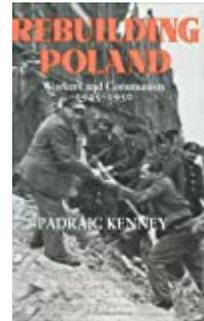




Padraic Kenney. *Rebuilding Poland: Workers and Communists 1945-1950.* Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997. xv + 345 pp. \$39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8014-3287-3.



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Rebuilding Poland, by Padraic Kenney, revisits the 1945-50 process of communist takeover in Poland from a fresh perspective—that of the actions and reactions of Polish workers.[1] Kenney focuses on the ways in which workers both resisted and cooperated with the emerging regime, and while workers perhaps not did shape broad regime policies, he shows how some important concessions were won. This nuanced approach adds much to our understanding of the evolution of communist rule in Poland, as most literature on this subject takes a “top down” approach which assumes that the people of Poland had little agency during the Stalinist era. Kenney uses newly available archival materials from, among others, the Security Apparatus, factories, and trade unions, as well as his own interviews with workers, to paint a complex landscape of warring interests. The author views the struggles of both workers and the state from below. On the one hand, he deconstructs the “state” and the “party” to show how the many layers of bureaucracy held conflicting interests and positions, illuminating the inner workings of what seemed to be a monolithic totalitarian system under Stalinism. On the other, he documents rifts among workers based on gender, age, skill, regional identity, and class background.

Kenney argues that there were two distinct phases of transformation from the post-war situation through

to the total dominance of communist power by 1950: economic and social transformation was most important from 1945-47, and then Stalinist political and social transformation from 1948-50. The book thus is divided into two sections. The first, *Revolution in the Factories, 1945-1947*, gives an overview of the post-war situation in Poland, including the mass looting and destruction of industry by German and Russian troops and the subsequent tasks of rebuilding homes and industry and providing basic subsistence needs. Kenney sketches the conflict between the two political parties, the PPR and PPS (Polish Workers’ Party and Polish Socialist Party), which later merged to form the PZPR, or Polish United Workers’ Party, the Communist Party in Poland. Most engaging in this section are the two chapters on contrasting labor relations in the cities of Łódź and Wrocław. Kenney describes the workers in Łódź, the manufacturing center of Poland in many respects, as having a strong class and community identity which had only been strengthened by the war. Poor living conditions, bitter winters, and little help from the nominal government resulted in wave after wave of strikes, as workers united to express the moral economy of the community through their tradition of strikes. Kenney shows how workers incorporated the new rhetoric of the communist state into their protests, however, subverting the ideological appeals of the state and forcing officials to take action to allevi-

ate conditions. The situation in Wroclaw was dramatically different—a former German city largely destroyed and abandoned during the war, to which came migrants from many parts of Poland, including returning Germans and Jews. The city was rebuilt as Polish, but due to the lack of community solidarity among workers there was markedly less resistance to communist policies, particularly in the form of strikes.

The second section of the book, *The Party's Revolution, 1948-1950*, examines communist attempts to achieve full control over the labor process. In chapter four, Kenney argues that communist leaders used the expressed desires of workers against them as excuses to solidify authoritarian rule. This important chapter treats the ways in which early communist power was limited by the social negotiation that took place with labor, shaping the political/economic system as it was in the process of forming. Other authors, from Burawoy to Kornai to Verdery, have described this system of negotiated power in industry as it looked in the later years of communism, but Kenney highlights the early events which influenced the unfolding of the system.[2]

In the next two chapters, he then turns his attention to two prominent programs used by the state to shape workers' labor and ideology: campaigns of labor competition, contests in which workers attempted to surpass production quotas for bonuses and prizes; and the introduction of "cultural" themes for the purposes of recreation and class integration, such as plays, concerts, and factory-organized vacations. The conclusion recaps the

larger struggles over moral community, labor, and society, and the change in the base of legitimacy of the state from the reconstruction efforts of the immediate post-war years to the grand communist plans of the 1950s.

Kenney has written a detailed, comprehensive book, which will be useful for labor scholars, scholars of the former Soviet regime, and perhaps also for those who study authoritarian regimes elsewhere. A more grandly theorized contextualization of his discussions of class, moral economy, and the production of national identity would have added greatly to the usefulness of this volume for comparative scholars. Overall, however, Kenney's treatment of the micro-technologies of power, and the ways in which they may be successfully resisted and shaped, is thoroughly convincing and a strong contribution to the social history of communism.

Notes:

[1]. I follow the author's usage of "communist" and "Stalinist."

[2]. *Michael Burawoy, The Politics of Production: Factory Regimes under Capitalism and Socialism*, (1985, Schocken); *Janos Kornai, The Socialist System: the Political Economy of Communism* (1992, Princeton); *Katherine Verdery, What was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (1996).

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