

Reviews in Brief

Stalin Reconsidered

FRANCIS B. RANDALL: *Stalin's Russia*. New York, The Free Press, 1965.

THIS BOOK is a collection of topical essays, rather than a systematic history of the Stalin era or a biography of its chief protagonist. Though much of the treatment is a routine saunter over well-marked fields, Randall writes with a certain verve; he is whimsical, and sometimes plays the role of an *auteur provocateur*. Thus, he argues that "the cause of human freedom rides with Stalin," because if Stalin was merely a creature of circumstance "it is a defeat for us all," while if Stalin was really a tyrant he demonstrated what another man could do in a better cause.

In his first chapter, Randall asks a question which also struck this reviewer as he finished reading the book: Is there justification for another one-volume survey of the Soviet Union under Stalin? Presumably *Stalin's Russia* is aimed at beginning students rather than scholars, because it skims quickly over a wide range of topics and is based largely on secondary American sources (plus Stalin's better-known writings), making little use of materials published in the USSR since 1956. Even as an introduction, however, the book cannot be recommended wholeheartedly. There are

too many errors of fact, dubious interpretations, and misplaced emphases.

The book is one of a series devoted to "historical reconsiderations." Randall's reinterpretation stresses two somewhat contradictory themes—Stalin's latitude in making decisions and the overwhelming influence of ideology in shaping these decisions. Minimizing the impact of impersonal forces as well as of individuals on Stalin's policies, Randall emphasizes the options open to an all-powerful dictator in charting his course. Few would deny Stalin's decisive power in the USSR, but surely it is an oversimplification to say that "most of what happened there happened because he wanted it to happen." Stalin "wanted" speedy collectivization, but did he want the agricultural difficulties—to put it mildly—that accompanied collectivization and lowered agricultural production for a decade? Stalin "wanted"—in some sense—a pact with Hitler, but did he want the ordeal by fire, the misery and destruction to which the pact was the immediate prelude?

A similar objection can be made to the author's treatment of the role of ideology. According to Prof. Randall, Stalin "acted chiefly in accordance with his ideology." The author is no doubt right in rejecting the notion of a dualistic Stalin whose doctrines were unrelated to his decisions. Unfortunately, however, it means little to portray the Soviet leader as acting under the influence of ideology when this ide-

ology is defined as Marxism-Leninism plus "all the new doctrines that he worked out and new sentiments that he adopted" in the course of his rule.

Thomas B. Larson

Planning the Economy

JANE DEGRAS, Ed.: *Soviet Planning*. (Essays in honor of Naum Jasny.) New York, F. A. Praeger, 1965.

ON THE OCCASION of the 80th birthday of Dr. Naum Jasny, a group of his professional colleagues have pooled their talents to produce a unique but fitting literary monument to the work and personal achievements of that eminent and prolific scholar of the Soviet economy. The book contains a nicely varied assortment of ten essays on the general subject of Soviet economic planning, each of these essays reflecting the particular current research interest of the individual author.

One group of essays sheds new and valuable light on some neglected areas of Soviet economic history. In one of these papers, for example, Mr. J. Miller, now an editor of *Soviet Studies*, recounts his own unique personal experience

as a staff member (and graduate student) at the Economic Research Institute of the Soviet Gosplan during the grim years 1936-37, when this institution, along with the rest of the USSR, was passing through the Stalinist ordeal of mass political purges and trials. One byproduct of this wave of hysteria, he recalls, was a "colossal amortization" of books: whenever a man was arrested, any brochure or book he had ever published was promptly removed from the libraries and bookstores.

Professor Holland Hunter, of Haverford College, is the author of another retrospective essay embodying the results of his recent research into Soviet planning performance during the 1930's in two key industries: electric power and steel. Hunter reviews the record of the planning mechanism within a "contemporaneous setting" and on a year-by-year basis in an effort to evaluate the decisions reflected in each annual plan objectively and "without the unfair use of hindsight brought to bear from our present vantage point." His inquiry reveals a steady improvement in the technique of plan fulfillment in these two basic industries as compared with the performance of industries producing several less "essential" commodities, "with shortfalls systematically sloughed off onto consumer-welfare items."

The same group of historical essays also includes an analysis by Luba Richter of the grandiose Soviet experiment in "urbanization of the countryside" which was undertaken by Khrushchev during the 1950's. Drawing upon Russian fiction to reinforce her analysis, the author succeeds in conveying to the reader the magnitude of the economic and psychological barriers encountered by the leadership in the course of its attempt to implement this drive. She also brings out the remarkable persistence of the leadership's intent to remold the village environment in such a way as to make it more amenable to the purposes and manipulative techniques of the urban political elite.

Two essays, one by Peter Wiles and another by Colin Clark, are devoted to statistical examinations of the recent growth performance of the Soviet economy in a comparative setting. There are also papers by George Garvy on "The Role of the State Bank in Soviet Planning"; by Werner Klatt (a consultant to the United Nations) on "Soviet Development Aid"; and by Michael C. Kaser on social welfare criteria in relation to the Soviet planned economy. J. H. Richter provides a brief survey of Dr. Jasny's professional career.

Alec Nove, of the University of Glasgow, makes a dual contribution. In a graceful introduction to the collection, he presents an evaluation of the prodigious output of Dr. Jasny in the light of more recent research on the Soviet economy by younger academic specialists, pointing out that in a number of instances the statistical indices arrived at by these younger specialists, "calculated by highly sophisticated methods, proved very close to Jasny's rough estimates." Besides this tribute to Jasny, Professor Nove contributes a brief but thoughtful essay entitled "Toward a Theory of Planning," in which he critically examines the official Soviet concept of "planned proportional development." Dr. Nove concludes that his own research to date "has not uncovered any Soviet theory of planning in the sense of a body of doctrine which could be said. . . .to underlie decision-making by planners." He does, however, view the increasing popularity of mathematical economics in the USSR as a sign pointing toward the emergence of some kind of "theory of planning practice" promising at least to provide Soviet planners with a sort of operating manual for their day-to-day activities, although the basic goals of economic planning will doubtless continue to be defined by the political leadership. Readers and friends of Naum Jasny alike will not fail to take note of the fact that the volume under review was made possible by the faithful labors of Miss Jane Degras, who served in

the capacity of both discerning planner and skillful editor of this impressive enterprise.

ABRAM BERGSON: *The Economics of Soviet Planning*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1964.

The appearance of a new study on the Soviet economy by a scholar of the stature of Professor Bergson would be an important event under any circumstances, but the occasion is all the more noteworthy because in this latest work Prof. Bergson points a much broader picture of Soviet economic performance than he has ever before attempted, covering in fact the whole range of activities falling within the competence of the Soviet planning authorities. Not only that, but the new study combines the findings of the author's own research with a broad sampling of the judgments of other scholars currently working in the field. In Prof. Bergson's own words, he has attempted to present a comprehensive "summary survey" which will "contribute to understanding of a society and a way of economic life" that have emerged in the USSR after nearly four decades of economic planning.

Most readers familiar with Dr. Bergson's previous writings on Soviet national income will be grateful for the opportunity to become acquainted for the first time with his views on such other key aspects of the Soviet planned economy as the structure of consumption, managerial motivation, choice of technology, labor utilization, incentives in collectivized agriculture, and capital formation. In his evaluation of Soviet economic policy and practice, the author combines due recognition of Soviet achievements in the area of capital formation with a rigorous application of Western principles of economic efficiency. On the latter basis, he comes to the conclusion that Soviet practices in resource allocation have tended to violate the main dictates of effi-

ciency rules (*i.e.*, performance oriented toward an economic optimum) and have therefore often been economically irrational.

Professor Bergson is also disposed to evaluate Soviet policies in terms of consumers' welfare. With regard to the treatment of consumer needs, he finds that the authoritarian Soviet system of planning, which has been marked by frequent changes in assigned "plans" designed to achieve a properly "balanced" output of final goods according to the planners' preference, has all too often resulted in the diversion of a portion of the resources required for the production of household consumption goods to more "essential" uses. As a consequence of this official bias against the consumer—to quote the author's judicious academic prose—"the mix sought must be realized to a less extent in targets for supplies for household consumption than in those for supplies for final uses generally" (p. 282).

In the final chapter of his study, the author undertakes an overall evaluation of the "economic merit" of the Soviet economic system. In his view, such an assessment of any system, whether socialist or capitalist, must turn on the issues of efficiency and equity of income distribution. Unfortunately, he observes, the Soviet government has been "notably secretive" on the subject of income distribution. He regards this fact itself as suggestive, but acknowledges it is a formidable obstacle to factual appraisal.

The author consequently centers his attention on economic efficiency as the main criterion for judging the merit of the Soviet economic system. He traces and evaluates a number of sources of inefficiency in the economy: the official value theory, price-formation practices, overcentralized decision-making, collectivized agriculture, autarky, and the criteria of performance employed by the central authorities for rewarding enterprise managers. He then proceeds to weigh these practices against the known sources of inefficiency in a market economy like that of the United States. On

the basis of a substantial body of quantitative evidence, Dr. Bergson comes up with the calculation that the amount of net national product obtained in the USSR per unit of labor and reproducible capital in recent years has been equal, at best, to only 54.9 percent of that obtained in the United States. "If socialism were an especially productive system," he observes in conclusion, "one might think that by now this fact would have been manifest."

Leon Herman

Agriculture under Khrushchev

NAUM JASNY: *Khrushchev's Crop Policy*, with foreword by Alec Nove. Glasgow, George Outram & Co., Ltd., 1965.

WHATEVER MAY HAVE been the reason for the belated publication of Naum Jasny's newest study of Soviet agricultural policies, it certainly is a pity since the study, at the time it was actually written (1963), was much more of a pioneering work than it now appears to be. This book is by no means easy reading and no doubt will appeal mainly to those who have a deep and specialized interest in Soviet agriculture and its problems. Nevertheless, Mr. Jasny writes with unsurpassed authority in this field, and his latest work, notwithstanding the tardiness of its appearance, offers painstakingly detailed analyses which are still of value today.

At times Mr. Jasny might seem to have arrived at too negative an assessment of Soviet agricultural development under Khrushchev. However, the events of the last two years, as well as the admissions that have been made in Moscow since Khrushchev's ouster, have confirmed the author's estimates to an astounding degree.

There are, to be sure, various points which are disputable. In particular, this reviewer doubts that the low yield of hay per hectare and the existence before 1959 of vast expanses of untilled land in the regions north of the "black earth" zone can be blamed entirely on "backwardness and disorganization" (p. 39). The shortage of farm labor, brought about by the pronounced drift of population from the countryside to the cities, and the lack of adequate farm machinery presumably were major factors responsible for what appears to have been a strangely irrational distribution of fallow lands (p. 41). Again, the high costs of Soviet livestock production are perhaps due not only to the composition of the feed, as Jasny suggests (p. 61), but also, in equal measure, to the fact that in wide areas of the USSR livestock suffer each winter from a shortage of feed, preventing any gain in weight or any milk output for months on end. Furthermore, Jasny's comments about corn planting in the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (p. 141) are based on a misconception: the figures he cites for 1928, 1932 and 1937 do not refer to the present-day Moldavian Republic but only to that part of it which constituted the former Moldavian Autonomous Republic east of the Dniester River, before the inclusion of Bessarabia.

It would be petty, however, to place undue emphasis on such minor flaws of detail, for these do not impair the essential value of the book. A more important and basic criticism that might be made of Jasny's treatment is that his repeated insistence on the high cost of Khrushchev's agrarian experiments misses the crucial point—*i.e.*, that the primary goals of Soviet agricultural policy are to establish the "socialist" system and at the same time produce specified quantities. On this vital point, however, the reviewer would like to express his full endorsement of Jasny's arguments on the following grounds:

Even in a totalitarian system which treats farm workers as helots,