

in July 1970. The journal is edited by Professors Eugène Zaleski and Michel Lesage. French work has long been neglected in the United States, partly owing to a cultural lag, but also to a domination of research and publication, particularly in the 1950s, by doctrinaire people. At present there is much fine research being conducted on many subjects, in research bodies such as the C.N.R.S. referred to above, the government (as in the G.E.P.E.I.—Groupe d'Études Prospectives sur les Échanges Internationaux), and in the universities (in the provinces, as well as in Paris).

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AN ECONOMIC HISTORY OF THE U.S.S.R. By *Alec Nove*. Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969. 416 pp. \$10.00.

This is a valuable book. In my opinion it now stands as the best comprehensive economic history of the entire Soviet period, and it will no doubt be a highly useful synthesis and reference tool for a number of years. Among recent treatments it is vastly superior to Anatole Mazour's *Soviet Economic Development*, for example. It also surpasses somewhat older major studies—Baykov (1946), Dobb (first and basic edition, 1948), and Jasny (1961)—since it provides detailed coverage of both the preplan and postwar eras and incorporates important recent monographs by Levin, Malafeev, Moshkov, and others. Yet for various reasons, of which the two most important are discussed below, I do not think it will come to rank as one of the truly outstanding general studies in the broad field of economic history.

To begin with, this is an extremely *political* economic history. After quoting Lenin in the preface to the effect that politics have dominance over economics, Professor Nove agrees that this has undeniably been the case in the Soviet Union. And if the politicians doubled as “the board of directors of the great firm U.S.S.R. Ltd.,” and therefore had to respond to economic conditions as well as impose their will upon them, these “super-managers” are still the economic historian's proper focus. Thus the author feels justified in choosing to “concentrate on economic policies, decisions, events, organizations, and conditions” chiefly as they relate to the men, or man, at the top. This leads him to organize his study mainly around the specific pattern of events in time, as opposed to analytical or topical subdivisions.

This chronological political approach has real merits. We see, for example, that Lenin was still backing war communism as late as February 1921, and that NEP was under serious attack from 1925 on. Consistently we find a clear narrative of what leaders were thinking and doing on economic matters. There is a delightful absence of the chronological confusion or deception found not only in an authority like Dobb but in many builders of “Soviet economic models.” But there are obvious shortcomings to what might be called the “super-manager view of economic history,” as there was in the old “great man” view of political history. We are offered insights into certain decisions, such as NEP, collectivization, and liberalization, but our understanding of the underlying problem—the tempo and process of Soviet economic development—is advanced very modestly. The findings are incomplete, as is the analysis.

A related problem concerns the use of qualitative and quantitative material. There is currently a tendency among some economic historians to overestimate the

value of quantitative data and to pass over qualitative data with disdain. Nove does not do this. Indeed he uses qualitative data—debates, literature, stories, even jokes—with rare skill and sensitivity. This allows him to cut through the fog of propaganda and some academic discussions and give his reader a balanced view of Soviet economic experience.

Quantitative data is handled indifferently, however, and that is unfortunate. Very striking is the absence of any real discussion or analysis of such data on rates of economic growth, rates of capital accumulation, levels of per capita income, income distribution, demographic changes, and so forth. A short “Note on Growth Rates” appended to the text is indicative of the author’s apparent lack of interest in quantitative analysis. Arguing that the difficulties of the index number problem are practically insoluble, we can only “agree that the U.S.S.R. did industrialize rapidly after 1928, . . . and that the word ‘rapidly’ cannot, from our present information, be given precision.” There follows a table showing the increase in physical output of selected basic commodities in six years between 1928 and 1966, which “may be a useful summary of industrial progress.” Such a descriptive, nonanalytical use of statistic data within partial indexes was a staple of economic historians in the nineteenth century. It might even still serve as the core of an author’s quantitative data. But if so, such material must be skillfully and systematically arranged and indexed, and more sophisticated measures cannot be almost totally ignored.

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SOTSIAL'NOE STRAKHOVANIE V ROSSII V 1917–1919 GODAKH (SOCIAL INSURANCE IN RUSSIA IN 1917–1919). By *S. M. Shvarts* (S. M. Schwarz). English summary by *Abraham Ascher*. New York: Russian Institute, Columbia University, 1968. ix, 202 pp. Paper.

The question of social insurance in Russia in 1917–19 has remained largely unexplored. Thus Solomon M. Schwarz’s study is particularly valuable on two grounds: it makes a substantial contribution to closing this gap, and it comes from the pen of the former head of the Department of Social Insurance in the Russian Provisional Government’s Ministry of Labor, who was the author of many legislative reforms concerning social insurance in Russia. In a sense, this book is a kind of autobiography. From 1913 Mr. Schwarz was an ardent exponent of the Menshevik position in the Russian workers’ insurance movement.

Schwarz’s detailed study will be welcomed by economists and others interested in Russian labor problems. It traces the transformation of the Russian system of social insurance from one based on the principle of social autonomy to a highly centralized operation controlled by the government. The principle of social autonomy, in which the system is partially administered by the insured themselves, was wholeheartedly supported by the Mensheviks; the centralized system came to be the Bolshevik position.

The purpose of this book is not so much to describe the administrative, technical, and financial aspects of the social insurance schemes as to analyze the competing principles from which they developed and to trace the struggle between these principles. The book succeeds admirably in its objective. As Abraham Ascher correctly notes in his English summary of the book, “In a sense, this book is a case-study of Menshevik and Bolshevik labor policy.”