

*Class Theory and History: Capitalism and Communism in the USSR,*

by Stephen Resnick and Richard D. Wolf.

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reviewed by Michalis Hatziprokopiou\*

Resnick and Wolf, both Professors of Economics at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, have produced an interesting and ambitious piece of work on the birth, rise and fall of the Soviet Union. Fundamental to their analysis is their conception of class, which is built on the concept of social organization of surplus. The book consists of three parts.

In Part 1 the authors develop their own version of class analysis for the nature and the dynamics of an economic formation, including a communist economic system. The cornerstones, on which traditionally the concepts of socialism and communism were constructed, were two. First, a society characterized by collectivity, implying communal rather than private forms of ownership and collective rather than private cultural, political and economic decision making hegemony. Second, a classless society conceptualized in terms of ownership of the means of production and/or power over wealth, the means of production, income distribution, bureaucracy, culture etc. Consequently according to the traditional view elimination of private property and/or acquisition of political power by the workers was identical with the abolition of capitalism. At the same time socialization of the means of production and democratic distribution of power was a necessary and sufficient condition for the elimination of the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production. The result was the withering away of the state in a world of plenty. Socialism and communism, as distinct economic systems, were understood in terms of income distribution, according to labor contribution and to needs respectively.

As far as communism and the USSR are concerned, the analysis proposed by Resnick and Wolf is non-deterministic, meaning rejection of the idea that the revolutionary action of the proletariat is the inevitable outcome of the workings of laws governing capitalist society. Consequently, the analysis does not end in conclusions that class was the only determining factor in the birth, rise and fall of the USSR. It is eclectic, in the sense that it selects and emphasizes aspects and relationships over-

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looked by other analytical approaches. A corollary of the non-deterministic approach is the relative autonomy of the superstructure in relation to the economic base or more generally: the interdependent and interactive character of all forms of social relations.

The basic analytical tool adopted by Resnick and Wolf is their conception of the social organization of surplus, i. e. the production, appropriation and distribution of surplus. Accordingly, the workers produce more than the goods corresponding to their necessary labor. The rest is the surplus, which is received by the same group or is appropriated by a distinct social group. The receiver or appropriator of the surplus then decides on its distribution inside and outside the group. This type of class analysis concentrates on the social groups producing, appropriating, distributing and receiving the surplus. It concentrates also on the interdependence of those groups; on the possibility of simultaneous existence of multiple social organizations of the surplus; on the interaction of class and non-class processes (property, markets, planning, power, politics, culture etc). The authors argue that the absence of those class elements from communist theory and practice after Marx led the labor movements which came to power to travel the wrong path in relation to the transition process from capitalism to communism.

In a communist class structure the surplus producer is at the same time also the surplus appropriator. In a capitalist class structure the appropriator is different from the producer and so the first exploits the second. Communist class structures can exist side by side with a very wide range of different non-class processes. Therefore, communist societies, according to Resnick and Wolf, may exhibit a wide range of non-class political, property or economic coordination forms, which may range from full democracy to clear despotism, from extremely collective to completely private ownership, from fully centralized planning to perfectly competitive private markets. This implies the existence of an infinite number of communist structures, corresponding to all possible combinations between class and non-class structures. It implies also that specific combinations may initiate a transition process from one class structure to another. Finally it implies that any class structure including a communist class structure displays its own distinctive contradictions. Contradictions, in other words, characterize not only exploitative but also non-exploitative class structures.

In the case of exploitative class structures the surplus is produced by slaves, serfs and proletarians and is appropriated and distributed by slave-owners, feudal lords and capitalists respectively. In the so-called ancient class-structure, the same individuals produce, possess and individually distribute surplus, so the ancient class-structure is not exploitative. The communist class structure needs something more than the coincidence of surplus producers and surplus appropriators. This is collective production, collective appropriation and collective distribution of surplus. But since such a struc-

ture is not classless there are struggles over the size of surplus and its distribution to workers, the state and party apparatus and the communist subsumed classes (lawyers, teachers, entertainers, security personnel etc.). Distribution aims to secure those non-class processes of social life that induce, inspire or compel laborers to produce surplus. Communism like all other social systems can display an extremely wide range of variations. The variations come out of different combinations of the communist class structure with the infinite number of non-class process of social life. Examples of these variations are combinations of a communist class structure with private ownership of the means of production, undemocratic distributions of power and/or competitive markets. The point is that changes in these non-class processes may generate struggles induced by new kinds of contradictions. They may not, however, necessarily affect class structures or any other aspects of the society in any particular way. Some of the contradictions will sustain and some will undermine the coexistence of communism class and non-class elements. Laws securing the equality of distribution, introduction of regular rotation of all individuals in and out of communist class positions, requirement from each communist enterprise to distribute some of its surplus to a central fund to sustain the unemployed are examples of political and cultural processes containing the new contradictions. It is not guaranteed, however, that the co-existence of communist class structures with non-class elements will survive the contradictions and struggles developed. The end result may be the modification or even the collapse of the communist structure or the elimination of the non-class elements (private ownership of the means of production, unequal distribution of power, market competitiveness, degree of centralization, level of technology, size of the productive units).

There are also an infinite number of paths of historical development flowing from the variation of the non-class processes, the contradictions within and between the communist fundamental and subsumed class processes and the contradictions between the communist class structure and the no class or non-communist processes that comprise its social context.

The authors define socialism as a form of capitalism. Societies in which capitalist class structures prevail inside productive enterprises and few, if any, communist class structures exist anywhere. Historically socialist societies are conceived as societies with an increased degree of state intervention, a high priority for social welfare. They are less frequently seen as societies of a transitional nature between capitalism and communism. A distinction is made between first, a socialist and second, a communist dictatorship of the proletariat. The first would exist when the state is committed to goals other than communist class and classless structures (state management, regulation and intervention in the economy, social welfare, income equality, mass democrat-

ic political participation). The second would exist when state power builds and extends communist class structures and promotes the abolition of all forms of class structures. Each one has a repressive attitude towards social groups opposing their goals.

In Part II the authors develop an analysis of a capitalist class structure in its private and state forms. Like communism, capitalism has an infinite number of variant forms. They are generated by the combination of capitalist class structures with a variety of non-class processes. Such processes include a wide range of institutional arrangements concerning: centralization or decentralization of surplus production, appropriation and distribution; distributions of ownership between workers and surplus appropriators; coordinating mechanisms of the economic system; distributions of power; forms of enterprise management and control. The analysis, however, is focused on two particular forms of capitalism: state and private capitalism. State and private capitalism are defined according to the social group having control of the surplus appropriation and distribution processes. Crucial in the distinction between state and private capitalism is the nature of the surplus appropriators: state officials or individuals. State capitalism is characterized by the coexistence and interaction of a capitalist social organization of surplus on the one hand, and processes in which state officials possess a class position, as appropriators and distributors of surplus on the other. In this case state and party officials determine the size of the surplus by setting commodity values and wages, allocate inputs and outputs and establish priorities with respect to production and the social organization of surplus. Their rationale is to maintain and strengthen the class structure generating the surplus. To this task, state and party officials set priorities with respect to investment in productive capacity and social capital, and support of the party, state, police and military apparatus.

In Part III the authors, building on the above arguments, claim that in the Soviet Union there was never any attempt to establish communism as a class or classless structure on a society-wide basis. The October revolution simply replaced private with state capitalism and this form prevailed from that time on.

The authors argue that in pre-emancipation Russia one half of the serfs were working at state-owned farms, while the other half were working at private farms. Thus, in feudal Russia there was a coexistence of private and state feudalism. Feudalism, like any other social system, exhibited a wide variety of forms. Besides private and state, defined according to the ownership of land by landlords or the state, the authors distinguish between urban and rural, enterprise and household, centralized and decentralized, agricultural and industrial feudalism. Contradictions between private and state class structures, especially contradictions arising from the distribution of power between lords and the crown, intensified the degree of exploitation of both private and

state serfs. Serfs delivered surplus labor or its product individually or collectively as a village to the landlord. The surplus was distributed among the lords of various ranks including the Czar, the church, the state, the police and military apparatus, creditors, servants, teachers, etc. The lord provided the land and sometimes part or the totality of the means of production. He provided also security and protection. Russians, however, occupied multiple class fundamental positions. At the same time they could be surplus producers and surplus appropriators. The head of the household produced surplus appropriated by the lord but at the same time he appropriated surplus produced by his wife and other members of his household.

Feudal class structures co-existed with ancient class structures for many centuries in Russia. The pre-1861 class structures inside households were not affected by the emancipation. The 1861 serf emancipation initiated a process of transition from feudal to ancient class structures outside households in both agriculture and rural and urban handicraft industry. So after 1861 the ancient class structures co-existed with capitalist and feudal class structures in the agricultural, craft and industrial sector. Individual peasants cultivated their own piece of land and appropriated the surplus they produced. They also distributed it to the council of the village elders, the state in the form of taxes, the church in the form of contributions and the ex-land owners in the form of redemption payments. Many Russians occupied *class fundamental* positions. A great number of them occupied *subsumed and non-class* positions as well. They received income from distributions of portions of the surplus from the appropriators and not from any direct involvement in surplus production and appropriation (village moneylenders, merchants, governments). They occupied also non-class positions (employees of moneylenders, merchants and governments). There was a multiplicity of ancient class structure contradictions and tensions culminating in struggles: over periodical land redistribution among the ancients; taxes due to - and services expected from - the state; state-support to landlords and capitalist industry; redemption payments of the ancients to the landlords; quantity and quality of the surplus produced within the ancient, feudal and capitalist class structure; intensification of exploitation for subsidizing the growing industrial sector and facing the rising military, police and administrative costs; distribution of the appropriated surplus among capitalist appropriators and subsumed classes and among class structures, especially between private capitalism and village ancients.

The unresolved contradictions, sharpened during the First World War, led to the revolutionary explosion of 1917. The authors argue, however, that the contradictions were conceptualized by the revolutionary Russian vanguard not in class, i. e. social organization of surplus but in non-class, i. e. economic, political, cultural terms. Therefore a class revolution never occurred in the Soviet Union. What actually happened in

the Russian case was a replacement of private capitalism by a form of state capitalism in which the welfare and workers' rights commitments were very strong. Surplus was produced at many sites but it was appropriated and distributed centrally by state and party officials and not by the collective of the workers. These processes did not proceed smoothly but due to the development of internal contradictions were marked by difficulties, setbacks and crises. The debates and struggles of the 20's did not touch the issue of surplus organization. The discussion of the transition to communism was restricted to the generalization of state ownership and the replacement of the market by the plan. The two conditions were considered necessary and sufficient for attaining communism, i.e. production according to ability and distribution according to needs.

War Communism, the period of civil war and foreign invasion in the Soviet Union, had some striking characteristics. Nationalization of the means of production in the industrial sector; abolition of private markets, commerce and money; administrative allocation of inputs and outputs; centralization of industrial production in newly established state enterprises; requisitions (administrative and coercive mechanisms of surplus extraction); intensification of agricultural surplus extraction to finance rapid growth of the industrial sector and to support the state, party and managerial bureaucracy. The authors argue that war communism was an unusual kind of emergency state capitalism since surplus production continued to be carried out by the working class while surplus appropriation and distribution was a matter concerning party and state bureaucracy. The party and state bureaucracy, more specifically the Supreme Council of National Economy, which was later reorganized as the Council of Ministers, acted as a board of directors of a private capitalist industrial giant. The Council of Ministers initially took control of selected strategic economic sectors but gradually it embraced the whole industrial sector. In the late 1920's the Council undertook direct control of the agricultural sector as well. The Council of Ministers distributed part of the surplus to finance state capitalist subsumed class positions working for the preservation of the Council's role as surplus appropriator and distributor. Such positions had to do with legislative and judicial institutions, the economic planning apparatus, enterprise managers on the local and regional level, the Communist Party and police apparatus, military and police forces etc. The struggle to establish and sustain the non-class structure described above produced new contradictions and strains, which at times developed into active struggles. The primary contradiction during and after War Communism was the one arising from the multiple class character of Soviet society. It was the contradiction between the industrial sector, dominated by state capitalism, and the agricultural sector, dominated by private ancients and small capitalists, over surplus extraction and distribution. In addition to the antagonism between industry and agriculture other contradictions developed as well. There was a conflict between state

capitalist appropriators and capitalist subsumed classes over various issues such as: centralization in decision making; pressures for surplus production; the chaotic conditions of state industry; surplus distribution among class and non-class fundamental social groups. The combination of class struggles and struggles over non-class processes, over power allocation and prestige on bureaucratic levels, and over power distribution among different ethnic, religious and regional populations, etc created a potentially explosive social mixture.

Lenin responded to the contradictions of War Communism by the New Economic Policy (NEP). The NEP led to the growth of a small-scale private capitalist class structure in agriculture. Ancients, who failed in their farming activity, were obliged to sell their land to successful farmers and move to the urban centers or remain in the country and sell their labor power for survival. New legislation allowed successful ancients to use wage labor and lease new lands. They had under the NEP the opportunity to distribute portions of their surplus to buy or lease more land and to invest in animals and equipment. Thus, they raised their production and their tax contributions to the state and they eased their pressure on women and other members of the household to produce feudal household surpluses. On the other hand the NEP generated a growing tension between the capitalist farmers and the agricultural proletariat. Generally speaking the NEP raised questions about capitalist revival in agriculture and debates over the proper economic and political strategy of Soviet social development. Distinct paths towards socialism were adopted by the three wings, right- center- and left-wing of the Bolshevik Party. Trotsky and Preobrazhensky, the most prominent figures of the left-wing opposition, advocated rapid rates of growth of the 'socialist' sector with priority given to heavy industry at the expense of agriculture while Bukharin, the main exponent of the right-wing opposition, favored a more balanced development of industry and agriculture. Stalin on the other hand, as the leader of the center, had no clear position until the end of the 1920's, when he actually adopted the Trotskyist strategy.

It was mentioned above that one of the greatest dilemmas faced by the Soviet leadership was related to the extraction of agricultural surplus and its distribution among different recipients. To this purpose requisitions were extensively used during War Communism. During the NEP period price policy was the main instrument for extracting agricultural surplus, necessary for financing industrial development. More specifically Soviet authorities manipulated the terms of trade between industry and agriculture. This manipulation resulted in what came to be known as the 'scissors crisis'. High prices of agricultural relative to industrial products would have as a consequence retardation of industrial growth and industrial labor force expansion, and possibly an increase in the degree of workers' exploitation, which would cause polit-



ically undesirable discontent in the ranks of the working class. Low relative prices for food would intensify exploitation of the ancients and small capitalists in agriculture and cause alienation of the peasants, undermining the political alliance between workers and peasants on which the Soviet revolution was based. Over the entire NEP period the price scissors, the ratio of agricultural to industrial prices remained more or less open at the expense of agriculture. The relative index of this ratio fluctuated between 34 and 90 in 1923-1924 and 1928-1929 respectively, compared to 100 in the prewar period. The difference in relative prices of industrial and agricultural products did not develop smoothly. In 1922, just after the end of War communism, there was a scissors crisis in industry in the sense that the terms of trade had substantially improved in favor of agriculture. The result was a decrease in state revenues and the surplus appropriated by the state, an increase in raw material expenditure and a pressure on wages to rise. The Council of Ministers overreacted to this situation and so another scissors crisis, in agriculture this time, developed in 1923. The state intervened again and the terms of trade started improving for agriculture in 1924. The oscillation of the terms of trade continued, although the scissors were closing more and more until 1928-1929 under the pressure of ancients and Nepmen. The NEP reestablished private markets in an effort to expand marketed supplies of grain and agricultural raw materials. The NEP also kept state-administered prices below those of the private market to avoid hurting the real wages of urban workers, which were already low since the state tried to maximize profits through low labor cost in order to increase the surplus of the industrial sector. The pricing policies of the NEP period generated contradictions and tensions among private ancient and small capitalists and the way out for the state was collectivization of agriculture.

By the late 1920s the Bolsheviks had managed to bring under the control of the party surplus appropriation and distribution of the industrial sector. In the agricultural sector private ancient class structures prevailed initially and later, in the years of the New Economic Policy, small capitalist farming developed to a great extent. Forms of production inside the household did not change and so the class structures in this domain remained feudal and ancient. Collectivization eliminated small capitalists and ancient farmers and multiplied private *collective and state farmers*. The majority of ancient and capitalist farms were replaced by private "collective farms" through persuasion or open coercion. A minority of peasants found employment in state farms, where agricultural workers produced surplus appropriated and distributed by state officials. Kolhoz (collective) or Sovhoz (state) farms were much more subordinated to state control than ancient and capitalist farms. Collectivization was not a smooth process. Peasant resistance to the transformation of class structures was keen and bitter. Ancients and small capitalists suffered a lot and the destruction of production,



animal stock and agricultural equipment by the peasants were common phenomena. But despite the cost collectivization was a fact and many of the Kolhoz farmers collectively produced, appropriated and distributed their surplus. Collectivization was thus the first and only mass introduction of a form of communist class structures in the Soviet Union. Curiously enough it occurred in agriculture, not industry, and in the 1930's, not during the revolutionary decade after 1917. The authors suggest that according to the evidence many collective farms sooner or later lost their communist character. This happened when a specific subgroup replaced the totality of members in their role of surplus appropriators. Ancient class structures survived through the allocation to the peasants of the so-called 'private plots', where the members of the collective produced agricultural products on their own, sometimes at the expense of their collective. This type of ancient production proved to be very important in difficult times because it saved urban and rural population from starvation.

The new policy sought to manage the basic contradictions within state capitalist industry and between industry and the more complex class structures in agriculture so as to maximize the growth of surplus. The hunger for revenue of the Soviet leadership - obsessed by heavy industry priorities - led to the continuation of the price scissors policies between industry and agriculture. But now the victim of unequal exchange would be the largely communist agriculture and not the ancient and small capitalist farmers. The rapid expansion of industrial state capitalism was achieved at the expense of the only widespread Soviet communist structures, the collective farms. Other policy measures of the Soviet leadership weakening the communist class structures in agriculture were first, the resumption, under certain conditions, of local private markets, and second, the allocation of small pieces of land to the peasants for private production. These two policies eased the burdens of intensifying the surplus extraction from collective farmers, or in other words they allowed the state to extract more surplus from agriculture. On the other hand the state gave the opportunity to collective farmers to rent tractors from the machine tractor stations (MTS). The positive effect of this measure was a rise in agricultural productivity while the negative effect was the obligation to the collective farmers to deliver a portion of their surplus to the state for using the tractors. The state also sent to the countryside thousands of young and enthusiastic party cadres to familiarize the peasants with communist ideas. Their contribution was remarkable in building up communist class structures in the collectives. But the young enthusiasts undermined the communist structures by extending to agriculture the spirit of state capitalism already dominating industry. Another characteristic of Soviet development in the 1930s was the rapid growth of a female labor force in industry and agriculture and the greater burden falling on women's shoulders, having

to produce surplus in different sites - inside the household and outside of it, in the factory or on the farm.

The existence and reproduction of the prevailing social formation made the presence of a huge body of unproductive laborers, involved in the party, police, military, cultural, planning and managerial apparatus necessary: party officials to oversee all aspects of social life, mobilize resources and especially labor, mitigate excesses and diffuse official policies among the masses; police to discipline society; the army to defend the USSR and secure its international status as a great power; educators to train youth and artists to motivate endorsement of the official path to a modern communist society; planners to direct the flows and exchanges among industrial and agricultural enterprises; managers to employ more machines and workers. The combined effects of the cultural, political and economic processes comprising the Soviet model enabled the class structure in Soviet industry and agriculture to yield industrial growth. That is why the Council of Ministers distributed a remarkable portion of surplus to the state and party bureaucrats providing these processes. The new contradictions included; tensions between private and state markets; ancient, state capitalist and communist structures in agriculture; men and women inside as well as outside household; consumption and capital accumulation; productive and unproductive labor; labor intensity in industry; consumer goods and heavy industry; and so on. The contradictions and their interaction resulted in a fragile social organization. The tensions were approaching crisis proportions, which provoked state and party intervention starting from propaganda and reaching the limits of demonizing all actual or potential critics of official policy on class structures or any other social aspect of the Soviet regime: political, economic, personal, religious, ethnic, regional, cultural. Stalinism's chief result in class terms was to solidify the overwhelming predominance of an expanding industrial state capitalism in the USSR. On this basis, Stalinism modernized industry, organized a massive state bureaucracy, built an army able to stop Hitler, inaugurated an ambitious social welfare program of collective consumption, and froze its politics and culture into a rigid statism. However, to sustain industrial growth and secure the Stalinist cultural, political and economic processes required expanding surpluses appropriated from state capitalist workers and collective agriculture via unequal exchanges. The state was able to affect the size of the surplus by manipulating the terms of trade between industry and agriculture, wages, taxes and tractor rents, but its ability in this respect was not unlimited. When the Soviet State could not extract the necessary surplus state capitalism collapsed and the process of transition to private capitalism was initiated.

During the 1930's the decentralized state capitalist class structures in the industrial sector were transformed to more centralized forms resembling those of war commu-

nism. The system moved from the numerous decentralized industrial trusts of the NEP period to a relatively small number of officials appropriating surplus. The size of surplus appropriated and distributed grew rapidly over the 1930s due to the intensive and extensive expansion of the industrial sector itself. In the “private plots” the members of the collective farm produced agricultural products on their own alongside or sometimes at the expense of their collective. Industrial development was based on massive capital accumulation and intensification of workers’ exploitation due to managerial pressures on industrial labor and rising productivity after 1934. Real industrial wages, however, fell during the 1930s despite the rise in productivity (shock brigades, competition among workers, increasing production norms, piece wages, the Stakhanovich movement). The wage decrease reflected cuts in consumption of the manufactured goods’ sector and persistent shortages, causing long lines of customers. Industrial real wages fell faster than urban households’ real consumption per capita because of the increase in female employment. Per capita consumption in agriculture seems to have improved after the 1930-1933 decline without reaching the level of the late 1920s.

The Soviet Union came out of the Second World War victorious but the price she had to pay was too high in terms of human and material resources. After World War II, and especially after Stalin’s death, various reform efforts appeared from time to time aiming at the ‘liberalization’ of the economic system. The reforms, however, never challenged the fundamental principles of state capitalist industry. In agriculture the relative importance of state capitalist farms rose vis-a-vis both the collective farms and the ancient class structures on the individual private plots. Lastly households retained their mix of feudal and ancient class structures. After the middle 1970s, unofficial and sometimes illegal enterprises of all sorts, largely organized as ancient class structures, grew quickly and therefore the relative weight of ancient class structures increased.

The postwar Soviet social formation continued to comprise a contradictory complex, in which multiple class structures, inside and outside households, simultaneously supported and undermined one another’s conditions of existence. In class terms there was little difference between the prewar and postwar societies. Both were fragile complexes of class structures caught up in contradictory relations precariously balanced. From the beginning of the 1970s non-class changes altered the balance among contradictory Soviet class structures and mutual support gave way to mutual undermining. Dissatisfaction, resentment, corruption and conflict deepened. Efforts to strengthen the system proved inefficient. The difficulties in raising the size of the surplus in order to meet the continuously expanding requirements of heavy industrial capital accumulation, the superpower status, the state and party expenses and a growing effort to raise collective consumption (housing, education, medical care) were becoming great-

er. At the same time the weakening of the cultural, political and economic influence of Stalinism encouraged the shift toward the personal or 'private' spheres of life. Political developments, after the 1970's undermined state capitalism in favor of ancient class structures and private capitalism inside and outside Soviet households. Alienation from politics was growing in a parallel way with alienation from 'social' production and in general social forms of life. Party-driven appeals for mobilization of labor and campaigns to reduce waste of resources occurred not so often and they were not so efficient as in the past. The cultural turn from public and social towards private and personal concerns changed the balance among the USSR's class structures in favor of the ancient and at the expense of both the capitalist and communist class structures. Rising income and wage inequality after 1975 induced workers to transfer their energy to the non-capitalist class structures of private and often illegal or semi-legal enterprises. The Party could not control these developments in the 1970s and the 1980's. Besides, private consumption in 1985 remained far below that achieved in other capitalist countries like Spain, Portugal and Turkey. The authors argue that the drastic retardation of economic growth, the decline of the Soviet superpower status because of the Afghanistan disaster and the comparison of Soviet and western living standards (cultural, political, economic) turned into a cumulative and unstoppable progress towards disaster.

In a very interesting chapter of the book the authors concentrate on Soviet Union household class structures. More specifically they argue that household class structures changed in some ways while in other ways remained unchanged and they raise the question of how relevant developments were affected by specific policies or the lack of specific policies. Russian women had a long history of replacing men as surplus appropriators inside the household and feudal or ancient farmers outside the household. Especially during the First World War and civil war years women were obliged to act as household heads. After the end of the war women were consciously or unconsciously unwilling to accept their previous politically and culturally subordinated status. This reluctance was one of the main sources of tensions between men and women. After 1917 forms of communist household class structures made their appearance in Soviet society. In these structures production was collective and the producers themselves appropriated the household surplus. A major role in setting up the communes in urban centers and the countryside was played by the revolutionary militants, inspired by the socialist as well as by the Russian religious and cultural tradition. The communist communes did not have the support of the Soviet State. There were no tax policy, subsidies, educational or Communist Party campaigns favoring communes in a conscious effort to strengthen communist class structures in the household. Communist communes were marginal for Soviet society and so they dis-

appeared by the early 1930s. Decisive in the disappearance of communes was the role of “productivist” bias dominating the party thought, according to which social development was a matter exclusively connected with the growth of industry and especially heavy industry. Let us not forget the Bolshevik slogan, repeated in many party congresses and expressing the feelings towards the road to socialism, a road ignoring the surplus approach. “To convert the Soviet Union from a country importing machinery to a country producing machinery”. During the NEP period but also at the end of the 1920s plans for establishing collective institutions to replace individual households were abandoned because of lack of resources and other priorities, inducing Soviet society to traditional feudal structures. This policy had of course social costs: unequal participation of women in Soviet political and cultural life, imposition of patriarchal customs on the development of children, lowering workers’ productivity, etc.

In conclusion, Resnick and Wolf, drawing on their previous work on class analysis, have produced an ambitious and provocative piece of work, which will be much discussed in the years to come. Their theoretically fascinating definition of class, based on the social organization of surplus, i. e. production, appropriation and distribution of surplus, allows them to develop an alternative non-deterministic conception of the social systems (feudalism, capitalism, socialism). Applying this powerful analytical tool to the examination of the birth, rise and fall of the Bolshevik socialist experiment, they conclude that the multiple class structure prevailing in the Soviet Union was predominantly a form of state capitalism. According to Resnick and Wolf and in contrast to the traditional view communist structures in the USSR prevailed for a limited period of time and in agriculture not in industry. In addition to the analytical tool mentioned above the work of Resnick and Wolf benefits greatly from the emphasis on the analysis of contradictions of Russian and later Soviet society. The contradictions gave rise to social tensions and struggles, which played a decisive role in the transformations that took place in Russian and Soviet society. One of the best parts of the book is the chapter analyzing class relations and contradictions inside the household. One may question fundamental parts of the analysis (for example the rejection of power as a determining factor in surplus appropriation and distribution or the communist character of collectivized agriculture etc.) or the results of the analysis but the value of the book cannot be questioned. It is a book that everybody interested in class analysis, social transformation or Soviet history must read.