Kenneth M. Straus, Factory and Community in Stalin's Russia: The Making of an Industrial Working Class. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997, xiv + 355 pp., $55.00.

Why were Soviet workers, so militant in 1905 and 1917, quiescent between 1929 and 1989? In this provocative study of industrial workers in the 1930s, Kenneth Straus argues that industrial workers by the mid-1930s had become integrated into Soviet society, forming a new working class that had struck a bargain with the regime, an ersatz social contract that provided for improved status in exchange for loyalty. Drawing both on aggregate statistical analysis of Soviet labor and on a case study of Moscow's east-side Proletarian District factories, particularly the Serp i Molot steel and the Stalin automobile plants, Straus invokes an array of sociological and economic theory to articulate a structuralist argument about class formation and social stability. In essence, the pre-Five-Year-Plan labor force, labeled "labor aristocrats," was supplemented in the 1930s by three new groups of workers: peasants, youth, and urban women. The process of recruiting, keeping, and training these new workers, engineered and socialized by a "factory melting pot," led to a general middling-out of wage and skill levels, a "homogenization/redifferentiation" that erased earlier status hierarchies in the labor force.

Straus poses his case for this parallel integration of the new working class against two alternative explanations of Soviet industrial worker behavior: the resistance/repression arguments of Donald Filtzer and Solomon Schwarz, and scholars who emphasize workers' fragmented identities, a so-called "contingent identity" school including Vladimir Andrle, Hiroaki Kuromiya, and Lewis Siegelbaum. Straus marshals theoretical insights from labor economics, particularly noting the importance of the

"inverted" labor market in explaining the evolution of Soviet industrialization in the 1930s. It was only when labor became relatively more scarce after 1933 that factory managers were able to better utilize the factor of labor, to train the newcomers rationally, and to offer rising wages and standards of living. Enterprise labor hoarding of the early 1930s and its resulting inefficiency, not peasant indiscipline, was the cause of the plan-rupturing chaos of the first Five-Year Plan. The destabilizing shock brigades of the first Five Year Plan became converted to routinized work brigades, which Straus argues became the core of the newly homogenized, stable, and contented working class. This homogenization also allowed the regime to relax its early rhetoric about "class enemies"--meaning the peasants, and to acknowledge the peasants' new inclusion into the working class by switching to a rhetoric of "enemies of the people," or genuine national aliens, rather than class aliens.

This point about the regime's rhetoric suggests both the impressive reach of Straus's ambitions and the sometimes disappointing level of empirical substantiation. In a solid bibliographic essay, he discusses the nature of one of his primary sources, the Serp i Molot factory newspaper, Martenovka, which presumably provided his evidence for the changing regime rhetoric. But the newspaper is very little evidenced in the text itself. Many of the arguments are advanced at a level of abstraction and aggregation that renders them problematic. For example, his four worker categories--aristocrats, peasants, women, and youth--are highly aggregated, and rarely interrogated in terms of experience, conflict, identities, or interactions. In fact, Straus's argument would be the same if he had limited himself to "old" and "new" workers, or "urban" and "peasant." These more familiar binaries also characterize earlier work on Moscow workers by William Chase and David Hoffmann. While the regime itself kept declaring that the new working class would best be augmented by recruits from urban youth and urban women, we see very few flesh and blood youth, women, or peasants. Homogenization and therefore

resolution of conflict is assumed on the basis of aggregate wage and skill categories, not on actual reported experience. Even though the factory newspaper reflected the voice of management above all, one would expect that some of the articles written by its 5,000 worker correspondents would provide evidence of a messier shop-floor reality. Similarly, he assumes that more permanent urban proletarian families provide additional stability for this working class without examining evidence on urban family life.

Straus employs the structuralist theory of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim to posit the formation of an objective working class, wage workers who were relatively little stratified by skill and wage levels. According to historians of class like E. P. Thompson, whose authority Straus quotes approvingly, this constitutes class in itself. For Straus, however, class in itself is sufficient to assume class for itself. He argues that a homogeneous entity, the working class, was melded together from among the four categories of aristocrat, peasant, youth, and women through the common experience of the factory both as employer and as community organizer (of food supply, housing, and leisure). I cannot accept, however, that this class became automatically conscious of itself as a class, and this book does not offer enough evidence to allow for a less deterministic acquisition of consciousness. Straus assumes away conflict within the class through his structural categories, and thus can argue, with no proof, that gender relations were "entirely new" (p. 278), that all former subalterns were happily integrated into the new factory collective, providing the social glue that held urban society together. Despite Straus's familiarity with much recent comparative work on working-class history, he makes assumptions like this that run counter to work on the complex relations among workers as well as among classes. This relentlessly structuralist view, moreover, leaves no room to consider the independent variable of socialism in the analysis.

Straus offers a powerful argument and challenge for a theoretical exploration of social relations in understanding the experience of Soviet industrialization. His argument is bold at some times and quite obscurely developed at others, which makes for difficult reading. It is an important book, not only for its theoretical and analytical ambition, but also for the quite valuable insights developed from his case studies of the workings of the factory and factory community. It deserves a wide audience and it should stimulate a lively debate.

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