

Russia's Economic Transitions from Late Tsarism to the New Millennium. *By Nicolas Spulber*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003. xxiv + 420 pp. Maps, tables, notes, index. Cloth, \$75. ISBN 0-521-81699-8.

Reviewed by Peter Gatrell

This book is an exercise in comparative economic history. Nicolas Spulber identifies three economic transitions: the late tsarist (covering roughly the 1860s to 1914), the Soviet (1917 to 1991), and the post-Soviet (where the story is taken up to circa 1998). In effect this means that Spulber has written a thematic history that embraces a century and a half of Russian economic change. No comparable treatment of this subject exists that has the depth of this book or draws so well upon a range of published material, including some of the finest work by Russian social scientists. Each "transition" receives more or less equal attention, with an emphasis in each instance on state, economy, and society; sectoral growth and change; and social accounting. Spulber manages to maintain a consistent structure within this strong framework, so that anyone interested in comparing (say) industrial policy or the role of foreign capital can easily navigate between the three successive transitions. This clear structure will enhance the value of the book for scholars and for advanced students, the more so as Spulber offers a helpful summary of each transition. (It seems to me, however, that it is stretching the single term "Soviet transition" to embrace war, communism, New Economic Policy, Stalinism, the post-Stalinist reform era, and perestroika.) Finally, the value of his book is augmented by one hundred or so informative tables that draw upon a range of official and semiofficial sources.

Apart from a clear organization of the material, Spulber offers a lucid exposition of the main issues relating to economic transition. Prime importance is attached to the restructuring of property relations; one of the merits of his book is that he takes seriously the vigorous debates about ownership in each period (with the obvious exception of the Stalin era, when open debate was stifled). This enables him to identify alternative paths of development under consideration and to introduce readers to notable intellectual figures from each phase, such as Alexander Herzen, Yevgeny Preobrazhenskii, and

Gregory Yavlinsky, each of whom was exercised not only with issues of reform and growth but also with Russia's economic status vis-à-vis the West. Due attention is given to economic policies and to key sectors, including tertiary activities, such as domestic trade, that are sometimes overlooked. There is plentiful material on external economic relations and the banking system. A pleasing feature of the discussion of state finance is the attention given to subnational elements. Nor does Spulber overlook the development of non-Russian parts of the tsarist empire and Soviet Union.

What general conclusions does Spulber reach? First, that the tsarist economic effort was impressive, thanks in particular to the stimulus of foreign capital investment, but that no significant progress occurred in agriculture before 1917. Second, that the Soviet economic effort bore some of the hallmarks of late tsarism, particularly the emphasis upon heavy industry, albeit with much more rigorous instruments of state control. However, whereas total output in the late tsarist economy grew rapidly, the late Soviet "war economy" failed to capitalize on its earlier momentum during the 1930s and 1950s; by the 1980s systemic deficiencies in the centrally planned economy had become deeply entrenched. Soviet Russia also ran a sizable budget deficit. Finally, the story of the 1990s is one of falling output and real incomes, the rupture of established economic links, and the growth of barter. Economic power is now vested in the old *nomenklatura*, whose members took advantage of privatization to reinvent themselves as business and media moguls. Spulber keeps an open mind about the future, but he sketches a scenario in which Russia follows a Latin American-style development, comprising highly unequal income and wealth distribution, capital flight, and economic stagnation. These are not particularly original or contentious conclusions, to be sure, but they rest on the solid foundations of the author's empirical research.

I can only applaud the clever way in which Spulber has compressed so much material into a relatively short space. Inevitably, however, in such an ambitious and wide-ranging book some issues have been neglected or accorded insufficient treatment. These include the impact of the Stolypin reforms on land tenure and the role of Russian cooperatives in different periods. Labor productivity, technological change, the quality of entrepreneurship, and environmental degradation scarcely get a mention. Nor does Spulber offer an explanation for the immediate collapse of the tsarist regime in 1917 and

the Soviet regime in 1991, or deal more generally with various forms of resistance to the state. The Khrushchev and Brezhnev eras get short shrift. I was also surprised that he did not make more of Tatiana Zaslavskaja's famous critique (in the *Novosibirsk Report*) of the late Soviet economic system. Finally, there is only the briefest explanation for the persistent development gap between Russia and the West. Insofar as Spulber ventures an opinion, it seems to be that successive Russian regimes have failed to put in place a proper legal framework for secure economic activity, preferring to retain vestiges of traditional autocratic governance.

This book will be especially suitable for use in graduate seminars in social science and will also benefit advanced undergraduates. The index is unhelpful, and there is no bibliography. The footnotes surprisingly omit any reference to the work of Eugene Zaleski, Holland Hunter, Alec Nove, R. W. Davies, and other pioneers, although Alexander Gerschenkron and Paul Gregory do receive honorable mentions. Spulber does, however, turn to some often overlooked sources. Prerevolutionary Russian units should have been converted into standard metric measures. Such complaints aside, this book is an impressive achievement, the culmination of a lifetime's reading and reflection on fundamental—and in some instances, unresolved—issues of Russian economic development.

Peter Gatrell is professor of economic history at the University of Manchester. His books include The Tsarist Economy, 1850–1917 (1986) and A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I (1999). His most recent book is Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in the Former Russian Empire, 1918–1924, coedited with Nick Baron (2004). He has recently completed an economic and social history of Russia during World War I. His survey, "Economic and Demographic Change, 1900–2000: Russia's Age of Economic Extremes," is forthcoming in The Cambridge History of Twentieth-Century Russia.