



R.W. Davies. *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev.* New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. xiv + 96 pp. \$19.99 (paper), ISBN 978-0-521-62742-9; \$48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-62260-8.



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Published on EH.Net (April, 1999)

R.W. Davies' compact book is a marvel in economy. He covers the period from the Tsarist economy to 1965 in 83 pages, not counting references and index. The major achievement is that Davies' analysis is far from superficial. He explains to the reader the available scholarly literature on each subject. Davies removes his own views as much as possible from the scene by providing the evidence both pro and con for each scholarly conflict—of which there are many for this long period of Russian/Soviet economic history. The author also supplies the main aggregate statistics that the reader needs to evaluate each period. The combination of economy and depth is the product of Davies' superb command of the Western and Russian language literatures.

In reading Davies' account, I focused most on his discussions of controversies concerning Russian and Soviet economic development. He provides a balanced discussion of the "optimistic" versus "pessimistic" views of Russian economic development on the eve of World War I—whether the contradictions of the economy were the root cause of the Bolshevik revolution. On the viability of NEP (a literature to which Davies and his Birmingham colleagues have made significant contributions), Davies identifies four schools of thought. First, there is the argument that NEP could have worked if market forces had been less restricted—a view Davies associates with writ-

ers as diverse as Alexander Gerschenkron and Grigory Khanin. Second, there is the view of E.H. Carr (and Maurice Dobb) that NEP was inherently unstable and had to be replaced by something else. The third school Davies associates with historians sympathetic to Bukharin (Cohen and Tucker) and to James Millar that NEP would have remained a stable system on the basis of a strong agriculture. Davies also cites the work of Holland Hunter, who used counterfactual economic and statistical analysis to show that the Soviet economy would have performed better in a NEP-type environment. The fourth group, in which Davies includes himself, argues that NEP had room to grow but was unsuited for rapid industrialization.

In his discussion of Soviet economic growth, Davies raises the important issue of whether the recent studies of Russian economists, such as Grigory Khanin, require a reevaluation of historical Soviet growth performance. He concludes that "the Russian economists have not made available enough information about their methods of calculation to enable their results to be checked. For the period from the 1930s to the 1950s, the Bergson and Moorsteen-Powell estimates certainly remain the most reliable" (pp. 41-42).

Davies is able to use his own research in the Soviet State and Party archives to provide reliable estimates of

the size of the gulag population in the 1930s, which he puts at 3.3 million in 1941 (p. 50). Prisoners provided up to a quarter of all construction labor, and produced slightly over one percent of industrial output on the eve of the war.

Davies deals as well with the issue of the effectiveness of forced industrialization, pointing out that there is still considerable controversy surrounding the rate of growth of the economy in the 1930s. However, the major debate on this issue is over the necessity of collectivization. In this regard, Davies contrasts the arguments of Millar and Barsov, who conclude that collectivization did not provide a true "surplus" for Soviet industrialization, with Nove, who concluded that collectivization did allow Soviet authorities to collect agricultural surpluses for industrialization. Davies' own conclusion is that collectivization's main contribution was to the political goals (and political priorities) of the Soviet leadership.

Davies concludes with a discussion of the basic features of the Soviet administrative-command economy, pointing out its command and more hidden market fea-

tures. Among its weaknesses, Davies singles out the high costs of repression of agriculture, the high costs of technological mistakes, the success indicator problem, and the disadvantages of repressed inflation and the sellers' market.

Davies' book is ideally suited for the classroom as a supplemental text or for readers who want to be brought up to date on Russian and Soviet economic history. We are quite fortunate that a scholar of Davies' maturity and depth has taken the time to write such an accessible and useful book for those who do not have the time or inclination to get into the specialized literature. One important feature of this book is that it is itself a useful guide to the specialized literature.

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Citation: Paul R. Gregory. Review of Davies, R.W., *Soviet Economic Development from Lenin to Khrushchev*. EH.Net, H-Net Reviews. April, 1999.

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