With this book, Siegelbaum has established himself as a major voice in revisionist scholarship in Soviet history. In his discussion of the cult of the Stakhanovite, the Great Retreat values of the later 1930s, and various aspects of labor technique within the factory and mine, Siegelbaum follows the lead of Moshe Lewin in arguing for, as Siegelbaum puts it, a model of Soviet history stressing "state-society interpenetration" rather than the more one-sided totalitarian model of complete state control and mastery over society. In his stress upon the state's struggle (however misconceived and ultimately counterproductive) to gain control over its cadres, Siegelbaum also shares the concerns of revisionist scholars like J. Arch Getty and Gabor Rittersporn. If Getty's and Rittersporn's main interest is with center-periphery struggles within the central and regional network of the Communist Party, Siegelbaum's primary focus is upon the struggle between the central authorities and industrial cadres, a struggle, moreover, which is a central part of the background to the destruction of those cadres in the Great Purges.

Siegelbaum has made a significant contribution to the history and historiography of the 1930s. However, two small notes of criticism are in order. Siegelbaum has a tendency to shy away from the full development of certain issues and topics such as in his discussion of the role of improvisation in the politics of Stakhanovism (p. 123) and the transition from Stakhanovism to police terror (pp. 142-44), leaving the reader wondering about further documentation and argumentation. Siegelbaum also falls somewhat short of bringing the actual Stakhanovites of the Stakhanovite movement to life. While Siegelbaum treats the politics of Stakhanovism on an exceptionally high level, he is less successful in presenting the reader with a picture of the everyday world of the Stakhanovite. Here, a more creative use of the voluminous memoirs of Stakhanovites, which are fully employed for other purposes in this study, would have been appropriate.

However, these two points of criticism are indeed minor and do not detract from the tremendous contribution and extraordinarily high level of scholarship which characterize Stakhanovism and the Politics of Productivity.

Lynne Viola


Surely everyone in every field of Russian studies speculates occasionally about Stalin. What would we give to have the sort of information about him that we possess for Franklin Roosevelt, for example? But speculate we must, so the issues for anyone writing about Stalin become the weight and credibility assigned to the scattered accounts by those who knew him, or
claim they did, and the approach taken. Writing essentially from a Freudian perspective and drawing on a wide body of primary and secondary sources, Daniel Rancour-Laferriere has produced a highly personal and provocative excursion into Stalin's mind. The discussion ranges over such topics as "His Special Interest in Feet," "The Homosexual Element," and Stalin's identification with Hitler.

The bulk of the material Rancour relies upon will be familiar to those who have read even moderately widely about Stalin. The author's contribution is to have unearthed some rare materials and, much more important, to have assembled considerable testimony in a powerful theoretical framework. Whether one accepts the central analysis depends on one's view of Stalin, the course of Soviet history, and psychoanalysis. Some of those who appreciate theoretical psychobiography will find Robert C. Tucker's reliance on the work of Karen Horney and Erik Erikson more persuasive.

The book's personal references, for instance the asides on Rancour's dreams and his father's steel crutch, may bother some readers. But the author argues effectively that such points are germane to a psychoanalytic approach. Rancour has the courage to discuss his personal involvement in his subject, something most of us probably seldom confront. Nevertheless, I do not agree that those who are seriously interested in Stalin "feel a need to be" him "because we perceive a bit of ourselves" in him. The first idea does not necessarily follow from the second.

There are some other difficulties. After raising the issue of Anton Antonov-Ovseenko's reliability—which has been very seriously challenged by others—Rancour proceeds to rely on his book for a number of the juicier items denigrating Stalin. Alexander Orlov was generally in Spain, not the USSR, in the 1930s, and his work too is suspect. The emphasis on Stalin's psychological makeup to explain events occasionally leads the author to offer a twisted, personal motivation for the general secretary's decisions where a more ordinary, straightforward one is much more likely. Thus Stalin wanted to control Eastern Europe after World War II, Rancour suggests, because of his penchant for controlling everything. But surely any leader of a devastated country would have ardently desired to control a buffer zone in a similar situation; the French also tried to create one in the same area after 1918. Rancour attaches great significance to the fact that the USSR was often called a motherland (rodina) but the Second World War became the fatherland (otechestvennaia) war. This he ascribes to Stalin's childhood, when his father beat his mother (and him) frequently. Thus for the dictator mothers were beaten, fathers beat, and he readily identified with the latter. Perhaps, but of course the war against the French in 1812 was also an otechestvennaia voina, so that it was perfectly logical to name the conflict with the Germans in the same way. Stalin's hatred of homosexuals and scorn for women were very widespread male traits then—and remain so. Other examples could be given.