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THREE VOLUMES ABOUT SOCIAL POLICY

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2007. *Sovetskaia sotsial'naiia politika 1920-kh–1930-kh godov: ideologiia i povsednevnost'*. [Soviet Social Policy in the 1920s–1930s: Ideology and Everyday Life.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 432pp.

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2008. *Sovetskaia sotsial'naiia politika: stseny i deistvuiushchie litsa, 1940–1985*. [Soviet Social Policy in 1940–1985: Scenes and Actors.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 376pp.

Romanov, Pavel & Iarskaia-Smirnova, Elena (eds.) 2008. *Sotsial'naiia politika v sovremennoi Rossii: reformy i povsednevnost'*. [Social Policy in Contemporary Russia: Reforms and Everyday Life.] Moscow: Variant, Centre for Social Policy and Gender Studies, 456pp.

At the beginning of this century, the Faculty of Social Systems Management was established at the Saratov State Technical University (SSTU) in Russia. This department was founded by uniting the departments of social work and social anthropology. SSTU



is the university in the Volga region which prepared social workers all through the Soviet period. The faculty has not completely shrug off its somewhat negative reputation (as social work tends to be a low prestige subject in Russia, and young people usually study it when they do not qualify for other subjects at the university), but the applied studies is now complete with academic theoretical studies. The social anthropologists at Saratov study the different aspects of social work and, in general, the topic that can be called occupational anthropology (*antropologiya professii* in Russian). This group of social anthropologists also organises various conferences, analysing research into social work. The materials of different studies have been gathered between the covers of three volumes of a publication series, which publishes translated works of West-European scholars next to Russian scholars.

The three books offer an overview of the social work in Russia from the beginning of the Soviet period until the post-Soviet period. The first book *Sovetskaia sotsial'naiia politika 1920-kh-1930-kh godov: Ideologiya i povsednevnost'* discusses social work in Soviet Russia between the 1920s and 1930s. Instead of being strictly historical studies, the articles of this book focus on the relations between Soviet social politics with the political and economic situation in post-revolutionary Russia. Perhaps the most interesting articles are those analysing the impact force of ideology on the development of social policies. On the one hand, Soviet Russia was economically struggling with limited and insufficient resources. On the other hand, the period already reflected the euphoria of a new and better world. Anything old and outdated was thrown overboard to make room for the shortly arriving “proletariat paradise”. People were expected to eagerly participate in building up the new state, although at the same time it was challenging for the common people to find enthusiasm in the situation in which unemployment rate was high or work was physically demanding. Alexander Morozov focuses in his article on the unemployed in Kazan, and Svetlana Tulaeva describes the forest workers in the Komi Republic. Both groups found it difficult to join in on the general euphoria. The articles show how bolshevist ideology determined the state’s attitude towards those who for some reason or another voiced criticism about the view that

work is to be honoured and not necessarily compensated for. This started the later traditional strategy of the Soviet state that people who were too critical and thus not acceptable were declared “ignorant parasites” and became victims of ideologically justified sanctions.

A separate section of this book is dedicated to gender issues. In the Soviet Union, women had a unique position. Within the ideological paradigm, the Socialist society was particularly symbolic for them: they were freed of double suppression (both of men and the capitalist society) and their position in the society was meant to change in radical terms. Artemi Pushkarev and Natalia Pushkareva analyse in their article a particularly provocative taboo – the sexuality of a Soviet woman and its compliance (or non-compliance) with the ideology. The article reveals that the “evolution” of a Soviet woman was not as linear as the ideology prescribed. Natalia Lebina writes intriguingly about how Soviet abortion policy was searching for a compromise between the social reality and the conceptualisation of social work. A Socialist or Komsomol family was not only involved in fulfilling plans, but also had personal interests and needs. This is why at some point abortion had to be legalised and authorised as a solution for dealing with unwanted pregnancies. The sanctioning of abortion served as “a favour to working women” and symbolised a double failure: unwanted children were the result of “morally loose conduct” as well as poverty which struck certain population strata and made having children problematic. The last part of the book tackles a somewhat neglected topic of how children were raised in the Soviet period, introduces the selection criteria for students who needed social benefits at universities, and explores how the scanty resources for survival were allocated for the children in the 1920s’ Russia.

The second book in the series, *Sovetskaia sotsial'naia politika: stseny i deistvuiushchie litsa, 1940–1985* (‘Soviet Social Policy in 1940–1985: Scenes and Actors’), focuses on a problematic period in the history of Russia. Stalinist terror made the social work which was already based on ideology even more ideological. A remarkable article on this topic is Ekaterina Tchueva’s study on war invalids’ complaints to party functionaries as a strategy for claiming government benefits. The article analyses the use of ideological rhetoric both by the disabled and the authorities and leaves the impression that the post-Second World War Russia was characterised by the cruel demagoguery of the survival of the fittest. The fourth part of the book groups articles about how the ideological boundaries of “us” and “them” were drawn, whereas people on one side of the boundary were “parasites” and against peace. Natalia Lebina describes the construction of socially anomalous groups in the Soviet society in the 1950s and 1960s. Again, the reader is faced with the ideological definition of “good” and “bad” and how it was applied in everyday life. The final section of the book is quite entertaining and discusses the relations of consumerism and ideology (Oksana Zaporozhets, Yana Krupets), alcohol drinking as a form of leisure and conflicts arising from drinking on the party level (Galina Karpova), and also the Soviet cultural codes applied to women behind the wheels (Rostislav Kononenko).

Typically, the number of non-Russian authors is particularly large in the third book of the series, *Sotsial'naia politika v sovremennoi Rossii: reformy i povsednevnost'* (‘Social Policy in Contemporary Russia: Reforms and Everyday Life’). Western scholars have had the chance to do research in Russia only since the collapse of the Soviet regime, and are therefore qualified to participate in discussions about mainly contem-

porary Russia. In this book, Western anthropology is represented at its best in the translated article by Hilary Pilkington, sociology professor at the University of Warwick, about the use of heroine among Russian youth. The book is dedicated to the development of social politics in contemporary Russia. The reforms, though liberal in content, did not fulfil the expected function because these took place in Russia under the centralising reorganisation activities by Vladimir Putin in the situation of corrupted buccaneer capitalism. Around this time the country withdrew its connection with socio-economic processes and limited the financing of social work activities. Anastasia Kincharova suggests on the example of rural population in Russia that the state's withdrawal from the social sphere had the greatest impact on the Russian periphery. Traditional ethnography is represented in this book by Irina Kuznetsova-Morenko, whose article introduces making presents and voluntary activities in the everyday life of Muslim Tartars. By contrast, the book contains a theoretical article on the future of sociology and scientific research by Polish anthropologist Michael Burawoy.

Perhaps the most positive thing about the three books under discussion is that all of them tackle topics that have been somewhat neglected so far. In sum, the book series is an interesting source of information not only for local Russian scholars. National social policies are on the one hand an ideological strategy for supporting or ignoring certain societal groups, but on the other hand, reality is often far more complicated, forcing state institutions to compromise. The main contribution of these three books to understanding social processes is precisely the analysis of this versatility. These collections of articles which reflect the different aspects and developments of social politics over tens of years provide an educational read which inspires to think about the versatile nature of other social processes.

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