

As the concluding chapters note, now is a time of renewed scholarly interest in St Petersburg and its ambiguous cultural history. The contributors to the volume all carefully weave narrative threads exploring the city's rich cultural past and present. Yet, St Petersburg continues to resist theorisation, so the authors all consciously retreat from making blanket statements. While some may find fault in this reluctance to articulate a theory of St Petersburg (especially given the reference to preservation in the volume's title), others are sure to consider the range and diversity of this assortment of thoughtful studies on the city to be the anthology's principle strength.

*Houston*

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Stephen White (ed.), *Politics and the Ruling Group in Putin's Russia*. Studies in Central and Eastern Europe. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, xvi + 174 pp., £50.00 h/b.

THIS INSIGHTFUL VOLUME ON POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA, edited and prefaced by Stephen White, includes eight essays based on papers presented at the VII World Congress of the International Council for Central and East European Studies in 2005. Adopting different theoretical perspectives and applying both quantitative and qualitative methods, the authors seek to answer the question which has provoked headaches for most Western observers during the last 20 years: namely, 'What is the nature of the post-communist political and economic transformations in Russia?' The answers vary, but overall, they reflect the endeavour of social scientists to develop a distinctive vocabulary and adjust their conceptual frameworks in order to explain the continuously evolving post-communist realities. This need for new analytical tools is accurately described by Stephen White in the preface.

Published before the *medvedoputia*, Russia is portrayed as 'Putin's Russia' and many would argue that now, after two years, that still seems to be an appropriate perspective. Even in the midst of the economic crisis, Putin's rating did not drop significantly. Trying to shed light on the nature of the current Russian political regime, Hans-Hening Schroeder contends that Russia during the transition period underwent two parallel processes: the rebuilding of the state and the redistribution of public wealth. While the first process granted legitimacy to the newly emerged cartels, the redistribution of public wealth has resulted in sharp social inequalities and the failure to consolidate a middle class. The survey data used by Schroeder show that the current political system is held together mainly by trust in the person of the former President, Vladimir Putin.

Presidentialisation might explain the high levels of trust and Oleg Zaznaev makes a convincing argument regarding Russia's move from a constitutional semi-presidential regime to a *de facto* presidential one. However, the causation process of the presidentialisation process is not completely clear. Why is Russia constantly presidentialising? Zaznaev makes reference to several explanatory variables: political culture, the ideological and psychological narrow-mindedness of the political elite, favourable circumstances and the role of the parliamentary majority. The author thinks the president and the government should be held accountable by the *Duma*, but we are not given the recipe for how to transform the subservient parliamentary majority into an active self-conscious actor in Russian politics.

Schneider's approach is less theoretical, but has at its core the idea that the aim of Putin and the Federal Security Service (FSB) was to build a market economy within a powerful state, but not necessarily a democratic state. Contrary to widespread belief, Schneider suggests that, initially, Putin was not a strongman, but rather a good mediator between five power groups: the Yel'tsin family, the regional leaders, the power ministries, the oligarchs and the St Petersburg reformers. At the end of his second term, after subordinating three of those groups, he had only to arbitrate between two groups: the *siloviki* and the reformers. Putin's plan was to endow the FSB with sufficient powers, so that the institution could prevent the emergence of any significant

political opposition and at the same time control the pace of economic transformations and foreign investments in Russia. Following the same line, Schneider contends that the proceedings against Mikhail Khordokovsky, chairman of Yukos, were not initiated by Putin, but by the FSB. Schneider's account is very probabilistic, relying mainly on second-hand sources that are hard to verify, but most likely anyone writing on the FSB would have to use such sources.

Hillel Ticktin uses a class approach to argue that the Putin regime is inherently unstable, mainly because it was unable to complete the transition to capitalism and instead created a distorted form of economy in which finance, gangster and extractive capital are dominant. Ticktin suggests, similarly to Schroeder, that the Putin regime brought higher living standards for half of the population, but this achievement was based more on a favourable situation on the oil market than on sound economic policy. Interestingly enough, Ticktin concludes that there was no alternative strategy to move towards capitalism. This analysis explains much on the macro-level, but it holds a rather dim view of the prospects of capitalism without specifying which of the various capitalist systems are doomed.

Embracing a perspective close to the rational choice–institutionalist way of thinking, Andrei Yakovlev implies much like Ticktin that Russia's early path in the 1990s was the only alternative because, unlike other countries, it did not retain functioning state institutions and lacked a strong cohesive elite sharing the same set of values. Furthermore, while at the centre there was an elite change in 1993, with the younger generation of the *nomenklatura* and *intelligentsia* gaining power, in the regions the old economic and political elite stayed in place. Of particular use here for understanding the dynamics in Russia is Yakovlev's government and business interaction model. Yakovlev claims that the way out of this uncompetitive environment and bad equilibrium is the introduction of mechanisms and institutions that stimulate economic innovation. However, to lead to genuine competition, the introduction of new institutions should be initiated by the few players from the ruling elite interested in long-term development and the secondary elites represented by the smaller players from the business, political and governmental spheres.

The last three chapters focus specifically on the Russian oligarchs. Using survey data, Alexander Chepurenko observes that the majority in Russia regards the current business elite as having roots in the former *nomenklatura* of the Communist Party and among the activists of its youth wing. This popular perception overlaps with the expert assessment of Yakovlev and Ticktin on the origins of the business elite. Moreover, most Russians consider that there was no radical change in the composition of the business elite after the USSR collapsed. It should not be a surprise then that the current Russian economic elite enjoys a low level of legitimacy. Also of great interest are the discrepancies between the worldviews of the economic elites, the *intelligentsia* and non-wealthy citizens.

Jakob Fruchtman uses statistical investigation to test two simple propositions regarding attacks on oligarchs: 'the scapegoating' and 'the social envy' theses. Correlating various word frequencies in the Russian press with economic indicators (such as oil prices and gross domestic product growth), Fruchtman finds confirmation for the social envy hypothesis, which states that the more successful the oligarchs are, the greater the temptation for politicians to acquire a share of their wealth. In some sense this might be counter-intuitive to many Russia analysts, who think of attacks on oligarchs as being more frequent during times of economic hardship. Nonetheless, correlations are not necessarily causal relationships, but it should be noted that this research design is very carefully constructed.

Andrei Rogatchevski's scrutiny of unintentional humour in two Russian films about the *novye russkie* hints at how stereotypes about the oligarchs have been promoted by Russian cinematography and have thus contributed to myth making. Deconstructing the negative myth about the oligarchs, Rogatchevski explains how initially the term *novye russkie* represented an attempt to construct a positive myth by the *Kommersant* publishing house for its middle-class readership. The project was derailed by the popular jokes made about the New Russians. Are the

oligarchs a new social group with specific psychological traits? Rogatchevski would say that it is merely 'the reconfirmation of the old status quo in a new economic situation' (p. 167).

If there is something missing from this edited volume, it is an explanation of the Russian opposition's constant failure to gain ground and a study about how the state modernisation rhetoric replaces the transition terminology in the official discourses. This being said, the book definitely opens up original avenues for research and should be part of any bibliography and syllabus on Russian politics and economy.

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ION MARANDICI © 2010

Judith Marquand, *Development Aid in Russia: Lessons from Siberia*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, xi + 281 pp., £58.00 p/b.

JUDITH MARQUAND, DRAWING ON HER NEARLY TWO DECADES OF experience in the Siberian cities of Tomsk and Omsk, provides a unique view of the challenges of managing development projects in Russia. The basis for Marquand's volume is her involvement in a series of projects funded by the EU and the UK, largely with Tomsk State University.

The volume sets the stage for European development assistance to the countries of the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s by explaining the varying approaches to the enormous task of reform and renewal in the former Warsaw Pact states taken by European countries. According to Marquand, the European Union took a manifestly different approach to development in Eastern Europe as compared to Russia because 'there was a strong belief, on both sides of the former [Berlin] Wall', that countries in the region 'should be brought into the European family as quickly as possible' (p. 47). However, European views toward Russia were characterised by ambivalence and confusion: if EU membership was out of the question, what should be the shared aspiration driving the EU–Russia relationship?

This issue was addressed in 1992, when the European Commission finally settled on a new vehicle for EU–Russian relations that had no final EU destination: the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA). The PCA's TEMPUS programme (Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies), which aimed to transfer European know-how to Russia and facilitate bottom-up reform in higher education, was the source of funding for many of Marquand's projects in Siberia. A significant portion of the book is dedicated to evaluating TEMPUS-funded projects, but smaller bottom-up projects funded by the United Kingdom's Know-How Fund and the Small Environmental Project Scheme are also discussed.

For each project, Marquand describes the context in which it was developed, the formation of the European–Russian partnership, the process of implementation, and evaluations by donors and stakeholders. In fact, many of these narratives are play-by-play descriptions of how the project developed, as Marquand believes that 'project management is in large part crisis management' (p. 99). Such thorough descriptions not only yield interesting facts and anecdotes (for instance, about reaching a breakthrough while relaxing in a *banya*); they also draw connections between the challenges that faced higher education and local government specifically and those that faced post-Soviet Russia as a whole.

For many projects, challenges arose not because of local issues but because of actions taken in Moscow that affected the often insular Siberia. In one case, a project to develop an Environmental Management Master's Degree at Tomsk State University was hindered by the Moscow authorities' refusal to recognise the programme; without recognition, students were forced to pay their own tuition, and the long-term viability of the programme was in question. Development projects were also held back by political turbulence in Russia. Marquand does a good job following the projects after their completion to determine how macro changes in Russia