

# [Review of the book *Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918-1930*]

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Husband, William B.  
\*Reviewing Author

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indicates that the Nationalist Party's patriotic propaganda also helped the workers to overcome their feeling of degradation and made them be proud in serving the country's defense industry.

The chapter on the "organic worker intellectual", Yu Zusheng, is extremely interesting and well written. Howard underscores influence of Russian fiction (not Marxist theory) on Yu Zusheng, revealing the true reason why thousands Chinese educated and self-educated youngsters chose revolution and joined the communist movement in the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the concept of organic intellectual and Gramsci's theory could not sufficiently explain the schisms between intellectuals and workers. It is not convincing to argue that "[Yu] became a writer in part because he feared that the party, still dominated by intellectuals, had distanced itself too much from workers." (p.325) By 1942, at the middle and low levels the Party was already dominated by leaders with peasant and worker background, and criticism against intellectuals began to serve as a tool for political purges and inner party power struggle.

Examining the arsenal's welfare system in the GMD period, Howard found that the similar programs were carried over the 1949 division. Another important finding is the communist paradox of "a new bureaucratic class that might have had its roots in the working class but ultimately came to dominate the working class." (p.356) Howard is right to emphasize that in the labor movement the workers and communist organizers did not always share congruent interests. To establish and consolidate the Party's control, the communists not only promoted but also suppressed trade unionism in the 1950s. Comparatively, Howard's narrative of the post-1949 labor history is weaker than other parts of the book. Given ample opportunity for further study, this is a landmark work.

*University of Maryland, College Park*

James Z. Gao

*Republic of Labor: Russian Printers and Soviet Socialism, 1918–1930.* By Diane P. Koenker (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005. xii plus 343 pp.).

If the past isn't what it used to be, as wags have sometimes suggested, this is nowhere more true than in the history of the Russian working class. What was a dominant focus of Soviet historiography has reduced significantly in volume since the fall of Communism, even as Russian scholars have produced some notable recent studies. In the West, analytical categories other than class have become important vehicles for illuminating the lives of Russian workers. Scholars such as Stephen Kotkin and David L. Hoffmann, whose careers began after the Cold War, have situated the early Soviet and Stalinist experience within a pan-European process of state interventionism rooted in the Enlightenment. Focusing on culture and comprehensive understandings of civilization, they have provided novel insights into the lives of Soviet citizens of multiple strata, including but not limited to workers. In a different vein, veteran practitioners of Soviet history such as Sheila Fitzpatrick, and the historian of Europe William

Reddy, have found class simply inadequate as an analytical tool. Fitzpatrick has argued that the applications of class in Soviet political discourse have corrupted it as a scholarly category, a view to which the present reviewer subscribes, and she has suggested that Soviet ascriptive uses of Marxist class categories possibly inhibited class formation during the Soviet 1920s and 1930s. Diane P. Koenker forcefully disagrees. Her *Republic of Labor* argues that class was a historically rooted source of identity for Russian printers and, as such, must stand at the center of any understanding of the construction of a socialist working class culture in the USSR. In Koenker's view, what socialism meant to printers during the early Soviet period is indecipherable without taking into full account the language of class that dominated political discourse.

*Republic of Labor* is impressive by any standard. As Koenker presents matters, the Russian experiment in Communism took place in an environment shaped both by material reality and ideological aspirations. Printers, whose union initially resisted single party Communist rule, viewed themselves as a labor and moral vanguard. Their self-identification was above all male, but also skilled and conscious. Such workers therefore deeply resented their loss of status and material position in the post-revolutionary economy of scarcity that valued physical goods over the ability to produce the printed word, the more so in light of the importance of printed materials in fomenting the revolution. The changing face of trade unionism in a socialist state exacerbated the situation, and opinion divided over whether support of maintaining production or of workers' interests should take precedence. This conflict deepened as the perception of a functional blending of union with management grew, and as unemployment struck printers especially hard during the 1920s those with no jobs to lose became outspoken critics. But printers looked to the revolutionary state as a source of solutions as well as problems. The establishment of a central authority for the industry as an antidote to incompetent factory committees and dishonest officials held broad appeal among printers. And even as opportunities for direct dissent disappeared, workers found ways to express their feelings both at work and outside. Inertia, slowdowns, and other traditional mechanisms greeted unpopular directives at the point of production, while in workers' lives the promotion of Soviet culture foundered on issues that ranged from preferences for drinking and dancing above more "proletarian" pursuits, avoidance of workers' clubs as dens of youthful "hooligans," and non-attendance at factory meetings. In the end, Koenker argues, socialism for printers entailed both rational centralization and the right to control their working lives.

Although an impressive work of scholarship, this book is not for everyone. Koenker writes not for the uninitiated, but an audience already engaged with her issues. This—in combination with a propensity for statements sometimes more clever than communicative ("It is important to separate identity-based *behavior* from the language of identity," p. 91)—makes it unlikely that those who lack a pre-existing interest in her topic will have it kindled by *Republic of Labor*. Above all, her workers seldom speak for themselves. Koenker has marshaled a truly vast array of archival and printed sources, but her judgments of workers' behavior and opinions, especially away from the shop, rely heavily on remarks made at union conferences, didactic short stories and feuilletons in the union press, and contributions by worker-correspondents. Thus, the author states the

importance of male drinking in the formation of a printer's identity, but fails to develop the issue fully. Others have described how drinking establishments in Moscow, where one-third of Russia's printers resided, were segregated by class, craft, degree of integration into the work force ("worker" and "peasant" taverns for long-time proletarians and recent arrivals), and place of employment. But having emphasized male identification, Koenker does not pursue printers' integration into Moscow's tavern culture. She also says little about the problem religion posed for politically conscious workers in the process of identification. Existing works have shown that during the 1920s the party press repeatedly lamented the high degree of religiosity among otherwise qualified new members, crowded living conditions presented conscious (i.e., atheist) workers with the dilemma of an icon worshipping mother or mother-in-law in residence, and opponents of the continuous work week disingenuously expressed their personal preference in religious terms (it was the invention of the Anti-Christ). But religion, actual or opportunistic, is not a key element in Koenker's evaluation of printers' lives. There is also scant analysis of women printers away from the shop. Did they, like other Russian women of the era, find informal ways to express what they could not otherwise articulate? In short, the author misses opportunities to investigate elements of class-identification away from work more expansively.

In the end, Koenker's achievement is significant. This is a work of conviction and intelligence that states its case powerfully. No one with a serious interest in Soviet class formation can ignore *Republic of Labor*.

Oregon State University

William B. Husband

## SECTION 6 REGIONAL ISSUES

*Delivering Aid: Implementing Progressive Era Welfare in the American West.*

By Thomas A. Krainz (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005. xiv plus 325 pp. \$37.00).

*Delivering Aid* is a solid piece of revisionist social history. Unlike most social welfare historians, Thomas Krainz does not consider the Progressive era (the author's data come mainly from 1900 to 1920) to be a prelude to significant New Deal changes in the treatment of the poor, the unemployed, the elderly, as well as widows and dependent mothers and their children. "In terms of altering the welfare state the Progressive Era was a period of disappointment . . . delivery of poor relief looked strikingly similar to nineteenth-century relief practices" (p. 12).

Krainz pursues questions shared by many contemporary students of U.S. welfare history, which deal with the forces that affected Progressive Era relief policies. He focuses on gender issues, elaborates the rights of the needy as citizens, highlights pivotal policymakers, and examines critical moments in policymaking. Krainz, however, gives primary emphasis to why the implementation of Progressive measures—with one exception, provisions for the blind—did not much

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