

Stalin's Railroad: Turksib and the Building of Socialism. *By Matthew J. Payne.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001. 400 pp. Cloth, \$37.00. ISBN 0-822-94166-X.

Reviewed by Jonathan A. Grant

Grand construction projects occupied the very heart of the Soviet regime, and Matthew Payne's analysis of the Turkestando-Siberian Railroad (Turksib) is a revealing case study of one such project conceived during the New Economic Policy of the 1920s but completed under Stalinism's Great Break of the First Five-year Plan. Payne takes on the broader topic of Soviet modernity through an examination of elite, ethnic, and social class formation. Following Sheila Fitzpatrick's notion of "cultural revolution," Payne explicates how the rhetoric of class war defined and shaped the dynamics of power during the building of Turksib. The book flows along two tracks: a political one that explores the planning, routing, and resource allocation that went into the construction of the railroad; and a social one that encompasses the formation of a modern Kazakh proletarian identity of those employed on the site. Payne argues that both engineers and workers developed their own particular social identities as a result of their experiences on the Turksib.

In addition to analyzing class formation, Payne incorporates nationality in his discussion of Cultural Revolution. He shows how Moscow overtly sought to construct proletarian nations, and officials conceived of Turksib as a means to that end. In this regard, the new railroad also served as proof of the regime's commitment to anti-imperialism by bringing industry to the former colonies of tsarist Russia. Local officials understood the construction project as supporting the industrialization of Kazakhstan's economy and modernizing its culture. The Kazakhs successfully pressured the commissariat into hiring thousands of Kazakhs and training them for industrial labor. In this way Turksib forged a new Kazakh proletarian social identity.

This work manages a synthesis of the older totalitarian state-centered approach and the revisionist view that pays more attention to the social side of the equation and to possibilities of social resistance to the regime's goals. Payne is able to triangulate these

two approaches. He finds significant value in the older totalitarian historiography that concentrated on the state's efforts to expand its purview. In the case of Turksib, Moscow's refusal to grant preeminence in planning either to the Peoples Commissariat of Ways of Communication (*Narkomput'*) or to the regions preserved the Politburo's room for maneuver. Ultimately, the Soviet government sacrificed local residents' interest in using the project to bring industrial development to Kazakhstan in order to obtain a transit line that would carry raw materials for the central textile industry in European Russia.

On the other hand, revisionist interpretations also find ample support in this book, and one of Payne's most important contributions is his subtle and sophisticated understanding of the practice of politics within the Soviet system. Rather than the center's dictating all decisions to the periphery, Payne finds that Turksib's planning and construction developed through a three-way interaction between the central government commissariats, regional lobbies with their own local political elites, and the regime itself. Moreover, different interests between center and periphery supported the project, with the result that the government ordered the railroad to serve two contradictory goals: to connect the Siberian and Altai grain and timber belts with the Central Asian cotton belt; and to serve the local economic interests of the areas the railroad passed through. Payne demonstrates how local actors in Siberia, Turkestan, and Kazakhstan lobbied alongside the central institutions, such as *Narkomput'* and the textile industry, in favor of building the railroad. In line with the revisionist position, Payne shows that the regime did not always get its way, as workers and managers redirected state goals within their own frame of reference. In the beginning of Turksib, the Communist Party did not exert itself much, since its presence in Kazakhstan was generally weak. Thus operations largely fell into the hands of the pre-revolutionary engineers, known as the "spetsy." Engineers educated after the revolution, the "Red Engineers," led the charge against the spetsy on the grounds of the latter's suspected incompetence and disloyalty to the Soviet regime. In battle with the spetsy, the Red Engineers invoked the rhetoric of cultural revolution and appealed over the heads of the bosses to the Party and the union. Thus, the impetus for the purges that struck the spetsy of Turksib came from the Red Engineers on the project.

Payne's careful and thorough sifting of the relevant archival sources is a central factor in his comprehensive approach. In effect, he has seized the railroad by both ends. His research is divided fairly between the sources at the center and the periphery. From the center, Payne relies on documents from the Russian State Archive of the Economy and the State Archive of the Russian Federation. On the other end, the Party Archive of the Kazakh Republic, the Central State Archive of Kazakhstan, and the State Archive of Semipalatinsk Oblast' illuminate regional matters. By employing these different sets of primary sources, Payne is able to delve into both the political and the social dimensions of Turksib, and consequently his work engages the issues of totalitarians and revisionists alike. If there is one significant criticism to be made, it is that Payne is so even handed in his treatment of the various readings of the Turksib experience that it is difficult to determine which direction he wishes future scholarship to take in order to transcend the totalitarian-revisionist debate. Nevertheless, he has provided a fine piece of research, and this book is a welcome addition to Soviet history.

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