men suffer from the caprices of arbitrary wage differentiation, while women are condemned to structural wage differentiation (p. 145). The workers are under intense surveillance from the employer, who prefer to hire outsiders and to hire "casual workers" so as to avoid the surveillance of the state (which might work to the benefit of labour). For the workers, debt is a political instrument, often (as indicated by the historiographical literature) under the control of an overseer. On the political front (and in line with the recent work of G.K. Lieten on West Bengal), Breman notes that the communist regime in Bengal would not countenance the brazen extra economic coercions that have become commonplace in Gujarat, dominated as it is by the theological fascist ensemble of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

In Breman's account, merchant capital does not control the production process (itself controlled by imperialist forces) nor does it attempt to transform the process itself, "but rather preserves and retains it as its own precondition".[3] Those who hope that the "reforms of 1991" will transform India into a "maxi-dragon" might consider these words from Marx which are well elaborated in Breman's book. For the World Bank and the IMF (which Che Guevara called the "watchdog of the dollar"), Breman's book offers an indictment of their crop of analysts whose blindness to the fundamental realities of our world is in inverse relation to the power they wield.

Vijay Prashad

LEWIN, MOSHE. Russia/USSR/Russia. The Drive and Drift of a Superstate. The New Press, New York 1995. xiv, 368 pp. $30.00.

As historiography on Soviet Russia moves towards completing its transformation into what could be called a "normal" historiographical field, with a "normal" availability of primary sources and a "normal" historiographical debate, the need for interpretation does not seem to be losing its centrality. On the contrary, amid the abundance of archival evidence which has enriched research into Soviet history in recent years, strong interpretative ideas are essential in order to make sense of what sometimes seems to be a *mare magnum* of illuminating contributions.

Russia/USSR/Russia, Moshe Lewin's latest work, is a reconstruction of the Soviet historical experience from its beginnings, free from the chronological constraints of a conventional "History of the Soviet Union". It is organized around some broad analytical cruxes and contains sixteen essays (some of which have been previously published) in which we find some of the traditional conceptual elements of thirty years of scholarship devoted to the Soviet system: a system considered as a historical phenomenon of an original kind and worth being studied as such. Moreover, new issues have been included in an innovative research perspective: Lewin does not just re-examine the Soviet experience in the light of its downfall, he also reflects on the demise of the Soviet Union as a scarcely unpredictable event, as an enduring process whose seeds were sown in the making of the Soviet system itself. The making and the unmaking

[3] Karl Marx, *Capital* (London, 1981), vol. 3, p. 452.

of the Soviet system thus emerge as intertwined phenomena in an overall retrospective inquiry into the Soviet experience. It is an experience deeply marked by some "burdens of history", as the author defines the elements which have accompanied the transformation of Russia from a *muzhik* country to an urban power and the change in the relationship among these main partners: peasant society, the state, the bureaucracy. In this context Lewin conceives the dualism between a weak society and a strong state as a basic and persistent feature of the Soviet system in its transition from an agrarian despotism imposed on a slow-moving rural society to a powerful bureaucratic state ruling over an increasingly urban society.

As in Lewin's other previous studies, the main focus of his analysis is the pre-Second World War period, and in particular the fifteen years from the civil war to the first five-year plan: the two "system makers" which shaped the main features of the Soviet entity. But while in some of his previous studies, especially *Russian Peasants and Soviet Power* (1968) and *The Making of the Soviet System* (1985), he focused on inquiring into the genetic crisis of the system, here he emphasizes some of the principal long-term traits of Soviet Russia. The influence of the civil war on the development of Soviet society and the transformations of the "rural nexus" are two closely related "burdens of history", a traditional theme in Lewin's works which is further considered and developed in this new book. His writing is persuasive in describing the civil war years as an age of simultaneous dissolution and archaization of Russian society, marked by "phenomena of morbidity" (p. 47) and resulting in a polarization of the two main components of the new social fabric: the peasantry more "ruralized" than before ("an ocean of small family farms, mostly oriented toward family consumption", p. 65); the party's body militarized and highly centralized while rapidly moving on a collision course with the countryside. The emergence of the Soviet state in this context ("on the basis of a social development in reverse", p. 48) appears to be the main result of the period, and it opened the way to a new version of the Russian "peasant nexus", from the Tsarist agrarian kingdom to the "agrarian despotism" of post-collectivization Russia, by "imposing on a slow-moving social system a violent industrialization drive" (p. 83). It was a transition marked by the dominance of the pace and tasks of development, by the hypercentralization of state *apparaty*, by the exacerbation of the internal incoherences of the old system through the traumatic imposition of a new one (Lewin refers here to Trotsky's concept of "combined development"), a transition whose effects were to remain as the principal features of the system even after the urbanization of Soviet society following the Second World War and the transformation of Stalin's agrarian despotism into a "command-administrative system".

The statism of the Soviet system represents the other main focus of this book. It is seen as the basic trait of the Soviet Superstate (conceived as a bureaucratic entity of a historically new kind) and as a broadly explicative element, essential to understanding a wide range of phenomena (from economic planning to the nationalities policy). From the genesis during the first five-year plan of a bureaucratic system that rapidly became "the arena and the substitute for 'economics'" (p. 279), up to its final collapse, the Superstate is analysed not only in terms of its historical elements, but also as a breeding ground for a bureaucratic cadre that was to become one of the three layers in the social

landscape of the post-industrialization USSR (together with the peasantry and the mass of new workers), and as a testing ground for its different development phases. Especially interesting from this point of view are the essays on "Stalinism and bureaucracy" and on the limits peculiar to the Bolshevik perception of the bureaucratic state. Lewin underlines the strong contradiction which marked the relationship between the Stalinist regime and the bureaucratic *apparaty*. A relationship trapped by the simultaneous presence of two conflicting forces: on the one side the overgrowth of party and state *apparaty* as an unavoidable result of growing Stalinist centralization; on the other the urge to control, limit and eventually repress the expanding power of the bureaucracy as a consequence of Stalin's omnicomprehensive state-security strategy. Lewin, referring to Weber's analytical tools, places this contradiction inside the broader sphere of the general conflict between state bureaucracies and dictatorial despotism. This leads him to interpret the purges as "the ultimate weapon", used by a Stalinism entrenched in its own "institutional paranoia" (p. 200) against the expansive power and growing consolidation of the bureaucratic *apparaty*. It was a weapon whose effectiveness was to prove very narrow, since after the death of the dictator (and the removal of the "big obstacle to the transformation of the upper layers of bureaucracy into a ruling class", p. 187) the power of the consolidating bureaucracies survived as the main attribute of post-Stalin Russia.

Lewin lays much emphasis on the analytical feebleness of the whole Bolshevik leadership with regard to the qualities of the state they were ruling, and to the bewildering poverty of their interpretative tools (which continued to consist simply of blaming the Tsarist past or the social composition of the *apparaty*). Even Trotsky and Bukharin, who still provided some insights into these points, did not go beyond a weak perception of this issue: the former by underlining the process of merging the party with the state; the latter with his final vision of a bureaucratic nightmare, though Bukharin was confused in his persistent faith in the vitality of the "New Economic Policy".

This stimulating inquiry into the contradictions of the birth and early development of the Stalinist Superstate sheds new light on the demise of the Soviet system too. First, because Lewin places at the centre of the whole Soviet experience the problem of leadership. It was a problem not only in party terms, but, as Lewin demonstrates, because of the unstable ways in which the ruling classes of the Soviet state were formed during and after the Stalinist period. Second, because Lewin also underscores the strong lack of leadership ability, as a result of which, in the long run, the ruling classes could not avoid failing to find solutions beyond the hypercentralization of economic management and the paradoxical depoliticization of society. Within this perspective, Lewin describes the downfall of the USSR as a global crisis of *démesure*, the natural death of a modern-archaic system by "an overdose of its own essence" (p. 290), enhanced by the inadequacy of its ruling classes to cope with the growing complexity of the present.

Unfortunately, together with these very effective insights into the whole Soviet historical experience, the book has one regrettable weakness. Here and there, the reader may have the gloomy impression that the author is engaged in a kind of dispute somewhat removed from the historiographical rigour of his past and present scholarship. Even though Lewin's frequent emphasis on the non-socialist

character of the Soviet state can obviously be shared by others, it seems to refer to discussions that are outdated, thanks principally to research like Lewin's own. The appendix on the extent of the Gulag is a case in point. Instead of a much-needed contribution to our comprehension of one of the chief but less studied issues in Soviet history, Lewin simply disputes the figures proposed by other scholars on the inmates and victims of the Stalinist camps. Nonetheless, *Russia/USSR/Russia* will rightly be hailed as another major piece of research by one of the leading scholars in the field. As a means of understanding one of the crucial periods of this century, it has much to recommend it.

Andrea Romano

CLARKE, SIMON, PETER FAIRBROTHER, [and] VADIM BORISOV. The Workers' Movement in Russia. [Studies of Communism in Transition.] Edward Elgar, Aldershot [etc.] 1995. v, 431 pp. £49.95.

This volume is a systematic presentation of a vast amount of data, much of it collected directly through interviews and direct observation, about three major sections of the new Russian labour movement, from its origins in 1989 until the end of 1994. It offers detailed accounts of the workers' committees and the Independent Miners' Union (NPG) in the Kuzbass (with some discussion of the national and other regional unions); the Sotsprof confederation of unions, both its national level and its primary organizations (with special attention to the First Moscow Watch Factory and the Moskvich auto plant); and the Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Unions, also at various levels.

The authors' stated purpose might appear modest: "Not so much to provide an explanation [. . .] as to provide some evidence on which to base further discussion of such explanations" (p. 1). However, this is a valuable and quite unique book. It is all the more remarkable in view of the difficulty of systematic data collection in the chaotic conditions prevailing in Russia, and in its labour movement in particular.

The book's title, however, is somewhat puzzling, as it implies that the "traditional" unions inherited from the Soviet period are not part of the workers' movement, even though they were and remain the principal labour organizations. Despite their numerous shortcomings, they are no more detached from their membership than, for example, the national Sotsprof or even the national NPG, as it eventually evolved. Politically, the "traditional" unions have shown more independence than the "alternatives", despite the authors' claim that they continue "to be bastions in defence of whoever happens to be in power" (p. 406). Their political independence was most pronounced in the crisis of September 1993, which surprisingly is barely mentioned in the book. The "alternatives" supported Yeltsin's coup, which ushered in a presidential autocracy, while the "traditional" federation, at least until Yeltsin's threat to dissolve it was really felt, defended the constitution and parliamentary democracy.

This book is really the story of the failure of the "alternative" labour movement. It was not an unmitigated failure, but by the end of 1994 these organizations were clearly only marginal elements in the labour movement and, except for the air traffic controllers (and a few other transport-related unions not covered in the