Gorozhanin kak politik: Revoliutsiia, voennyi kommunizm i NEP glazami Petrogradtsev, and: Proletarii kak politik: Politicheskaia psikhologiia rabochikh Petrograda v 1917-1923 gg, and: Krestianin kak politik: Krestianstvo Severo-Zapada Rossii v 1918-1919 gg. Politicheskie myshlenie i massovyi protest (review)

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In these prodigiously researched and cautiously argued volumes, the author examines the political psychology of the "city-dweller" (*gorozhanin*), "worker," and "proletarian" of Petrograd in 1917–23 and the "peasant" of northwest Russia in 1918–19. By focusing on a period rent by war, revolution, and civil war, he seeks to examine the evolution of popular political attitudes under duress. He has chosen instances of dissatisfaction, opposition, and outright resistance to superordinate authority as a lens on such change. Iarov's first volume focuses on the strikes and protests by civil servants (*chinovniki*), industrialists, intellectuals, and artists immediately following the October takeover in 1917. These protests, he argues, were motivated by a belief in the economic, political, or cultural unpreparedness of the masses for the exigencies of the new regime as well as a distaste for its encroachments on these groups' erstwhile economic or cultural prerogatives. The second volume examines the proletarians' and workers' strikes of March and July 1919; it also concentrates in particular on the mass strikes, protests, and demonstrations of the early months of 1921 as a result of food supply problems, the fuel crisis, and the introduction of the New Economic Policy. The third book in the series analyzes peasant discontent, as expressed in 26 uprisings and disturbances (*vosstaniia* and *volneniia*) in 1918–19 in the northwestern provinces of Russia over such issues as military obligations and the requisitioning of grain and cattle.

Iarov describes a fundamental change in the political psychology of these groups in the course of 1921. Where the disturbances by workers and peasants up to 1921 had been fragmented and disconnected, they took on a far more coherent and complete form in the "state crisis of 1921" (*Gorozhanin*, 63), described by Iarov as the "most powerful social protest in Petrograd since the

February events of 1917" (*Gorozhanin*, 74). In this crisis, he argues, when almost all city enterprises were seized by strikes, as hunger and privation persisted beyond the end of the Civil War, mass protests turned into demonstrations and workers' demands were rapidly politicized. At the same time, the small, sporadic village *bunty* of 1918–19 created a "psychological readiness for a peasant war" (*Krest'ianin*, 67) that erupted in the large uprisings of 1920–21. Cowed by the "political passions that threatened the stability of the state order," the new regime, in the interest of retaining power, lost interest in revolutionizing the workers, trying instead to limit them to the "realm of 'material interests'" (*Proletarii*, 15). Iarov identifies as evidence of this de-politicization a decline in openly non-party (*bespartiinyi*) activity, a general improvement in relations between workers and Communists from 1922 onward (*Proletarii*, 62), and a decline in discussions about both *vlasti* and the Communist Party. Iarov attributes this rise of conformism to both ideological and economic factors under NEP (*Proletarii*, 66). As the waves of discontent died down, a psychological shift took place from "mass, politicized outburst to conformism" (*Gorozhanin*, 91). By 1922–23, Iarov argues, the disappearance of political discussion in workers' circles was a consequence of political repression combined with the change in economic policies that shifted worker attention from political concerns to everyday economic concerns (*Proletarii*, 68). It was also, he adds, a function of the "political accommodation" that characterized Soviet life and was the prime mode of orienting oneself to the new life (*Proletarii*, 50).

In these three studies, Iarov draws upon an impressive array of primary and secondary sources, including political *svodki* gathered by the authorities (especially party cells) on the "moods" in the plants and factories of Petrograd, protocols of meetings and conferences held in these enterprises, reports by local NKVD organs and rural soviets on peasant attitudes, as well as personal letters, contemporary diaries, and the published press. Significant portions of the first and third volumes consist of reproduced original documents.

Iarov's picture of the popular political culture of this period in Petrograd is in some respects a rather unorthodox one. This culture, he argues, was not defined by political parties *per se*, but was one in which the non-party voice – a major feature of mass political life up to 1921 – had to be taken seriously (*Gorozhanin*, 24ff). Iarov implies that later historiography has made the political parties a more significant part of the political culture than they actually were at the time (*Proletarii*, 135). He consistently refuses to impute an unmerited coherence of purpose to the instances of opposition and dissatisfaction he is documenting. In pre-October Petrograd, he argues, political views were confused. Hostility to Kerenskii, for example, did not signify support for the Bolsheviks, approval of the Bolsheviks did not mean a readiness to rise up, and protest

against the governments of pre- and post-October Russia was not always political in nature (*Gorozhanin*, 7–8). At every step, he implies, the strikes, demonstrations, and other expressions of discontent fell far short of political coherence, either in terms of a collective identity or a set of unifying political goals shared by the social groups he is studying.[1] Acts that aroused the ire of the *gorozhanin*, including the dispersal of the Constituent Assembly, the shooting of demonstrators, the murder of two Provisional Government ministers, or the closing of the opposition press by mid-1918, consistently failed to provoke mass protests or demonstrations, either in the plants and factories of Petrograd or among the peasantry outside of the city. The perennial workers' strikes of this period, Iarov notes, had the feel of a "mechanical act, deprived of economic and political meaning" (*Gorozhanin*, 41, 43). Even the strikes during the crisis of 1921 bore a "shadow of indecision, compromise" (*Gorozhanin*, 73), ending because the unrest was "internally preprogrammed to limit itself in its acts and political programs" (*Gorozhanin*, 74). Nor, in Iarov's view, did the Kronstadt revolt, the crushing of which has been for many scholars the clearest expression of Soviet Russia's fundamental illegitimacy, play a major role in the stoking of popular oppositionist sentiment.[2] On the contrary, it was met with apathy and indifference by many, even with brief euphoria by some (*Proletarii*, 9, 20, 61; *Gorozhanin*, 78–79). Here, too, Iarov implies that later historiography has tended to read too much of a "'Kronstadt' mood in the masses" (*Proletarii*, 114), and has sometimes imputed to the disturbances of the entire period an expressly political (i.e. anti-Bolshevik) shading (*Gorozhanin*, 12, 71). The slogan "Soviets Without Communists," a workers' demand supposedly heard during the strikes of 1921, was, he argues, a later ideological and historiographical construction (*Gorozhanin*, 70). Iarov concludes that the sources in fact reveal very little about "mass, 'collective,' opposition of workers to Bolshevism" in 1917–1923, and that direct attacks against Soviet power were "extremely rare" (*Proletarii*, 38).

Iarov also cautions against reading too much political intent, particularly anti-Bolshevik or anti-regime intent, into the peasant disorders, even the large

[1] For recent examples that taken together help foster a notion of continuous and coherent popular resistance throughout Soviet history, see Galina Fedorovna Dobronozhenko, ed. *VChK-OGPU o politicheskikh nastroeniiakh severnogo krest'ianstva: 1921-1927 gody. Po materialam informatsionnykh svodok VChK-OGPU* (Syktyvkar: Syktyvkarskii gosudarstvenyii universitet, 1995); B. S.Pushkarev, ed., *Kommunisticheskii rezhim i narodnoe soprotivlenie v Rossii 1917–1991* (Moscow: "Posev," 1998); Vladimir Petrovich Kozlov, *Massovye besporiadki v SSSR pri Khrushcheve i Brezhneve, 1953–nachalo 1980-kh gg.* (Novosibirsk: Sibirskii khronograf, 1999).

[2] For the most recent collections of primary sources documenting this "tragedy," see V. K. Vinogradov and Vladimir Petrovich Kozlov, eds., *Kronshtadtskaia tragediia 1921 goda: Dokumenty v dvukh knigakh* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999); Vladimir Pavlovich Naumov and A. A. Koskovskii, eds., *Kronshtadt 1921* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond "Demokratiia," 1997).

uprisings of 1921. He argues that their short duration (generally 2 or 3 days) cannot always be explained by military interference, but had much to do with their "concrete, completely 'utilitarian,' non-political goals" (*Krest'ianin*, 67). Since these goals could be reached with relative ease, he argues, the uprisings exhausted themselves quite quickly. The disorders were marked by the absence of any political program, a reflection of what he calls the low level of political culture of the village masses, poor organization, and an almost total lack of recognizable leaders or instigators. He adds, however, that they were neither "meaningless nor accidental," but were a result of the breaking of old political, social, ideological, and everyday (*bytovye*) structures in the village (*Krest'ianin*, 68).

Despite his cautious conclusions, however, Iarov's approach is shaped – and trapped – by reified categories and concepts embedded within traditional and newer approaches to Soviet history alike. In some respects, his thesis of a shift from political activism to mass conformism is a rather familiar argument about the atomization of Soviet society, signifying a mass withdrawal from political life. After this withdrawal, the Soviet system persists as an essentially hollow (and illegitimate) shell, the seeds of its ultimate collapse thus appearing already clear from the outset. Yet Iarov is not insensitive to implications of life in a highly politicized system. As he points out, the politicization of the "structures of daily life" (*Gorozhanin*, 44) – including dress, leisure, family life, the distribution of goods, services, dwellings, etc. – meant that all daily behavior became political behavior. Any individual who wanted to express a desire for any kind of change whatsoever could do so, he argues, only within the political formulations of this new regime. His sensitivity notwithstanding, Iarov's approach is informed by an impulse that he shares with more traditional approaches, namely to identify a significant historical voice of "society" that operates in some way independently of the "state" that suppresses it or speaks for it. He continues, then, earlier efforts of social and labor historians to save Soviet society from the state by, as David Mandel wrote in his study of Petrograd workers, "let[ting] the workers speak for themselves."[3] Curiously, Iarov's work is also in some ways a continuation of early efforts by political historians to save Soviet political culture from the Bolsheviks by focusing on elite opposition to the Soviet system inside and outside of the party.[4]

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[3] David Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Regime* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan Press, 1983), 5.

[4] The classic works are still Robert Vincent Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960); Leonard Schapiro, *The Origin of the Communist Autocracy: Political Opposition in the Soviet State. First Phase 1917–1922* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); and Charles Bettelheim, *Class Struggles in the USSR: First Period. 1917–1923* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1976).

Despite his expressed regret that the "direct speech" of the workers or peasants is very rarely heard in the primary sources, that it is always transmitted through *informatory*, Iarov's thesis of the gradual de-politicization of the system in the 1920s is an argument for autonomous individual agency (*Proletarii*, 63; cf. *Gorozhanin*, 4; *Krest′ianin*, 5). Many workers, he argues, consciously withdrew from politics, ignoring the Communists' "agitational contrivances (*ukhishchreniia*)" (*Proletarii*, 76) that accompanied NEP, being moved rather by NEP's social innovations that affected their immediate material well-being. Peasant hostility to the new regime was also a response to a broad perception that the demands of the new state were encroaching upon traditional ideas and norms in the village (*Krest′ianin*, 9).

For Iarov, the state (or, in his terminology, *vlasti*) and society exist as reified subjects in sharp dichotomy. The state is an object acted against, defined by resistance to it. It is a producer of constraints rather than of possibilities, invested here with cunning and purpose, the worker or peasant being ill-equipped intellectually and culturally to divine the "artful designs (*khitrospleteniia*) of party slogans and ideological programs" (*Krest′ianin*, 7; cf. *Proletarii*, 175). Probably unintentionally, Iarov reinforces this artificial dichotomy through the structure of his work, devoting discrete sections to analyses of workers' attitudes towards *vlast′*, the Communist Party, war communism, NEP, the Constituent Assembly, and Kronstadt respectively (*Proletarii*, 32–133). He similarly pits the peasantry against the state by focusing on peasant discontent with soviets, the Constituent Assembly, the Committees of the Village Poor, the Communist Party, and the Red Army (*Krest′ianin*, 12–35).

The author's very focus on resistance to, or withdrawal from, this reified state becomes a means of investing historical agency in society, and by extension in the individual, as Iarov strives to find the individual's "voice." Studies of popular resistance are driven at least in part by the sense that the act of exposing the state's manipulations or deceptions of society is fundamentally decent and right.[5] In this view, systems that seek to intrude upon the individual and society with designs to transform human nature must therefore be judged by the level of popular opposition or resistance to them, "unauthorized representations of the past" being the seemingly natural "windows through which we seek to

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[5] To paraphrase Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory*, ed. Samuel Raphael (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 232. Lynne Viola also recognizes the "element of historiographical virtue" inspiring the recent interest in popular resistance in her survey of recent work on the 1930s (Viola, "Popular Resistance in the Stalinist 1930s: Soliloquy of a Devil's Advocate," *Kritika* 1: 1 [2000], 45).

understand socialist systems."[6] More than this, such studies often imply that in some essential sense the individual subject's "natural" state is in opposition or resistance. Iarov, for example, implies an elemental spirit of resistance when he refers to the "spontaneous Bolshevism of the masses" as a force that was often turned against the Bolsheviks (*Gorozhanin*, 22).

This dichotomy between state and society sets up a further uncomfortable relationship between historical agency and ideology in these works. Iarov devotes some attention to the function of workers' enlightenment (*Proletarii*, 204–18), and he is certainly aware of what he calls the "institutionalization of ideological structures" (*Proletarii*, 165) as a major feature of this new regime's consolidation of power in the first decade after 1917. Still, ideology is conceded no explanatory or persuasive power vis-à-vis the individual, beyond the power to repress and delude.[7] The new political "rites, myths, language … [that] changed mass thinking" (*Gorozhanin*, 4), Iarov implies, were but gradual impositions from outside, rendered fundamentally illegitimate by their power to delude and direct the independent voice of the individual. The individual explains "his spiritual change with hackneyed (*raskhozhie*), clichéd formulations, he does not find for this his own words that would reflect his own thoughts – rather, he does not realize that the stereotypical formulations used by him do not belong to him" (*Gorozhanin*, 4; cf. *ibid.*, 31). The author notes that it is particularly difficult during times of social and political upheaval to distinguish between an individual's "independent thinking" and "affectation" (*Gorozhanin*, 6). It might be added that the distinction is by no means always clear to the individual. Indeed, the workers' material self-interest and psychological self-worth as the new social elite of the Soviet system was nurtured by ideology, causing them actively to defend the new status ascribed to them, while, Iarov adds tellingly, "not caring too much whether it was illusory or not" (*Proletarii*, 169, cf. *ibid.*, 195; *Gorozhanin*, 45). Ideology, in Iarov's approach, is the state's power to put words into the mouths of its subjects, thereby divesting them of historical voice and agency.

The individual, Iarov implies, is at the mercy of the state, the popular discontents of the pre- and post-October period being "immediately clothed in ideological garb … translated into a different language and directed as a weapon against political enemies" (*Gorozhanin*, 11). Iarov is well aware of the power of

[6] Rubie S. Watson, "Memory, History, and Opposition Under State Socialism: An Introduction," in *Memory, History, and Opposition Under State Socialism*, ed. Watson (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1994), 2.

[7] A plea for a more nuanced and broader definition of ideology in Soviet historiography has most recently been made in Choi Chatterjee, "Ideology, Gender and Propaganda in the Soviet Union: A Historical Survey," *Left History* 6: 2 (1999), 11-28. Compare an earlier plea for the reintroduction of the political into early Soviet history by Stephen Kotkin, "'One Hand Clapping': Russian Workers and 1917," *Labor History* 32: 4 (1991), 604-20.

the new political lexicon to alter the "philosophical self-identification" of the masses, this lexicon being the main medium through which individuals articulated their understanding of the changing world around them (*Proletarii*, 168). At the same time, he describes the use of communist terminology as a "clearly mercantilist operation," an "instrument for obtaining social privileges" (*Proletarii*, 168). The new communist lexicon, he implies, was at best window-dressing, a cynically *political* instrument. Its makers were largely unconcerned about "the precision of the definitions" of the terms they coined (counterrevolutionary, saboteur, bourgeois, conciliator, etc; *Proletarii*, 167; cf. *Gorozhanin*, 16). The new language blunted the masses' political slogans by "cloth[ing] [them] in 'socialist' form," creating a "specific self-censorship of political demands" (*Proletarii*, 113). Articulated in the Bolshevized political language of the time, therefore, even oppositional attitudes bore the "*illusion* of proximity to [Bolshevik postulates]" (*Proletarii*, 221, emphasis mine). At its worst, the new language signified naught but "linguistic servitude (*rabstvo*)" for the worker (*Gorozhanin*, 44). As Iarov vaunts the power of the new revolutionary language's form, he divests it of real content.[8] Ideology takes its most empty form when exercised as ritual, the worker being compelled to take part in mass meetings and demonstrations, which were supplied "with a scenario devised beforehand" (*Gorozhanin*, 44). In this "planned and directed spectacle, the roles of which are strictly distributed" (*Proletarii*, 10), the worker reads his lines dispassionately, by rote. Iarov sees two cities in existence in Petrograd in these years, "one, disciplined by collective rituals, silent or silently voting, the other – beyond the plant walls and institutions, without an observing eye, unfettered and unpredictable" (*Gorozhanin*, 30). These forms of ritualized support for *vlast'*, he sums up, are dangerous because they weaken "people's individual, internal resistibility (*soprotivliaemost'*)" (*Gorozhanin*, 44).

Iarov's conception of ideology as little more than coercion, deception, or self-delusion reduces the explanatory power of his thesis, leaving the reader wondering what precisely the seemingly endemic popular dissatisfaction in early Soviet Russia signified and why it remained so blunted. After all, Iarov argues that the many instances of dissatisfaction expressed in varying degrees by various groups at this time fell far short of a direct challenge to the new political system, and concedes that this system could not have survived but for its success in drawing in and utilizing "the mechanisms of low-level (*nizovaia*) support" (*Proletarii*, 222). Iarov attributes this success to the weak political culture of the workers, concerned only with material questions, to the careful control of

[8] For a recent sensitive study of the content and possibility of this new language, see Michael S. Gorham, "Mastering the Perverse: State Building and Language 'Purification' in Early Soviet Russia," *Slavic Review* 58: 1 (2000), 133-53.

information at key junctures (e.g. Kronstadt) by the *vlasti*, and to the "agitational impact of the Bolsheviks," rendered most powerful wherever the "individual was overwhelmed by the mass" (*Gorozhanin*, 20; cf. *Proletarii*, 133). In Iarov's approach, the psychology of the masses looms as a further arm of the state. The individual subject, he believes, is ever under threat from mass opinion, the masses being characterized by a "subconscious striving towards caste isolation (*kastovost'*)," a desire to become part of a special, privileged group (*Gorozhanin*, 17). This desire, he implies, was fed by the spontaneous egalitarian impulses that characterized the "lower-level (*nizovaia*) city culture" (*Proletarii*, 188) even before 1917. These impulses would render the masses open to state-sponsored extremism (hostility towards the *burzhui*, for example) and selfishness (distancing oneself from the perceived losers) in the quickened conditions of the new system. The threat to the individual here lies not only in the adoption of the majority views, but in the fact that the individual actually *believes* that these views are of his own making and not imported "from outside" (*Proletarii*, 21; *Gorozhanin*, 20). Ideology, then, is designed to exploit this mass psychology.

Iarov's conceptual approach to acts of opposition and resistance does not allow them to be studied as a process through which the resisting subject is engaged by the system and transformed in fundamental and complex ways by these very acts.[9] Nor does it brook consideration of the complex *possibilities* of ideology to draw in or inscribe individuals into the new polity. It is conceptually unable to countenance *creative* aspects of the Soviet project, because ideology is deemed to be extrinsic rather than intrinsic to the individual agent. The growing and often obsessive surveillance by the government of its subjects, for example, is treated only as a source of information on popular attitudes, rather than as part of a "project" of surveillance intended to "act on people, to change them," as Peter Holquist puts it.[10] Similarly, it is unable to conceive of the "re-classing" of society by this regime, involving not only the ascription of class categories, but also the framing and construction of the very bodies of information upon which

[9] In this regard, see the remarks by Peter Fritzsche, "On the Subjects of Resistance," *Kritika* 1: 1 (2000), 147–52; Jochen Hellbeck, "Speaking Out: Languages of Affirmation and Dissent in Stalinist Russia," ibid., 83ff; Michael David-Fox, "Whither Resistance?" ibid., 164–65; Yanni Kotsonis, "Introduction: A Modern Paradox – Subject and Citizen in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Russia," in *Russian Modernity: Politics, Knowledges, Practices*, ed. David L. Hoffmann and Yanni Kotsonis (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 2000), 12–13.

[10] Peter Holquist, "'Information is the Alpha and Omega of Our Work': Bolshevik Surveillance in Its Pan-European Context," *Journal of Modern History* 69 (September 1997), 417. He develops his argument further in idem, "What's So Revolutionary About the Russian Revolution? State Practices and the New-Style Politics, 1914–21," in *Russian Modernity,* ed. Hoffmann and Kotsonis, 91–98.

historians draw for their analyses of this society.[11] Instead, it merely reproduces the social categories that were the invention of the Soviet project itself. This is shown by the separation of his work into separate studies of the political psychologies of the *gorozhanin*, worker, proletarian, and peasant, all of which surely deserve consideration as *political* (rather than *social*) categories. Even as Iarov repeatedly draws back from imputing a sense of collective political will or identity to the groups he is studying, the very act of cataloguing and analyzing their instances of resistance or opposition is a cohering act on the part of the historian. This is illustrated by his occasional use of the freighted term "movement" (*dvizhenie*) as an aggregate of these instances. Ultimately, Iarov reinforces the traditional conceptual pillars of Western historiography of Soviet Russia: the separation of state from society, the essentialist nature of resistance and opposition, and the rapid withdrawal of the masses from an illegitimate and increasingly hollow state.

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[11] Sheila Fitzpatrick is referring to the area of social statistics, and the way in which class categories were built into their collection, but her observation can be applied far more broadly (see Fitzpatrick, "Ascribing Class: The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia," *Journal of Modern History* 65 [December 1993], 745–70).