

Zitierhinweis

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weltgeschichte darstellt. Hier wird auf hohem Niveau darüber nachgedacht, wie eine Geschichte der Interaktion von Menschen mit ihrer Umwelt aussehen kann, in der „Umwelt“ nicht als statische Konstante begriffen, sondern in ihrer dynamischen Widerständigkeit und Relationalität erklärt und zum Gegenstand der Analyse gemacht wird.

In den nächsten Jahren wird keine Auseinandersetzung mit der „sowjetischen Arktis“ an diesen beiden Büchern vorbeikommen. Beide Monographien stehen exemplarisch für die Vorzüge und Begrenzungen ihres jeweiligen Ansatzes: Josephsons Arbeit stellt detailreich unter Beweis, weshalb man die Geschichte sowjetischer Arktisaneignung als Desaster verstehen kann. Doch über die Kontexte, in denen er sein Narrativ entfaltet, hat er im Grunde nur wenig zu sagen. Seine Arbeit ist daher letztendlich, wie auch schon andere Rezensenten festgestellt haben, ein Buch über das sowjetische Experiment am Beispiel einer konkreten Region. Andy Brunos Überlegungen sind hingegen überaus anregend und seine Erzählung ist theoretisch bestens informiert. Doch selbst mit dem postmodern aufgerüsteten Handwerkszeug des Historikers scheint es kaum möglich, die Behauptung plausibel zu belegen, dass nichtmenschliche Akteure sich aktiv am Aufbau des Sozialismus beteiligten.

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Peter Whitewood

The Red Army and the Great Terror. Stalin's Purge of the Soviet Military

Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2015. VII, 360 S. = Modern War Studies.

ISBN: 978-0-7006-2117-0.

After social and cultural history dominated Soviet history during the past quarter of a century, historians are beginning to recover their interest in the politics of Stalinism. Peter Whitewood's *The Red Army and the Great Terror* is an important contribution to the renewed debate on the politics of terror. Much more than a study of what is often called the "Tukhachevskii Affair" his book presents a detailed political history of the Red Army from its foundation after the October Revolution to its beheading in the bloodletting of 1937–1938. In a way, this book is an attempt to re-write J. Arch Getty's seminal *Origins of the Great Purges. The Soviet Communist Party Reconsidered, 1933–1938* (Cambridge 1985), only with a focus on the Red Army and integrating the new archival evidence released since 1991.

Whitewood presents two interrelated theses. First, Stalin did not plan the military purge long in advance; rather, it was an ad-hoc response to what the dictator believed to be overwhelming evidence of a military conspiracy in the highest ranks of the Red Army. This conspiracy was not real, but a figment of the security services' imagination. Stalin accepted it reluctantly, as he had no intention to wreck the army ahead of what he believed was an imminent war. However, once he had accepted its reality, he acted with little restraint.

The evidence presented for this part of the argument dovetails with what Whitewood's doctoral

advisor, James Harris, has written in his own synthesis of the Great Terror: in 1937 and 1938 Stalin began to believe in the conspiracies conjured up by his security services. The terror was not a carefully crafted campaign to increase the dictator's powers, but a panicky reaction to a perception of nearly overwhelming threats; it was the result of a misjudgement of the own situation ultimately caused by a perverse system of information gathering (James Harris: *The Great Fear. Stalin's Terror of the 1930s*. Oxford 2016). "Stalin completely misperceived the danger," writes Whitewood. "The military-fascist plot had no basis in reality. There was no fifth column in the army and no conspiracy in the high command, but the Red Army was purged nonetheless. [...] Stalin truly believed that this action was unavoidable based on the evidence he received during the first half of 1937 about an apparent spy infiltration of the Red Army" (p. 268). This thesis stands in the "revisionist" tradition of research on the Great Terror, including J. Arch Getty and Gabor Rittersporn as well as, more recently, Wendy Goldman.

The second thesis is more original, but also less well supported by evidence. To Whitewood, the Red Army purge was not only one aspect of the Great Terror. It was the central moment of the terror when the violence shifted from a focus on the elite to the purging of the population at large. "It is not out of the question," he writes, "that the discovery of the military-fascist plot itself acted to shock Stalin into finally taking radical action against other population groups outside of the Red Army" (p. 268). Unfortunately, the preparations for the mass operations against all kinds of presumed enemies preceded the "discovery" of the "military fascist plot." The two processes developed in parallel, and at best the evolving purge of the military further radicalized an already beginning onslaught against old "class enemies." After some dialectical back and forth, Whitewood seems to accept this less radical thesis, although elsewhere in the book he promotes a much stronger version of it.

The thesis about the centrality of the military purge in the larger history of the terror is one of several moments in this book when valid points are over-stressed for dramatic effect. It is questionable, for example, that given the information provided by his security services, Stalin really "faced little choice but to opt for a larger purge" of the army (p. 272). Not enough evidence is presented to make plausible the vision of Stalin as "an indecisive leader who, after years of nagging doubts about the Red Army, could no longer ignore his suspicions" (p. 281). And while it is undoubtedly true that "the Great Terror took on a momentum of its own," it does not follow that "the regime began to lose control" (p. 11). These are questions of emphasis and interpretation, hence historians might disagree over them. Other statements are factually misleading. It is simply not true that "ordinary people rather than party elites suffered the most during the Great Terror" (p. 265, similarly: p. 14). While the mass operations targeted people outside of the elite and produced the largest number of victims, in proportional terms the level of victimization was much higher among the state and party elite than among ordinary citizens.

Such objections aside, no specialist on Stalin's years in power can afford to miss this book. As a detailed history of the high politics surrounding the Red Army and as an important contribution to the history of the Great Terror, it will make its way on the compulsory reading lists of advanced students of Stalinism.

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