The aim of Lewis Siegelbaum's new book is to provide an interpretive overview of the period between the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 and Stalin's radical "offensive along the whole front" in the late 1920s. Organized chronologically, this book examines a wide range of topics: class outlook (primarily peasants, workers and intelligentsia), ideological developments (debates over industrialization and agrarian policy), power politics, conflicts over marriage and religion, and nationality questions.

The book is also meant to serve as a summary of current debates and a guide pointing to useful fixture research. The achievement of the book is to show, in a way that narrower monographs cannot do, how all these various processes interacted. Take, for example, the discussion of "making workers productive." Siegelbaum first looks at the attitudes of the workers themselves: shop floor culture as well as conflicts within the class. Productivity was also affected by the relations of the workers to other classes, particularly the peasants streaming into town and the specialists with their ambiguous authority.

Attitudes toward the workers played a large role, especially the Party's continual reminders of what might be called "the proletarian's burden" of class rule. In organizational terms, this resulted in a "historic bloc that consisted of the Stalinist secretarial leadership of the party and primarily young, male and ethnically Russian industrial workers," based on an "ideological cement" of anti-bureaucratism (pp. 183-84). Finally, Siegelbaum sketches the enormous objective difficulties inherent in raising productivity. All this in only eight pages! Another virtue of the book is that Siegelbaum has chosen to let us see something of the process by which a historian arrives at a position: choosing between rival accounts, keeping an ear open to developments in the Soviet Union (as it then was), advancing an academic agenda (in this case, a particular brand of social history), while remaining alert to the political implications of his interpretation. All this may add somewhat to the engaging clutter of the book, but I think this dialogic style is all to the good. The pose of an authority making weighty pronouncements ex cathedra is no longer useful (if it ever was) in promoting academic debate. Given the book's historiographic scope, the footnotes alone make fascinating reading for the specialist. (A technical criticism: because the references are often bunched together in one footnote citation at the end of a paragraph, it is sometimes difficult to match citation and source.) One striking pattern that emerges is the division between works on political and economic questions of the NEP period versus works on "social" topics. Judging from Siegelbaum's references, there was a cut-off point sometime in the early 1970s; before this point there was little done on social topics, while after it serious research on strictly political or economic topics dwindled away. (An interesting exception to this pattern is religion, a social topic which the younger generation of social historians has not yet found congenial.) The significance of this academic generation gap is often exaggerated by angry polemics, but Siegelbaum
shows in practice that a useful synthesis requires the labors of more than one cohort of scholars.

To employ a useful term from the Soviet period, Siegelbaum’s critical but nonpartisan attitude toward his academic colleagues has great *vospitatel’nyi* significance (or in plain English: he sets a good example). I assume this book will quickly become core reading for graduate students in any Russia related field. Siegelbaum’s dialogic style has a bearing on his book’s possible classroom use for undergraduates. Students will not receive cut and dried truths from Siegelbaum, and this may prove unsettling to some. For a teacher able to adopt a more interactive, hands-on approach, however, Siegelbaum’s book could be extremely valuable in promoting discussion and critical thinking about the status of historical verities.

For those of us engaged in researching and thinking about the pre-Stalin years, *Soviet State and Society* has a special significance as an assessment of the state of the field. It took me a long time to read the book through, because each of Siegelbaum’s formulations was a challenge to reflection. Even when I disagreed, my understanding of my own position was improved by my mental debate with the author. What follows is a summary of one such debate. Throughout the book, Siegelbaum deals with the interaction between overall interpretive commitment and particular fact; he emphasizes that progress is often only possible after changes in our overarching conceptual framework. One crucial framework that is subjected here to critical analysis is the fundamental opposition between “war communism” and NEP. In an early chapter, Siegelbaum calls on historians to abandon “war communism” as an interpretive concept. I agree with this position (as Siegelbaum notes), but I think the results of such a move will ultimately be more far-reaching than are yet apparent. “War communism” works as the complement to “NEP,” and if we discard it or a functional equivalent, major changes in the meaning of NEP are also mandated. This does not come out in Siegelbaum’s book, partly because of the privileged status of 1921 as a turning-point in a whole variety of fields, and partly because NEP is still characterized in large part as a “retreat” (retreat from what?). Even without the term “war communism,” therefore, we still are basically in the grip of a narrative that portrays the state as taking over more of society than it can handle in the pre-1921 period, retreating during NEP and advancing to stay in the Stalin period. Siegelbaum reveals his unhappiness with aspects of this overall narrative; he insists on the indeterminacy of the period and the necessity of regarding “the constituent groups of Soviet society not merely as objects of official policy but as collective subjects” (p. 226). The overall structure of the book, however, works to reinforce the retreat metaphor. Let me give a concrete instance where the overall narrative orders the facts in a way that is far from compelling. In the midst of an excellent section on “religion, anti-religion and double faith,” Siegelbaum writes: “Toleration of the national Church was a function of the retreat initiated by the state in 1921 but delayed in this case by two years.” He immediately introduces a further modification of the retreat metaphor by noting that “this retreat, as the others, had its limits” (p. 159). But does even a modified retreat formula really fit