

From the Editor:

Slavic Review publishes letters to the editor with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph; comment on an article should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. The editor encourages writers to refrain from ad hominem discourse.

D.P.K.

To the Editor:

I write concerning the review of David Hoffmann's *Peasant Metropolis: Social Identities in Moscow, 1929–1941* (Winter 1995). I would not otherwise write but for the nature of one of the criticisms. Hoffmann is faulted for failing to use more extensively various *svodki* on popular mood produced by government institutions. This insistence on *svodki* as the benchmark of popular attitudes misses much of the value of Hoffmann's book and represents a commonly held attitude that this source can serve as the silver bullet to solve all our questions about Soviet history. I found one of the best features of Hoffmann's book to be his portrayal of how people actually lived and experienced the Stalinist system. He creatively resorts to many forms of documentation usually eschewed by historians of twentieth-century Russia: interviews, folk songs, factory archives, and newspapers. He did so, I suspect, not because he conducted his research "astride the old and the new Soviet history," but because he sought to reintroduce Soviet citizens' own subjective experience to a history sorely lacking precisely that feature. And, despite our much-celebrated access to these materials, *svodki* cannot do precisely this. While *svodki* contain much useful material, they nevertheless remain documents generated as part of a larger surveillance project. To rely on *svodki* for our understanding of popular attitudes is ultimately to rely on the GPU-OGPU-NKVD for our source selection. Hoffmann's attempt to supplement the regime's own view of society with other source materials is thus a welcome step forward in our field.

PETER HOLQUIST
Cornell University

To the Editor:

The review of David Hoffmann's *Peasant Metropolis* (Winter 1995) is detailed and no doubt considered, but it might help to inform readers by providing them with a clear statement of the author's thesis. Hoffmann argues that workers adapted to new environments and negotiated with the Communist Party by a combination of old and new devices. Much as workers carried *zemliachestva*, *arteli*, and kinship networks into cities and their workplaces in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, so, under Soviet power, did they take advantage of very similar institutions, which provided order and security to a group that most writers at the time and historians ever since have described as disorderly. In this manner, Hoffmann explicitly challenges the image of urban Russia during the first Five-Year Plan as "chaotic" and "elemental," arguing instead that workers combined "labor" and "peasant" cultures with facility. In addition, workers could draw on the superficially pro-labor rhetoric of the new leadership to insist on dignified treatment and better conditions, thereby reversing the otherwise unidirectional flow of commands and deflecting the escalating demands of their employers.

YANNI KOTSONIS
New York University

To the Editor:

I was disappointed by Andrea Graziosi's review (Winter 1995) of David L. Hoffmann, *Peasant Metropolis*. The book is an important contribution to the field because it offers an exhaustively researched, detailed, and sophisticated account of the experiences of

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peasants who fled the village for the capital during a period of unprecedented social change. Aside from failing to acknowledge the book's many merits, the reviewer levels a series of criticisms that strike this reader as unfair. There is nothing contradictory about Hoffmann's claim that peasants were driven from the villages by the trauma of collectivization, on the one hand, and relatively good factory wages, on the other (it was the crisis in the countryside that made an urban existence preferable, even though conditions in the towns were also deteriorating). Hoffmann's skepticism about the effectiveness of Stalin's harsh labor laws is also entirely justified. While no one would deny that many thousands of workers were punished for infractions of "labor discipline," the chronic shortage of skilled labor and constant pressure to fulfill the plan fostered an informal system whereby factory directors and workers effectively colluded to circumvent the regime's *ukazy*.

JEFFREY J. ROSSMAN
University of California, Berkeley

To the Editor:

Andrea Graziosi's review of David Hoffmann's monograph, *Peasant Metropolis* (Winter 1995) does a great disservice to potential readers of this work. While zealously criticizing isolated aspects of the work, it seems that Graziosi mistakenly believes that a cursory listing of chapter titles is a substitute for a reviewer's presentation of an author's argument. The result is an unbalanced review that barely hints at the contents, let alone the strengths, of Hoffmann's work. One can only hope that readers will find out for themselves how Hoffmann imaginatively blends sources such as oral history and *chastushki* with an impressive archival source base to produce an important contribution to our knowledge of the 1930s and Soviet urbanization.

MAURICIO BORRERO
St. John's University

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to Andrea Graziosi's review (Winter 1995) of David L. Hoffmann's *Peasant Metropolis*. Hoffmann has written an excellent, innovative study that deserves fair treatment. Unfortunately, the review contained little that was fair or knowledgeable. For instance, the reviewer claims that Hoffmann's understanding of the famine of 1932–33 is based on a single newspaper article. In the first place, the article in question was written by V. P. Danilov, not a journalist. Moreover, this note was but one of ten references on the famine. There was, however, little reason for the reviewer to broach the topic, because few migrants to Moscow were fleeing the famine regions. As passing acquaintance with demography would lead one to expect, most migrants to Moscow came from the Central Industrial region. Similarly, the reviewer should have known that migration involves both "push" and "pull" factors. It is not contradictory, as he accuses Hoffmann, to cite both types of factors as being important. Migrants in fact were living in a world of relationships, not abstract dichotomies. Graziosi claims Hoffmann "uncritically" relied on Soviet memoirs, when nothing could be further from the truth. Hoffmann's treatment of such sources is a model of circumspection, which is balanced by extensive use of émigré interviews found in western repositories and interviews he himself conducted with former workers in the *perestroika* period. It would be a shame if this review misled scholars regarding Hoffmann's fine book.

ROBERT ARGENBRIGHT
University of North Carolina, Wilmington

Professor Graziosi replies:

I am honored to see my review greeted by five letters of protest. And I am heartened to notice that most of the dissenters do not contest any of my specific criticisms and limit themselves to vaunting the book's presumed virtues. Holquist: I thoroughly agree with the necessity to *critically* use the *svodki*, but this implies *using* them. I do not share instead his admiration for Hoffmann's recreation of the "Soviet citizens' own subjective experience." A few *chastushki*, some doctored "autobiographies," an unsystematic oral history project, and a sprinkling of newspaper articles (a notoriously problematic source) will not do. Kotsonis: I have very little to answer except to say that the assertion that people "negotiate" with power (and other social groups, sexes, age cohorts, parents, neighbors et al.) "by a combination of old and new devices" is a platitude valid