



The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States

By Ronald Suny

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Now thoroughly revised in its second edition, *The Soviet Experiment* examines the complex themes of Soviet history, ranging from the last tsar of the Russian empire to the first president of the Russian republic. Author Ronald Grigor Suny, one of the most eminent Soviet historians of our time, examines the legacies left by former Soviet leaders and explores successor states and the challenges they now face. He captures familiar as well as little-known events--the crowds on the streets during the February Revolution, Stalin's collapse into a near-catatonic state after Hitler's invasion, and Yeltsin's political maneuvering and public grandstanding--combining gripping detail with insightful analysis.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Suny (political science, Univ. of Chicago; *Looking Toward Ararat*, Indiana Univ., 1993) is a highly regarded scholar of the late Soviet Union. His present work, a textbook survey of that country's "turbulent tale," charts the "traumatic and painful transformations" of Russia from decrepit tsarist autocracy to post-Soviet chaos, corruption, and uncertainty. Suny's tone is judicious, and his judgment that the Soviet experiment's great achievement of "rough modernization of a backward, agrarian society," which produced nonetheless an incompletely modernized society for the 1980s and 1990s, is well supported. He is particularly good on World War II, its cost, and its impact. Each chapter has suggestions for further readings, with a chronology of dates at the end. This is and should remain a valuable reference text. —Robert H. Johnston, McMaster Univ., Hamilton, Ontario

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Review

Its main strengths, besides clear writing, are that the author lays out a range of historiographic positions on major issues (including what was, as of the book's initial publication, the positions of the very latest studies); that the author presents his own interpretative framework forcefully but without discounting other views; that the author deftly balances political, social, and cultural history without ignoring matters of diplomatic history; that the author provides clear discussions of main pillars of Soviet ideology and discusses its contested nature; that the author provides anecdotal material and fragments from documents, but always in context. Michael C. Hickey, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania *The Soviet Experiment* is well-written and accessible, fully appropriate for undergraduates. If I was teaching an entry-level course on Soviet history, I would consider assigning it. Fundamentally, this is an excellent text which is now almost 10 years old and hence needs to incorporate the work of historians over the past decade. Doubtless nobody knows this better than Ron Suny. H. Hogan, Oberlin College Following my point from above, I would say that at \$55-60, *The Soviet Experiment* is more reasonably priced than the Thompson that I currently assign. I was very impressed with *The Soviet Experiment* when I read it more closely for this review. The book puts the diversity, especially ethnic and national diversity, of the USSR in the forefront of the historical narrative. The "nationalities" make up an important part of the story, rather than a footnote at its end. Similarly, the book also gives a sense of the diversity of experience by gender, class and region, with attention paid in each chapter to the "average" people who lived through the wars and political programs. I think a new edition would be wonderful - I think the three changes above could make this book the best on the market for this sort of Modern Russia/USSR survey. Eliza Ablovatksi, Kenyon College This is a serious, thoughtful, and solid work. The book is methodically written and well organized. It is easy to navigate. It provides in-depth analysis of many key issues of Soviet history. I don't think any specific changes would make it more likely for me to adopt this book for the courses I am teaching, but I am glad to provide recommendations that may improve the new edition overall. -more pictures and photographs; -references and connections to the incredible wealth of online Russian history resources -better maps - Russia should not look like one big blank spot. It has so many regional and ethnic divisions, including, by the way, Chechnya (see p. 497); - linear charts look too dry and mathematical. Leonid Trofimov, Queen's College Suny's work is an excellent one, though this edition is certainly dated. Indeed it is likely the best textbook treatment available for a course on Russia from 1917 to 1995. As to the strengths there are many: it is well-written, balanced, comprehensive, and there is a most desirable objectivity in the way that Suny approaches the subject matter. I understand how expensive pictures can be in the text of this kind, and while the pictures included are adequate, perhaps more photos of the suffering masses in the different segments of the last century could

sensitize our students of today. James Crowl, Longwood University

About the Author

Ronald Grigor Suny is Charles Tilly Collegiate Professor of Social and Political History and Director of the Eisenberg Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Michigan. He is the author or editor of several books, including *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents* (OUP, 2003) and *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin* (OUP, 2001).

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