

and historical understanding of the Brezhnev years within the broader dimensions of Soviet history and politics.

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USSR: THE POLITICS OF OLIGARCHY. By *Darrell P. Hammer*. Modern Comparative Politics Series. Hinsdale, Ill.: Dryden Press, 1974. xii, 452 pp. Paper.

In the past decade the monolithic model of "totalitarianism" in studies of the USSR has been steadily chipped away by a new generation of Western scholars, mostly American, armed with the tools of behavioral science. Rejecting the monistic arguments of ideological or institutional determinism, the new school has sought, beneath the façade of unanimous conformity in the Soviet polity, evidence to support the conception of a "conflict model," the interplay of "interest groups," or in the work under review, "bureaucratic pluralism."

Professor Hammer, a political scientist at Indiana University, has produced in this, his first book-length publication, an unusual work of multiple value. Intended as a text in the "Modern Comparative Politics Series" edited by Peter Merkl, *USSR: The Politics of Oligarchy* is nevertheless a stimulating and original essay on the functioning of the Soviet political system and a useful update, even for the specialist, on a variety of points ranging from the role of Supreme Soviet committees (increasing) to the experiment in "popular justice" (tapering off). As a text, Hammer's approach is novel and refreshing. He begins (after a historical and ideological excursion) with a worm's-eye view of the actual workings of the system from the standpoint of local and regional administrators, and then moves through a discussion of the various bureaucratic structures to a concluding set of chapters on the process of top-level policy making in domestic and foreign affairs. Clear and forceful in style, and enlivened by liberal citation of eyewitnesses and Soviet sources, the work may nevertheless be tricky for the totally uninitiated student because of its sophistication in concept and the controversial nature of its central thesis.

Hammer may be faulted on a number of oversimplifications and some outright errors (among the points, "national districts" are not small, but in area quite large [p. 142]; the Georgians no longer are a power nationally [p. 147]; Stalin did not always desist from expelling Politburo members [p. 193]; candidates for the Supreme Soviet are not limited to nomination in one district [p. 260]). More important, the thesis of "bureaucratic pluralism" as the key to Soviet politics does not stand up persuasively in the face of Hammer's own evidence. Granted that the top leadership is an oligarchy—ten or fifteen or thirty men, rather than a personal despotism—its power over the system is not limited by any institutionalized autonomy for conflicting viewpoints, but simply by the constraints of reality—the limitations of inertia, complexity, and inefficiency in working the will of the leadership through the vast maze of interlocking bureaucratic controls that is Soviet society. Hammer underscores these limits himself in noting in his conclusion the price in bureaucratic rigidity that the Brezhnev regime has evidently paid for an orderly transfer of power.

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