

Editor's Introduction

The NEP Era seeks to devote as much attention to the center as to the periphery. The fourth issue of the journal, for example, directed readers' attention to the Tambov region as well as Ukraine.¹ But in both instances neither author, K. S. Drozdov nor V. V. Kanishchev, could ignore the center. As Konstantine Drozdov noted, "the formation of the Ukrainian SSR is 'the embodiment of compromise between Ukrainian nationalism and Russian centralism. . . .'"²

In the current issue we offer two essays that focus, deceptively, on the center. They confirm the point of our fourth issue: the center and periphery operate in tandem and neither can be understood without the other.

Janneke van de Stadt provides a powerful and subtle reading of two short stories by Isaac Babel, primarily set in St. Petersburg. Her comparison between the two, which "share a dark and . . . deliberate compositional relationship" reveals how Babel transformed in 1932 events that he first described in 1922.

In "An Evening at the Empress's" ("Vecher u imperatritsy," 1922), the narrator leaves the Anichkov Palace behind and heads jauntily for the Nikolaevsky Station, where, one can imagine, he intends to catch the train to the radiant future. In "The Road" ("Doroga," 1932), published a decade later, van de Stadt argues, Babel has crafted "a retrospective take on NEP," having just witnessed ". . . the crippling effects of its dissolution." In the later story the narrator's journey is no longer in the future but the past. Babel's protagonist arrives in Petrograd from Kiev, having made one of the most harrowing traversals in all of Russian literature. The anti-Semitic terrain of the periphery foreshadows the blighted, frozen capital he finds. Neither scene would be complete without the other.

Alexander Reznik reveals how successfully the center, Moscow in this case, managed in 1923-1924 to conceal the real strength of the Left Opposition led by Trotsky, Preobrazhenskii, and Sapronov. Both the center and the periphery, in fact, were dupped. As Reznik tellingly cites, "a young provincial Communist expressed his indignation in a letter to Stalin" three years after the fact, 'only now do I find out that in 1923 there

1. V. V. Kanishchev, "Vosstanovlenie chislennosti naseleniia i demograficheskoi nagruzki na prirodnuu sredu v Rossii posle Grazhdanskoi voiny. Tambovskaia guberniia, pervaiia polovina 1920-x gg.," *The NEP Era*, vol. 4 (2010): 31-42 and K. S. Drozdov, "Ukrainizatsiia v tsentral'nom chernozem'e RSFSR v 1923-1928 gg.: K voprosu ob osobennostiakh natsional'noi politiki Bol'shevikov v gody NEPa," *ibid.*, pp. 43-59.

2. Drozdov, *The NEP Era*, vol. 4 (2010): 43 as cited in Ivan Lysiak-Rudnitskii. *Mezhdú istoriei i politiki* (Moscow & St. Petersburg: Letnii Sad, 2007), p. 580.

were whole Trotskyist committees in the urban areas and the countryside'.³

I can confirm Reznik's point about the real strength of the opposition at the center. I found in Kamenev's *lichnyi fond*, no. 323 in RGASPI, a *steno-graficheskii otchet* recounting a Moscow party cell meeting held in mid-January 1924. Kamenev apologized for his nearly absent voice. He explained that he had spent the last three days speaking non-stop at cell meetings all over Moscow to defend the Central Committee from Trotsky's attacks and charges. How better, inadvertently, to convey the real strength of the opposition in 1923-1924?

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3. *Istoricheskii Archiv*, no. 6 (2007): 11.