enact reforms, Carol S. Leonard asks why the agrarian reforms under examination have consistently been perceived as failures, both by reform-era contemporaries and in the existing literature. The author eschews peasant resistance as the primary reason that the reforms failed – a topic admirably addressed by historians such as Judith Pallot and Lynne Viola. Leonard instead finds that the reforms were largely unsuccessful because Russian governments enacted them with the divergent aims of fostering economic growth, on one hand, and of ensuring political stability and upholding the social order, on the other. Leonard argues that government compensation of elites, the priority given to industry over agriculture, restrictions placed on the movement of the rural labor force, and the retention of peasant customs in agriculture all undermined the reforms' ability to overcome rural "backwardness."

Leonard's study is not based on archival research; rather, it uses the rich and extensive historical scholarship and published statistical data on Russian agriculture as sources. The book is divided into three parts. Part I constitutes a chronological narrative of the reforms and the crises that preceded them. In this section, Leonard lays out the crisis-reform paradigm that shapes her study. Russia's defeat in the Crimean War engendered the abolition of serfdom, the first of the reforms Leonard examines. The Russian Revolution of 1905 spurred the second agrarian reform – the Stolypin land reforms of 1906-1910. The Soviet state adopted the agrarian reforms of the New Economic Policy (NEP), specifically the Land Code of 1922, in response to the crisis conditions created by the Russian Civil War and War Communism. The collectivization of agriculture was the Stalinist regime's response to the perceived crisis brought about by NEP. The strength of Leonard's "reform follows crisis" argument begins to falter in her discussion of the post-Stalin agrarian reforms implemented by Nikita Khrushchev, Leonid Brezhnev, and Mikhail Gorbachev. Leonard points out that the rapid pace of the Soviet economy's recovery from World War II in general allowed Soviet agricultural production to reach pre-war levels by 1950. (p. 74) It is therefore unclear what crisis or crises late Soviet leaders were trying to address with their respective agrarian projects. What Leonard terms the "transition reforms" of the 1990s, which included the privatization of agricultural enterprises, the re-

duction of state subsidies to agriculture, and the freeing of prices for agricultural products, were undertaken amid the economic recession and political turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Part II traces the evolution of property rights in Russian history and argues that the enshrinement of custom in law has impeded Russian agricultural development. Russia's legal dualism began with the abolition of serfdom, when legal matters involving former serfs were assigned to specially constructed peasant courts, which upheld peasant custom. Adjudicating peasant affairs according to custom rather than codified law had the unintended consequence of shielding peasant property rights from outside (non-customary) reforms. Custom decreed that the arable land could not be owned or inherited by individuals or even households. Following emancipation, arable land was entrusted to the commune, which was responsible for allocating farming strips to peasant households according to the ratio of workers and dependents. Peasants were therefore also tied to the commune, because it controlled their access to arable land. The Stolypin reforms' limited (and highly debated) success in transferring the ownership of arable land from the commune to individual peasant proprietors was nullified by the revolution, which saw the socialization of the land, and further by NEP, which, according to Leonard, saw the revival of the commune. Even collectivization, which assumed state ownership of all arable land and essentially turned peasants into agricultural laborers, retained some aspects of peasant custom, namely by granting possession of private plots to households rather than individuals. The household plot fulfilled an important function in the Soviet era: food grown on the plot could be sold at *kolkhoz* markets and thus generated necessary supplemental income for collective farm workers and nutritive products for the population at large. Yet Leonard points out that cultivation of the plot diverted labor from the collective farm and did not encourage the development of new farming technologies or of new crops. (p. 127) Post-Soviet legislation finally recognized the rights of the individual, as opposed to the community or household, to land ownership. Regional limits on the amount of land that an individual can own, however, have discouraged the fragmentation of *sovkhozy* and *kolkhozy* and encouraged corporate ownership of farms.

Leonard is careful to emphasize that the commune as an institution did not constitute a brake on Russian agricultural development. In doing so, she enters a longstanding debate about the commune's place in perpetuating Russian "backwardness." Leonard portrays the commune as an entrepreneur: it purchased land, established credit, and invested in agricultural machinery. (p. 138) It proved willing and able to adapt to changing demographic and economic circumstances, such as the division of large households into smaller ones or the migration (temporary and permanent) of labor to urban areas. (p. 139) The real obstacle to profitable farming in Russia, for Leonard, was and still is the absence of guarantees of individual rights to land, which inhibits the creation of small-scale farms.

Part III examines the impact of technology on Russian agriculture and, using an impressive array of statistical data, evaluates the effects of the reforms on agricultural productivity. In Leonard's view, Stalin's patronage of Trofim Lysenko dealt Russian biotechnology a blow from which it has only just started to recover. Lysenkoism's rejection of genetic hybridization led to the purging of botanists, biologists, and geneticists and the closing of the institutes that employed them. It also led to the intellectual isolation of Soviet scientists and technicians from their Western counterparts, whose research findings the Soviet government deemed politically suspect. The Soviet state's decision to invest in railways to the detriment of roadways, a decision taken in the 1920s, also hurt agriculture, because railways were designed for the transportation of industrial rather than agricultural goods. In addition, collectivization severed the traditional method of passing knowledge of farming techniques from generation to generation by seizing control of agriculture from the household. Moreover, state ownership of the land suppressed any incentive on the part of collective farmers to design or implement technological innovation.

In her assessment of the impact of the reforms on productivity, Leonard finds that the emancipation of serfdom and the privatization of agriculture in the 1990s produced the strongest effects, although the effects were delayed. In this section, it is difficult for the reader to pinpoint whether the progress Leonard charts through statistical analysis is due to specific elements of the reforms or to other processes that were occurring simultaneously but were not direct products of the reforms, such as industrialization. In fact, in the conclusion, Leonard acknowledges this difficulty and concurs with the assertion of V. G. Treml' that there is no clear pattern between agricultural performance and reform in Russian history. (p. 264) And perhaps this assertion supports Leonard's main argument – the Russian government has consistently chosen the worst moments to enact agrarian reforms, during crises, when few options for reform were available.

In this book, NEP functions as a kind of bridge between the tsarist and Soviet eras. The Land Code of 1922 replaced requisitioning with a tax in kind. Peasants were allowed to dispose of any produce that remained after taxes as they saw fit. The code permitted, albeit with restrictions, repartitions, the leasing of land, and the hiring of rural laborers. It partially restored the pre-revolutionary authority of the commune in matters regarding the use and apportionment of land. All these measures helped to raise the opinion of the Soviet government in the eyes of peasants. These measures were also intended to raise agricultural productivity and to foster economic recovery after more than seven years of war and revolution. Most important for Leonard's purposes, NEP encouraged the consolidation of land into single plots and exempted improved land from communal repartition. Certain sectors of agriculture responded well to early NEP: the size of the livestock population and of sown acreage achieved pre-war levels by the mid-1920s. (p. 66) Mechanization and the use of horsepower on peasant farms increased, and the state

founded more research institutes for the agricultural sciences. (pp. 206-207) In late NEP, however, the government imposed price ceilings on agricultural products and increased taxes on peasant goods such as poultry, pigs, and garden vegetables, policies which overturned many of the gains made earlier in the decade.

This study's greatest contribution lies in its discussion and evaluation of Russian agriculture and the reforms affecting it in the 1990s and 2000s, a period which has yet to attract the attention of historians. The book's overall emphasis is on continuity, and Leonard convincingly highlights the commonalities among reform legislation in the tsarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet eras. Scholars of Russian peasant and agrarian history will find much of the narrative in Part I familiar, but Leonard offers some insightful correctives to this narrative. For example, she posits the banking crisis that struck Russia during the Crimean War as the main impetus for the emancipation of the serfs, as opposed to fears of peasant rebellion or the need for universal conscription, which are the reasons that historians most often cite for serfdom's abolition. Her work may be criticized for its overly positive characterization of the Stolypin reforms, a view which challenges not only Pallot's findings but also those of George Yaney and Yanni Kotsonis, who agree that the reforms were more successful on paper and in the minds of their advocates than they ever were in reality. Conversely, Leonard suggests that the Stolypin reforms were making real strides toward the establishment of a class of independent peasant proprietors until the war and the revolution interrupted their trajectory. She cites statistics on the number of households that left the commune and consolidated their plots to demonstrate the reforms' appeal to peasants. (p. 56) Yet Pallot and others have pointed out that peasants applied to leave the commune and consolidate their landholdings for reasons that usually had little to do with becoming independent farmers. Additionally, most of the data regarding the number of departures and consolidations is based on applications received by land reorganization commissions, but the number of applications received does not correspond to the number of projects completed.

Criticisms aside, this book provides an excellent overview of Russia's most comprehensive agrarian reforms and offers a new assessment of their potential worth by scrutinizing government reactions to crises. The book includes seven appendices; readers will find the Old Russian/New Russian/U.S./Metric measures conversion chart particularly useful. Both author and publisher are to be commended for the inclusion of an extensive bibliography at a time when bibliographies appear to be disappearing from published academic works. Numbering ninety-nine pages, the reference sections reads as a "Who's Who" in Russian peasant and agrarian studies and will be much appreciated by graduate students and professors alike. In sum, Leonard's work is a must-read for social and economic historians of late imperial and Soviet Russia and for political scientists, economists, and agronomists of the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. *Colleen M. Moore Indiana University, Bloomington. colmtoor@indiana.edu*