Editor's Note

Welcome to SPSR’s first issue of 2021, a year during which I am sure you will agree with me the world hopes to return to a semblance of normalcy after an unprecedented year of crisis and challenge. This issue includes four articles along with the same number of book reviews as the journal begins its forty-eighth year of publication.

This issue’s first article is a Russian language contribution by Professor Arsenii V. Starkov of the International Center for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences of the National Research University Higher School of Economics (Russian Federation). Entitled “Борьба с антисемитизмом в советском тылу в начальный период Великой Отечественной войны, 1941–1942” (The Struggle against Anti-Semitism in the Soviet Home Front during the Initial Period of the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1942), Starkov argues that the outbreak of the Great Patriotic War (World War II) led to an unprecedented evacuation of the Soviet population to the East as well as a significant growth of social conflicts. This article analyzes the reasons for this phenomenon and is based on the materials of judicial investigative cases of the Chelyabinsk (a city and region of the same name that are now located in Russia) Regional Court. Starkov examines conditions of socio-political instability in the Chelyabinsk region and concludes that mass anti-Semitism required severe punishments. This analysis allows for new conclusions regarding the role of the Soviet state in relation to the so-called “Jewish issue” during the Second World War.

“A Fly in the Soup: Gibberish in Russia as Aesthetic Defiance” by Professor Irina Dzero of Kent State University (United States) is this issue’s second article. Dzero explores the world of gibberish, which is defined as unintelligible sequences of letters or words in today’s Russian language culture. Gibberish is omnipresent in slogans, media, satirical songs and poems, films, and novels. Dzero argues that the appeal of gibberish and its repression by Soviet and post-Soviet officials is rooted in the belief that art and word have the power to influence people and events. Dzero’s article reveals that gibberish eludes the grasp of state censorship while also building communities of resistance and spoiling the authoritative discourse of officialdom.

Our third article of this issue is a translation (by Professor Richard Bland of the University of Oregon, United States) of a Russian language article by
Professor Andrei V. Grinëv of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University (Russian Federation) entitled “Is Democracy Possible in Russia?” Professor Grinëv discusses the question of why a Western-style democracy has not been created in Russia. According to Grinëv, the prerequisite for the formation of a democracy is the domination of small and medium-sized private property by a middle class. Grinëv contends that Russia has never known full-fledged democracy, and its current political system only imitates it. Additionally, Russia’s recent attempts to enter the trajectory of democratic development have failed. Grinëv argues that the blame for this failure lies not only with the current Russian leadership, but also with the West.

The fourth and final article in this issue is “A Soviet Ethnic Cleansing? The Polish-Soviet Population Exchange and the Making of Modern Ukraine, 1944–1947” by Dmitry Halavach of the Higher School of Economics of the International Centre for the History and Sociology of World War II and Its Consequences (Russian Federation). Professor Halavach examines the population exchange between Poland and the Soviet Union in 1944–1947 and its role in the evolution of the Soviet nationality policy during and immediately after the Second World War. Halavach also investigates the factors involved in the formulation of Soviet nationalities policy and then assesses how people on the ground made sense these policies. In addition, this article reveals that the Soviet party-state was ambivalent about its Polish ethnic minority, which in turn encouraged members of this group to leave the Soviet Union due to poor living conditions, fear of Sovietization, and ethnic conflict.

It is my hope that you will enjoy this first issue of 2021.

Christopher J. Ward
Editor-in-Chief