

their respective national contexts. Does this reflect the lack of importance of the Brussels Solidarność office or is it the result of the strict national approach taken by the studies? These issues would certainly merit greater consideration in a follow-up study.

The national approach taken by the current volume also has important advantages, however, such as the opportunity to zoom in on smaller national initiatives and particularities that might otherwise easily be ignored. Some authors inevitably have to start with a lengthy introduction to national trade-union history, and unfortunately this sometimes causes the reader to get lost in a jungle of abbreviations (always a danger with volumes of this kind). On the other hand, this provides the space to explain the importance of domestic circumstances in assessing Solidarność. It was not only general fears of endangering détente that played a role, so too did very national factors such as comparisons with the national experience (as in Spain (José Faraldo)) or fears of large waves of refugees in Sweden and Austria. The national approach prevents sweeping statements and leaves the recognition of generalizations and particularities largely to the reader, guided, of course, by the useful directions provided by Goddeeris.

This introduction and the strict parameters of the volume – the reactions of west European trade unions to Solidarność between 1980 and 1982 – make *Solidarity with Solidarity* remarkably coherent. The chapter on Austria is the odd one out in that respect. Rathkolb points to the role of domestic issues and détente considerations in determining support for Solidarność, but in his eagerness to discuss the political landscape that influenced the decision-making process he seems almost to forget the trade unions.

Solidarity with Solidarity is an excellent international inventory of current national research on Western trade union support for Solidarność, providing scholars with a clear overview while at the same time qualifying a number of entrenched myths. Above all, it leaves us with more inspiring questions to answer and connections to analyse.

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WARD, CHRISTOPHER J. Brezhnev's Folly. The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism. [Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies.] University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh 2009. x, 218 pp. Maps. \$50. (Paper: \$ 24.95.); doi:10.1017/S002085901100037X

Christopher Ward's book about the construction of the Baikal–Amur Mainline (BAM) was a long-anticipated study for those interested in the social aspects of the Brezhnev era in Soviet history. The construction of the railway, stretching several thousand kilometres across eastern Siberia and the Far East, went down in Soviet history as the last grandiose project of socialism. Although construction began in the 1930s, BAM attained genuine fame in 1974–1984, when it became a symbol of late socialism.

Ward's book consists of seven parts. The introduction tells the back story of the railway construction, and describes the intentions of the authorities and the importance that was attached to the project in the 1970s and 1980s. In this part the author briefly describes the main features of the project, stressing BAM's importance to the Soviet leadership. The second chapter focuses on the environment, particularly the birth of an environmental movement on BAM in the period of late socialism. The author discusses the policies of the Soviet leadership and local authorities in regard to the natural resources of Siberia and the Far East, particularly emphasizing the movement to protect Lake Baikal. The third chapter

documents crime and corruption on BAM. Ward is interested in the whole range of illegal activities recorded in the reports of local police departments, as well as the efforts of construction bosses to fight crime in the BAM zone. In the following chapter, Ward looks at the position of women on BAM, emphasizing the discrimination they suffered from both management and the predominantly male workforce. The fifth section of the book is devoted to nationalities policy on BAM. The author attempts to follow the logic in recruiting Komsomol youth brigades from Soviet republics to work in the construction zone. He notes the discrimination against “non-Slavic nationalities” and sees this as a typical example of nationalities policy in the USSR as a whole. The sixth chapter covers propaganda projects during the construction of BAM. Ward recounts trips abroad by BAM workers to propagandize about the project outside the USSR and the practice of using foreign workers on the BAM project. In the conclusion, the author sums up the results of the BAM project, calling it “the stage for the final act in the drama of Soviet state socialism”.¹

Ward’s book is not the first attempt to describe Soviet society through the prism of socialist construction projects. Stephen Kotkin’s work, about the Magnitogorsk Iron & Steel Works, demonstrated the possibilities of such an approach.²

The difference between Kotkin’s and Ward’s studies is not only in the thickness of the volumes, but in that the former sees social relations, the organization of the day-to-day life and work of the construction workers as informative sources that can help explain the peculiarities of Stalinist civilization (the flesh and bone of the system), while for Ward they are only of secondary interest. He is concerned with how Soviet society in the Brezhnev era met the challenges of the time when tackling the important issues of the day. Socialism, according to Ward, was a propagandized ideal and the construction of the railway served as the manifestation of this ideal.

Conceived as a case study on the history of life in the Soviet Union, Ward’s BAM becomes a condemnation of Soviet civilization, which is incapable of providing equal gender rights, resolving ethnic problems, eliminating crime, or protecting the environment. Chapters devoted to the practical aspects of life on BAM have a similar structure. They begin with a description of how a given issue was depicted in Soviet propaganda and end with a contrasting depiction of the harsh BAM reality. Ward argues that the declared goal of building “the society of the future” on BAM was not achieved, leading him to conclude that the project was a failure.

The first question that comes to mind concerns the criteria for measuring the success of a given project. Can the construction of an industrial asset be assessed exclusively on the basis of its ideological component? Ward thinks so, as the construction of a new society on BAM was, in his view, the main goal of building the railway. Evidence of this is cited in the introduction, where the author refers to the volunteerism of Brezhnev, who was trying to use another giant project to strengthen his position and distract Soviet youth from protest moods by proposing to build the society of the future.³

It is difficult to dispute that BAM served the needs of Soviet ideology. But to what extent was this purpose paramount compared to the other goals of the project? This question is fundamental, since otherwise it is unclear why the Soviet government would close its eyes

1. Christopher J. Ward, *Brezhnev’s Folly: The Building of BAM and Late Soviet Socialism* (Pittsburgh, PA, 2009), p. 155.

2. Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization* (Berkeley, CA, 1995).

3. Ward, *Brezhnev’s Folly*, pp. 1–11.

for over ten years to a society of the future that did not want to be built. Ultimately, even Khrushchev's "Virgin Lands" campaign lasted for just a few years. It seems to me that it was not just a matter of Brezhnev's stubbornness, but something else.⁴ I, personally, agree with the sceptics who have argued that the railway was being built for strategic reasons, and the goals of building the society of the future and developing Siberia and the Far East only accompanied and obscured this primary purpose.⁵ There are several arguments to support this view.

First of all, the construction of the railway coincided with the escalation of tensions with China. The Soviet side could have easily seen the Sino-Soviet border clash at Damansky Island in 1969 as the first portent of a looming conflict. This is apparently why the eastern section of BAM, from Tynda to Sovetskaya Gavan, was built by soldiers, who were not primarily motivated by notions of building the society of the future. The use of forced labour (though conscripts, not prisoners of the Gulag as in the Stalin era) seems absurd at a time when the country was building a new version of socialism (otherwise, how was it new?), but it is quite understandable if one is talking about the rapid construction of a railway with the available resources and using familiar "technology."

Secondly, the production objectives determined the nature of the project: BAM was split into jobsites, the main worker collective was the production crew (unlike the brigades formed by the Komsomol at rallying points), the labour code determined working time, wages were paid in line with current regulations, the foreman had more influence than the Komsomol organizer, and so on. In this sense, BAM was no different from dozens of other projects, except that BAM was huge and the Komsomol took a hand in recruiting, among other things. But this also was not unique if one recalls the other Komsomol youth construction projects of the time, such as the Kamaz auto plant in Naberezhnye Chelny or the Leningrad dam. BAM was supposed to be built by professionals, the shortage of which was to be made up by young people. The Komsomol youth shock brigades (be it the 17th Congress Komsomol squad or the Moscow and Leningrad Komsomol brigades) made up a small part of the professional teams that built roads, tunnels, and bridges.⁶ Thus, the management of state trusts working on BAM preferred to recruit workers themselves rather than trust the "builders of the future" sent by the Komsomol. Otherwise it would seem that the authorities tried to make "new Soviet people" primarily out of Siberian residents with work experience and a high skill level.

Furthermore, virtually until the end of construction of the railway, BAM management did not see migrants as potential settlers for the new frontier. The writings of project ideologists testify to this,⁷ and it is confirmed by the fact that virtually no special steps were taken to develop the BAM corridor until the adoption of a programme in 1987.⁸

4. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

5. Marius J. Broekmeyer, "Some Questions Concerning the Construction of the BAM", *Sibirie: Questions sibiriennes* (Paris, 1985), pp. 315–320.

6. A.N. Frolov, "Formirovanie trudovykh kollektivov na stroitelstve BAMA (1974–1984)" (Ph.D., Novosibirsk, 1991), p. 15.

7. V.P. Chichkanov, "Formirovanie trudovykh resursov v raionakh novogo osvoeniya", in A.G. Aganbegian and A.A. Kin (eds), *BAM: Pervoye desyatiletie* (Novosibirsk, 1985), p. 162.

8. R.A. Tsykunov and G.P. Vlasov, "Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie problemy istorii khozyaystvennogo osvoeniya regiona BAMA (1970–1999)", *Baikalo-Amurskaya zheleznodorozhnaya magistr'al na territorii Buryatii: Istoriya stroitelstva, ee rol v khozyaystvennom osvoenii regiona* (BNTsSORAN, Ulan-Ude, 1999), p. 101.

The directors of state trusts tried to retain workers until construction of the railway was finished and reported on the number of renewed contracts, but did not promise “manna from heaven” in the form of subsequent provision of housing. BAM did not have a common housing stock. Companies built temporary housing for their temporary workers. Only a few of their worker settlements became permanent and the responsibility for their development, including infrastructure and housing construction, ultimately lay on the shoulders of regional party committees, who as per their obligations, shared resources with the new BAM settlements. Railway workers, who would replace the construction workers, were supposed to live on BAM.

Thus, the logic of the decision to build BAM in the period of late socialism lay in the fact that the Soviet leadership needed the railway itself, and only later – in spite of or because of this – everything else, including socialism, which, as everybody knows, had already been built in the USSR. An analysis of the reasons for building BAM is just the tip of the iceberg, but this knowledge can explain the specifics of the project. The railway was not being built to manifest the idea of socialism, but rather socialism was reformed for the sake of building the railway. This would explain why the Soviet leadership decided at this time in particular to concede many changes in the system of labour organization and social relations, be it cost accounting or contract services. Subsequently, these innovations, first tried on BAM, began to be used widely throughout the Soviet Union, and in the Perestroika era they were seen as a hope for successful economic reform.

Ward is correct in that propaganda played an important role in the presentation of the project, but it did not try to deceive the reader, hiding the “real truth” about BAM, as much as it served another purpose. No-one tried to hide the fact that life would be difficult on the BAM project. This was why one should want to go there. More importantly, it showed how BAM workers should view BAM: how one should face difficulties, and deal with ethnic minorities, the gender issue and the environment. The things it tried to teach do not seem contentious.

Pursuing his mission to debunk Soviet propaganda, Ward does not see in BAM the distinct reality that BAM veterans recall in their memoirs, recount with pleasure in forums and write books about.⁹ While not disputing the conclusion that a new socialist society as pictured in Soviet newspapers was not built at BAM, I do not agree with the author that the community of BAM workers was therefore more asocial and crime-prone compared with communities elsewhere in the Soviet Union. In interviews collected for a recent project by a group of researchers from the Independent Sociological Studies Centre and the Oral History Centre at the European University in St Petersburg,¹⁰ former BAM construction workers consistently assert that one of the distinctive features of life on the railway was the “transparency” of the BAM way of life, where the relatively small population, living in common tents and working in teams, created a special environment. Therefore, without idealizing BAM, the workers said that their BAM experience had had a positive impact on their lives. In their recollections and observations, BAM veterans make the exact opposite conclusion from Ward, asserting that they, unlike most Soviet people,

9. BAM: Geroi svoego vremeni (St Petersburg, 2010), available at <http://bam.railclub.ru/forum/index.php>.

10. Independent Sociological Studies Centre and European University in St Petersburg Project (2006–2007), “BAM: Vzglyad iz stolitsy. Istoriya poslednei stroiki sotsializma” (supported by ACLS), Oral History Centre Archive, European University in St Petersburg.

actually “lived under Communism”. Stagnation, in their view, was noticeable “on the mainland”, but was not felt on BAM, with its special wage system (wages on BAM were far higher than in the country as a whole), access to scarce goods, and distinct organization of life in a youth subculture. Confining his investigation to a few expert interviews, Ward distances himself from the accounts of BAM veterans, which seems particularly strange given that these people, according to the author’s notion, were supposed to embody the end result of this project.¹¹

Ward’s book is the first serious study of BAM to emerge in recent years, and as such it is not immune to the shortcomings typical for a trailblazer. BAM is huge, both in space and time, so it is evident that the wealth of available sources (even excluding the fact that a great deal is locked away in Russian archives) created a problem with the conceptualization of the topic and, ultimately, with selecting the subject of research. Soviet socialism of the 1980s, as the main leitmotif of the book, ultimately remains a question mark for the reader.

It is extremely difficult to judge the benefits or shortcomings of the decisions made by the Soviet government and BAM management without comparing these decisions with the ideas articulated at the time in other countries. Particularly if the author attempts to pass judgment on them. Even when immersed in the wealth of details about the birth of the environmental movement in the USSR, it will be unclear whether the “socialist” approach to protecting the environment was any different from the “capitalist” one. This is lacking in Ward’s book and the reader is asked to take the author’s word for it that protecting the environment the Soviet way was ineffective.

In other words, the way that Ward has chosen to frame the conversation about BAM and Brezhnev-era socialism severely limits the possibility of understanding Soviet society of the 1970s and 1980s. The many details about life on the BAM project with which the book is packed constitute a valuable collection, but they cannot prove or disprove the author’s value judgements, as expressed in the book’s title.

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11. Of the eleven subjects interviewed by the author, only four were people who had worked on BAM; Ward, *Brezhnev’s Folly*, p. 182.