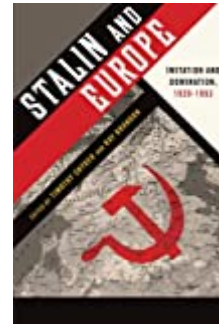




Timothy Snyder, Ray Brandon, eds. *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928-1953*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. xii + 326 pp. \$99.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-994556-6; \$29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-19-994558-0.



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A first brief glance at the table of contents of the volume *Stalin and Europe: Imitation and Domination, 1928-1953*, edited by Timothy Snyder and Ray Brandon, suggests that it is a motley collection of essays assembled at random, written by respected scholars, each of whom has several publications in their respective fields to their credit. This first impression disappears once the approach of the editors becomes clear. As Snyder notes in the introduction, "the contributions to this volume suggest that the quarter-century long encounter between the Stalinist system and Europe can be divided into four stages: (1) the application of an implicitly European scheme of modernization to the Asian and European territories of the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s; (2) the introduction of matured Soviet practices into Soviet annexations permitted by the Soviet-German alliance of 1939; (3) the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which was designed to undo the Stalinist system; and (4) the postwar remaking of eastern Europe as a buffer zone against future aggression by exporting a milder version of Stalinism to formally sovereign states" (p. 1). Each of these phases is then dealt with in three essays.

Concerning phase 1, Snyder argues, on the basis of the essays written by scholars Lynne Viola, Sarah Cameron, and Hiroaki Kuromiya and Andrzej

PepÅoÅski, that the Soviet Union had "no foreign territories to exploit on its journey to imitate capitalist development. Therefore [Joseph Stalin's] basic idea was to treat the existing Soviet population as capitalist exploiters treated colonized peoples" (p. 3). Stalinist development in the 1930s was a kind of "internal colonization" of the Soviet Union by the Soviet Union. A case in point is Kazakhstan. Its nomads, who in the Marxist interpretation of things had not even reached the feudal stage of history yet, first had to be coerced by violence and terror into settling down before they could be transformed into workers at collective farms. According to Snyder, Stalinism was therefore, among other things, "the paradoxical attempt to resist world capitalism by imitating it," which, in a further twist of the paradoxical screw, involved "Europeanizing a country that lay mostly in Asia." Snyder uses the occasion to encourage fellow historians "to overcome the typical Eurocentric bias in Soviet studies" (p. 4). This would cast new light on such developments as the anti-kulak operations, which had reputedly been inspired "by reports of Japanese recruitment of Russian and Ukrainian peasants in Soviet Asia" (p. 5). It is hypotheses like this that scholars are likely to take exception to.[1]

The second phase covers the period of cooperation between Adolf Hitler's Germany and the USSR, which

enabled the USSR to enlarge its state territory for the first time. What looked like participation in Nazi imperialism, was, among other things, an export of the Soviet political economy, developed on the basis of European theory, back westward as practice into capitalist Europe (p. 7). This phase is addressed by Rafał Wnuk in an essay on the Polish underground under Soviet occupation; Marek Wierzbicki on Soviet economic policy in annexed eastern Poland; and Christoph Mick on western Ukraine, which was occupied by the Soviets in the wake of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Here, the discussion would have benefited from a consideration of the Baltic states. Within a very short time these regions were sovietized by brutal violence. The only development put on hold until June 1941 was agricultural collectivization.

The German invasion of the Soviet Union put an end to the Soviet transformation in these regions. Nazi Germany's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union marks the third phase, in which the very existence of the Stalinist system was called into question. The essays in the third phase were written by leading scholars. An expert on the history of the German occupation of Ukraine, Dieter Pohl, writes about the Holocaust in Ukraine. Alex J. Kay, project coordinator at Germany's premier research institute, the Institut für Zeitgeschichte München-Berlin, of the English edition of the monumental documentation of the destruction of European Jews writes about German plans for the Soviet territories after the projected early victory. Finally, Timm C. Richter writes about the resistance mounted in Byelorussia by Soviet partisans.

The fourth and last part of the book includes an essay by Geoffrey Roberts, who has come in for a good deal of criticism from fellow historians for his controversial views on Stalin's foreign policy, whose essay is about Stalin's wartime vision of "great power peace" (p. 260). Additionally, there are two contributions by the acknowledged expert on the history of the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, Mark Kramer. These essays address the establishment of Communist regimes in the Eastern Bloc and the first attempt by a Soviet ally, Yugoslavia, to break out of the Soviet Bloc and Moscow's efforts to reassert control on the Balkans. On the basis of extensive archival research, Kramer convincingly shows that Soviet planning for the Cominform began long before the Marshall Plan was even contemplated (p. 284). Declassified transcripts of conversations between Stalin and Eastern European Communist leaders show without any

doubt that the final establishment of Communist dictatorships was only a question of tactics and time. It was definitely not an answer to Western policy. As this part of the book demonstrates, with the establishment of a buffer zone protecting the Soviet Union from Germany (and later the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) came the need for the Soviet Union to assert control over this zone. The USSR was now shouldered with an external empire. "The road to socialism," as Snyder puts it succinctly, was no longer a preparation for utopia, but a procedure for security (p. 13). Security aspects and the need to buffer Soviet domination now came to the fore even more than they had in 1917 or 1939.

This is not the place for a detailed discussion of each essay. In view of the spate of publications most of the authors have produced on the basis of years of archival research in their fields of specialized expertise, it would be unreasonable to expect them to come up with groundbreaking new discoveries here. Nor is this what the editors were aiming for. What makes this edited volume so worthwhile is the insight it allows English-speaking readers into the progress research has made in the countries under discussion. This applies for instance to Kazakhstan, where highly respectable research results have come to light over the last few years,[2] and it is no less true of work on the Soviet occupation of eastern Poland and Poland's occupation after 1944 with the ensuing underground war, a development still insufficiently appreciated in the West but studied by such historians as Wnuk in years of painstaking archival work. It is one of the merits of this volume to bring Eastern European and Western historians together and to present their research to a broad public in an English-language publication. Some of the connections established between specific topics may appear somewhat artificial but this is perhaps inevitable in a work that assembles such varied components.

Notes

[1]. On the Great Purge, see Marc Jansen and Nikita Petrov, *Stalin's Loyal Executioner: People's Commissar Nikolai Ezhov, 1895-1940* (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 2002), 79-111.

[2]. For example, see the historiographic overview by Sattar Mazhitov, *Istoricheskaya nauka Kazakhstana: Sovremennoe sostoyanie i tendentsii razvitiya* (Almaty: Assotsiatsiya izdatelei i knigorasporstranitelei Kazakhstana, 2013).

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