

Graeme Gill. *Stalinism*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998. Second edition. Pp. xii, 94. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 0-312-17764-X.

Martin McCauley. *Gorbachev*. London & New York: Longman, 1998. Pp. xvi, 343. Paper, \$17.95; ISBN 0-582-215998-6.

These two books examine the history of the Soviet Union/Russia over the last half-century. Their approach is quite different, however. While Graeme Gill in *Stalinism* attempts to study a phenomenon, Martin McCauley focuses his attention on a personality. Thus, it is difficult to assess the books in a comparative manner.

Stalinism appears here in its second edition. The author indicates that he has not changed the arguments that were presented in the earlier volume. In fact, new archival information has been provided to support those arguments. He has added a chapter, however, and updated the bibliography to include material that was not available at the time of the first edition.

The purpose of the book is to address the question of why Stalinism emerged in the Soviet Union. Gill argues that this phenomenon cannot be explained simply as an inevitable result of Russian backwardness, Leninism, or Stalin's personality. While the above factors played a part, none predetermined the emergence of Stalinism. Each contained the seeds of other directions in which the country might have moved. Thus, one has to look elsewhere for an explanation. Gill concludes that there are four "faces" in Stalinism: economic, social, cultural, and political. Since these "faces" appeared at different times, Stalinism did not emerge at a single point in history. The author makes the case that Stalinism was the result of conscious decisions that were made by the Soviet leadership, in particular the "revolution from above" and the terror. While Stalin clearly played an important role in those decisions, they also received support from many others in positions of power. It was the failure to prevent these decisions from being taken that led to the gradual emergence of Stalinism.

Since the purpose of the book is to analyze and explain the development of Stalinism as a philosophy, it does not recount details of the history of the Stalin era. A considerable amount of knowledge is assumed. That understood, the text is clearly written, and the arguments are cogently presented. It is, at times, a bit repetitive as the same information is used to make slightly different points. The analysis, however, is both thoughtful and controversial. One of the most interesting parts of the book is the section that deals with the fate of Stalinism in the post-Stalin era. The argument that the Soviets, and now the Russians, have not come to terms with the Stalinist past is compelling. Gill's conclusion that the attempt at reform under Gorbachev failed because the Stalinist legacy is still too powerful to overcome is disturbing but might well be accurate.

McCauley takes a very different approach in *Gorbachev*. This is neither a history of the Gorbachev era nor an attempt to understand the phenomenon of "Gorbachevism." Rather, as McCauley states in his preface, the history of the period

is used only to "illuminate Gorbachev's journey" through it. Thus, the focus of the book is biographical. The author acknowledges that the information comes primarily from Gorbachev's own writings, supplemented by works by Jack F. Matlock, Jr. and Archie Brown. While these are all credible sources, many other equally valuable voices are included only infrequently or not at all.

Although the book discusses Gorbachev's life prior to becoming General Secretary in some detail, it never really addresses the question of what influences in his early years predisposed Gorbachev toward reform. Likewise, it does little to expand our understanding of why perestroika failed. The only clear reasons given for the failure of reform are that Gorbachev did not really understand economics and that he did not pay sufficient attention to the nationalities question. While these are certainly part of the explanation, other factors surely played a role as well. In fact, Graeme Gill argues that although Gorbachev opened up the Stalinist phenomenon as a subject of discussion, he never helped Russia to come to terms with its past. This is a subject that is not even touched upon by McCauley. Although mention is made of the fact that Gorbachev has remained popular in the West long after his demise in Russia, little attention is given to the reasons for this phenomenon.

In addition to the absence of thoughtful analysis, the McCauley book also suffers from several other defects. The style frequently does not flow smoothly, and ideas are not always logically linked together. In some places the book reads more like a first draft than a finished product. Some topics are examined in considerable detail (the conflict with Lithuania, for example) while others are accorded only passing mention (such as Gorbachev's relations with the media). Glasnost clearly takes a back seat to perestroika.

Stalinism would be a useful book to include in the reading list of an upper-level course on Soviet history. The ideas presented are controversial enough to provide good fodder for class discussion. *Gorbachev* provides some useful biographical information. The account of the attempted coup is especially interesting. The last chapter contains a short analysis of why Deng's perestroika in China has succeeded while Gorbachev's failed. This comparison raises some useful points for further examination. Overall, however, McCauley's book contributes little to scholarly debate on Gorbachev's role in history.

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