

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Simon Pirani. *The Russian Revolution in Retreat, 1920-24: Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite*. BASEES/Routledge Series on Russian and East European Studies, number 45. New York: Routledge of Taylor and Francis, 2008. xiv, 289 pp. \$160.00 cloth; \$34.00 paper. ISBN: 978-0415437035 cloth; ISBN: 978-0415546416 paper.

Simon Pirani's study of Moscow workers in the immediate post-Civil War years significantly enhances our understanding of the relationship between the early Bolshevik government and its principal constituency. While building on existing studies by William Chase, John Hatch, Diane Koenker, and others, Pirani adds substantially to the discussion of the evolution of the party's power in the early construction of the Soviet state. Unlike Soviet-era historians, who followed the cue of the Bolshevik leaders in arguing that Russia's working class had been denuded of its class-conscious membership in the Civil War, Pirani demonstrates that Moscow's workers were indeed conscious of themselves as a class and politically active between 1920 and 1924 and that it was precisely in the tensions between the new party-state and the working class that the authoritarian features of the Soviet system took shape.

Pirani describes three phases in the process that stripped Russia's workers of political power. In the first, roughly 1920-21, Moscow workers pushed the Bolshevik government to remain true to its egalitarian ideals, vigorously protesting the preferential wages, housing, food rations, and similar perks to which many in the new state helped themselves. Indeed, despite its victory against armed opponents, Bolshevik power remained weak in the factories, and Pirani shows that, though the party was by no means helpless, it found itself responding to the initiatives of politically motivated workers rather than directing them. Lenin, Zinov'ev, and other party leaders dismissed workers' complaints as the product of "deproletarianization" (the replacement of hardened, class-conscious workers by women and unskilled seasonal laborers) and the influence of Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries. But Pirani argues convincingly that workers who genuinely opposed Bolshevik rule per se remained a minority, and the most serious challenges to the party's extreme concentration of power came from those who were behaving precisely as the party had encouraged prior to its seizure of power. Much of the most vigorous opposition emerged within its own ranks (though Pirani also offers an enlightening discussion of the political behavior of non-party workers).

Pirani nicely supplements and amends the pioneering work of Robert V. Daniels on opposition in the early Soviet era, drawing particular attention to challenges by Democratic Centralists, the Workers' Opposition, Workers' Truth, as well as local Moscow movements such as the Bauman group and the followers of Efim Ignatov. Far from seeking the overthrow of Bolshevik power – in fact, many were infused with the radical revolutionary romanticism of war com-

munism – such opponents campaigned for genuine decision-making by workers through the soviets and trade unions rather than by party bureaucrats, who used their power for their own material benefit.

By spring 1921, however, the effort to force the Bolsheviks to live up to the rhetoric of workers' power had clearly been defeated by party leaders determined to restrict discussion and restore industry to its pre-1913 condition. The turn to the New Economic Policy thus marked the beginning of a second phase in the "retreat," in that it required and established a new set of relations between workers and the party that further alienated the former from pretenses to decision-making authority. Though the historiography of the early Soviet era typically portrays the retreat from forced grain requisitioning and prohibitions against free trade as a tactical maneuver to save Bolshevik power from mounting social unrest (witness the Kronshtadt and Tambov rebellions), Pirani asserts that such movements enjoyed little support among Moscow workers and did not seriously threaten the new government. Instead, he argues, those workers were largely dismayed by NEP's relaxation of control over the economy and the return of unemployment, an urban bourgeoisie, and the authority of factory managers.

Pirani sees in the shift to peacetime construction the development of a social contract, whereby workers eventually consented to Bolshevik party control over the soviets, unions, and management in exchange for steady improvements in living standards. In this, he claims, the Bolsheviks mostly made good, though not without having to confront the contradiction between their productivist goals and the rhetoric of workers' power. The trade-union debate became the last major effort to keep some control of the workplace in the hands of the proletariat, but the unions themselves quickly became organs of party policy rather than representatives of workers' interests.

While the party leadership was struggling to impose its will over industrial workers, another process was at work that reached fruition in the third phase in 1923-24. Here Pirani devotes attention to the formation of the party elite – not only Lenin and company in the highest echelons (indeed, Pirani points out a number of instances in which the famed leaders themselves lamented the formation of the elite) but the ballooning army of bureaucrats or party officials who implemented policy and controlled access to decision making. More than historians before him, Pirani argues that this elite represented a nascent *class*, a privileged, self-aware, and self-perpetuating category of Soviet society made up primarily of white-collar employees whose connection to the working class had grown tenuous by the mid-1920s. Though many had working-class roots, fought for the Bolsheviks during the Civil War, and joined the party after 1917, the party's desperate need for loyal representation in the factories and for even rarer qualified personnel gave such members extraordinary leverage. Pirani offers abundant evidence of abuse of power at the factory and trust level, and yet, as he shows, despite well-publicized campaigns against corruption, Kremlin leaders were largely helpless to prevent it and still retain a loyal presence throughout industry.

Pirani's investigation of the emerging elite adds a new dimension to existing interpretations of the so-called Lenin enrollment of 1924. While Soviet historiography portrayed the campaign as an effort to re-establish close ties with the working class in light of its increasingly white-collar make-up, Pirani argues that it neither threatened the power of the party elite nor altered its relationship to factory workers. By 1924 the elite's control of lower party organs was, he says, secure. Rather than opening the door to democratization (despite the efforts of oppositionists), the enrollment imposed party discipline over broad sections of the proletariat without necessitating any significant change in policy or procedure. The enrollment thus represented the completion of the hierarchy that had been under way for the previous two years and, in Pirani's words, a final "break" with original principles that had drawn workers to the Bolsheviks in the first place.

Pirani's study adds much to what we know about opposition among workers to the growing monopolization of authority in the early 1920s. Given the discrepancy between worker expectations and the outcome for their position in Soviet society, such opposition is not surprising. What are less clear from this study are the reasons for the support that the Bolsheviks did receive. Though Pirani consistently offers detailed discussions of dissenting voices, he also points out that such opposition remained in the minority throughout the early 1920s, with some notable exceptions. Why was that the case? The promise of material improvements may account for much, but Leninist positions were winning majorities in factories even before the social contract Pirani describes began to produce results. A combination of factors, including fear, the force of the Bolsheviks' victory in civil war, hopes for stability, as well as restricted access to information may help to explain the phenomenon, but with the exception of Sergei Iarov's recent study of conformism (*Konformizm v sovetskoï Rossii: Petrograd 1917-1920-kh godov* (St. Petersburg: Evropeiskii dom, 2006), this subject awaits detailed examination.

This is an enormously well-researched book. Pirani has made extensive use of four local Moscow archives in addition to the central state and party archives. His careful sifting of the literature on every stage of his study shows clearly in his copious footnotes, which make frequent reference to dissertations and unpublished papers as well as the archives and expected literature. He has also added a useful set of appendixes, with brief biographies of the many characters that appear in his study, descriptions of Moscow factories and institutions, explanations of wage and currency rates, and notes on party membership and members' occupations. It is to the credit of the book's publishers that they have decided to produce a paperback edition, as the hardback price would have kept a book that deserves wide readership from reaching its audience.

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