had begun even before the accession in November 1918 of Admiral Kolchak to the office of “Supreme Ruler” and the role of Commander-in-Chief.

The author’s real contribution to our understanding of this era in Siberia is his elucidation, from his own experience and from his experienced selection from the written recollections of others, of the reasons for this defeat. While the story will undoubtedly be amplified by him as he pursues his researches at the Hoover Institution Library or by others, he has given us a convincing, rewarding, and even in some respects penetrating account of this episode. He conveys a sense of the strong feelings which impelled him and his associates to oppose the Bolsheviks, whom they regarded as a counter-revolutionary force and as the negation of all they stood for and wanted to realize for Russia. Their tragedy was that, while they sought to avoid the extreme solutions of both right and left and considered a middle ground as entirely attainable, they were unable to summon the collective resolve and organizational drive necessary to attain their goal. In the course of their decline, they fell prey to some of the very evils they had found objectionable in their enemies.

John A. White
University of Hawaii


The Russian peasant commune has been the subject of extensive recent investigation in the West, but less so in the Soviet Union. Moshe Lewin’s Russian Peasants and Soviet Power is a landmark of early Soviet history; Theodore Shanin’s The Awkward Class is well known by peasant specialists as well as Russian historians; works of Male, Solomon, Gill, Yaney, and Davies have all contributed to our understanding of the legislation and policy debates as well as the internal dynamics and political role of the mir, both before and after the revolution. With the exception of Danilov, and of earlier work by Anfimov and Dubrovskii, Soviet historians have added little to our understanding of the commune in late Imperial Russia, and even less on its functioning during and after 1917. The most interesting Soviet work has been based on estate records from the pre-reform period, notably the monographs of Alexandrov and Prokof’eva, as well as articles by Zyrianov. Now we have a lengthy attempt at synthesis by Dorothy Atkinson, the result of more than a decade of work which began with a doctoral dissertation at Stanford University.

In a nutshell, The End of the Russian Land Commune is an intelligent, informative work of institutional history, integrating pre-revolutionary and contemporary research, sifting through reams of statistics on landholding and usage, crop yields and demographic changes to arrive at cautious, unsurprising, but reliable conclusions on the basic dynamics of the peasant commune between 1905 and 1929.

The book is divided into five parts (nineteen chapters with subdivisions). A brief introductory section on the historical evolution of the commune is followed by a discussion of the Stolypin reforms, a description of the commune during the revolution and period of war communism, and a lengthy final section on the commune during NEP and the inception of collectivization. A particular merit of this book is to bridge the divide between pre- and post-revolutionary periods, and to show the considerable degree of institutional continuity in the history of the commune. Moreover, the author provides a useful account of the evolution of institutional relations in the countryside in the twenties, and of the course of the growing struggle over agrarian policy during NEP. It is her
judgment that the basic rupture in village life took place in 1929 rather than in October 1917. As Atkinson notes: "The monarchy, the Church, and even the family had to greater or lesser degrees been institutional casualties of the revolution. Only the commune survived intact." We might add the bureaucracy as another "survivor," but the point is well-taken.

There are few original conclusions in this book, and nothing to surprise the specialist. Occasionally, Atkinson belabors the obvious as when, discussing the peasant movement of 1917, she asserts that "land was most frequently seized in areas of acute land shortage." It would be easy to breeze over such a densely packed and tightly constructed analysis with the comment that the author adds little new to what is already known. Yet her careful study of the data is both useful and informative; though yielding few striking conclusions, she does much to clarify knotty factual problems, lays to rest many lingering disputes, and confirms arguments previously asserted, but never conclusively demonstrated.

Only a few examples can be offered here. Her painstaking analysis of the Stolypin reforms indicates that even in 1916 communal land tenure retained a firm grip on the countryside, that it was largely smallholders (rather than kulaks) who were purchasing private land, but also that where separations and consolidations took place "the picture that emerges from the sources is not one of policy introduced at bayonet point." She demonstrates that the commune remained the dominant institution in the villages throughout the revolutionary period, controlling the land committees and holding its own against the Kombedy. Like Male, she finds the rural soviet no match for the commune in the twenties; understaffed, underfinanced, and overcentralized, the soviet set down no roots and evinced little interest among the population, while the commune continued to decide vital issues of daily life. Atkinson also attacks the thorny issue of just how much land the peasant gained by the Revolution; using the research of Danilov, she concludes that the conventional figure of 150 million desiatinas should be reduced to 97, or even to 72 million, and that on a per capita basis this amounted to as little as one-tenth of a desiatina in certain regions (up to 2.5 in others). On the destruction of the commune she proposes the interesting notion that the Party finally managed to penetrate the solidarity of the old village by forcing quotas through the mechanism of the commune, requiring the gathering to decide who would bear the brunt of state demands, thereby fracturing village solidarity.

Another virtue of the work is its encyclopedic approach. Most issues pertaining to the agrarian problem find a niche in this volume: if the student wants a concise description of the complex Stolypin legislation; an introduction to the views of Marxists, Populists, and Liberals on the land question; a summary of the policies of the Provisional Government or of early Bolshevik legislation; a precis of the agrarian debates of the twenties—he should begin here.

I found Atkinson's discussion of the era of collectivization the only disturbing chapter. Perhaps because she was trying to be impartial, she waffles on the most important issues. To what degree did anti-kulak resolutions have a popular component, she asks. In some areas, where social differentiation was advanced, they had broad support. Elsewhere, peasant attitudes toward the kulak were ambivalent, fluctuating between envy and admiration. Thus, the war in the countryside was a Party assault on the village, but also a result of the collision of values within the breast of the individual peasant. Elsewhere she notes that "the collectivization movement that swept the countryside in late