Editor’s Note

As I write this Editor’s Note, Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine is about to enter its seventh month. I and many others who work in the Soviet and post-Soviet studies communities continue to be shocked and disappointed by the barbarity and wanton cruelty of this senseless war. It is difficult to watch events from afar that have a direct impact on so many colleagues and friends in both Ukraine and Russia without feeling a sense of despair and concern for the future. Not a day goes by that I do not hear of the death, injury, or displacement of a colleague’s family member or friend as Russia’s remorseless campaign against Ukraine’s sovereignty continues. However, I take some solace in the knowledge that the war will eventually end, and that someday the region will know peace.

On a happier note, I am pleased to share the contents of this issue of SPSR, which includes five articles and a pair of book reviews. Our first article is “Performing Inventiveness: Industrial and Technical Creativity in the USSR, 1950s–1980s” by Elena Kochetkova of the Higher School of Economics (St. Petersburg). Kochetkova examines the phenomenon of Soviet industrial and technical creativity from the late 1950s to the 1980s. Her article argues that the Soviet system placed labor creativity into the center of industrial development and own vision of progress seeing it as a resource for technological competitiveness from Khrushchev’s unmet goal to attain communism to the era of Gorbachev’s perestroika.

This issue’s second article is “Истребительные батальоны НКВД в западных республиках СССР: процессы создания, способы комплектования, особенности применения” (NKVD Extermination Battalions in the USSR’s Western Republics: Formation Processes, Staffing Methods, Features of Use) by Timofey D. Medvedev of the Institute of Soviet and Post-Soviet History (Moscow). Medvedev examines the formation and activities of the extermination battalions of the People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the USSR between 1943 and 1945. This article’s emphasis is on the battalions’ participation in the re-Sovietization of those territories within the USSR that were liberated by the Red Army. This article focuses on stories related to the reconstruction of fighter battalions as well as the social and personnel composition of these groups. Medvedev also identifies the activities of the nationalist underground within the Soviet Union during the Second World War.
Next in this issue is “Невыносимость подполья: Коллективное самоубийство староверов-странников в межвоенной Вятке” (Unbearable Catacombs: The Collective Suicide of the Old Believers-Wanderers in Interwar Soviet Vyatka) by Igor Kuziner of the Higher School of Economics (St. Petersburg). Kuziner examines the life of a local preacher who was the initiator of the wave of voluntary deaths in the city of Vyatka. This article argues that the Vyatka Wanderers were pressured by Stalin’s social and religious policies to the point that they found themselves unable to continue their lives under such a harsh regime.

This issue’s fourth article is “Future Citizens or Useful Workforce? Finnish Immigrants and the Communist Party in Svirstroi, 1931–1934” by Jesse Hirvelä and Ira Jänis-Isokangas, both of the National Archives of Finland (Helsinki). Hirvelä and Jänis-Isokangas focus on the construction site of Svirstroi (located in northwestern Russia) and the activities of its Finnish immigrant population. The organization of work and political education of these illegal immigrants was delegated between the OGPU (the predecessor to the NKVD mentioned, above as well as the KGB), the Communist Party of Finland, and the Bolshevik Party. Hirvelä and Jänis-Isokangas’ examination of the history of Finnish immigrants and communists sheds light on the history of minorities within the GULAG (state prison) system.

The fifth and final article in this issue is “Жилищная проблема и реэвакуация населения в Москве, 1942–1948 гг.” (The Housing Problem and the Return of Evacuated Civilians to Moscow, 1942–1948) by Vladislav Tiurin of the Institute of Soviet and Post-Soviet History (Moscow). Tiurin’s article analyzes the housing situations of those Soviet civilians who returned to Moscow after being evacuated from the city during the Second World War. Employing archival sources, Tiurin examines the magnitude of the city’s housing problem and from a legal and social perspective. He argues that although the authorities initially protected the vacant apartments of evacuees, they later began to move new residents into empty apartments despite the legal challenges of the now returned evacuees.

I invite you to enjoy this latest issue of SPSR.

Christopher J. Ward
Editor-in-Chief