

Tricia Starks, *The body Soviet: propaganda, hygiene, and the revolutionary state*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2009, pp. xiii, 313, illus., \$26.95 (paperback 978-0-299-22964-1).

The cartoon-like picture of Lenin literally sweeping the earth of the unclean—priests, monarchs, and capitalists—has become a famous image of the Russian Revolution, its humour belying the violence of the projected transformation, both against so-called class enemies and the remnants of the past more generally—ignorance, filth, and disease. In *The body Soviet: propaganda, hygiene, and the revolutionary state*, Tricia Starks explores the centrality of health and hygiene to the early years of the revolutionary project, especially the era of the New Economic Policy (NEP) before Stalin's rise to power.

Chapters are thematic, progressing from the macrocosm to the microcosm. The book opens with chapters on, firstly, the broad nexus between hygiene and the revolution, including Utopian and revolutionary thought, and, secondly, state policy, especially the role of the Commissariat of People's Health (Narkomzdrav) under Nikolai Semashko. Subsequent chapters then move from the city (the promotion of rational and healthy leisure activities amidst the many vices and temptations there), the home (domestic labour and the household economy), the family (maternity and early childcare), and, finally, the body (nutrition, cleanliness, physical culture, campaigns against alcoholism and smoking). The conclusion, which is really an epilogue, briefly sketches the break in policy and personnel inaugurated by Stalin's "Revolution from Above" and sets out the long-term trajectory of health and hygiene in the Soviet Union that culminates in today's demographic crisis.

The central focus of this volume is propaganda. Starks thus describes a wide range of cultural-political artefacts—from posters and advice literature to film and agitational plays. These readings are

supplemented by some personal accounts as well as records from governmental and local organizations, including regulations, policy statements, and statistical information (for example, on the number of sanatoriums established and patients served). It should be noted for readers of this journal that Starks is not particularly interested either in the medical or scientific ideas underpinning these campaigns of social hygiene or in their conduct or reception. Nevertheless, she does highlight comparative features, firmly placing the Bolshevik project into a pan-European context.

This book successfully demonstrates the literal and figurative importance of health and hygiene to what might be called Bolshevik ideology more broadly, its drive to enlighten, "healthify" and remake both everyday life and the human being. However, the relentless focus on the often Utopian visions of reformers (and their sometimes absurd interventions into people's lives) does have its costs. Starks is well aware that the visions were not generally translated into reality, a failure which reflected the mammoth size of the task as much as any other single factor. She thus indicates the limited scope of many services and projects as well as the disjunctions between visions and realities: the campaigns for personal cleanliness, for example, occurred in an environment where modern sanitation and running water were very often not available. Similarly, she is aware of the challenges of analysing the reception of propaganda and generally refrains from making unsupported claims in this area. Yet precisely the disjunction between visions and everyday realities raises questions about ideology itself. While Starks provides often interesting readings of ideology from propaganda artefacts, she does so in isolation from this context, that is, without considering the implications of their Utopianism—their distance from the everyday lives of Soviet people—to our understanding of NEP culture more broadly, its downfall, or even the makings of Socialist Realism. Furthermore, she does not delineate

any kind of chronology or periodization, nor does she identify distinctions (much less actual conflict) among her protagonists. As a result, the analysis seems pat in places, the chapters sometimes a little repetitive and predictable.

Nevertheless, this book is a welcome contribution to a now extensive literature on the New Economic Policy, building in particular on existing scholarship on propaganda and posters, sexuality, public health, and women. Starks's account is engaging (and sometimes humorous), and the volume as a whole provides a vibrant portrait of a wide range of propaganda sources (including twenty-six illustrations and eight plates on topics such as smoking, handwashing, breastfeeding, and even nude sunbathing). Chapters could easily and productively be incorporated into undergraduate teaching. While the focus upon visions and intentions can be frustrating, this book successfully portrays the Utopianism of the 1920s and the centrality of health and hygiene to the Bolsheviks' revolutionary project.

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Martin Edwards, *Control and the therapeutic trial: rhetoric and experimentation in Britain, 1918–1948*, Wellcome Series in the History of Medicine, *Clio Medica* 82, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2006, pp. 221, €46.00 (hardback 978-90-420-2273-7).

Featured on the cover of this book is an advertising poster for Hale's Life Tonic, "for that 'TIRED-OUT' CONDITION" mounted behind a painted image of a turn-of-the-century medical laboratory, with its acutely attentive researchers stationed at their instruments. Their life tonic is "control", not the reality but the word, and bolstered by its enchantment they go boldly forth to slay the dragon of traditionalism. Therapeutic research in the three decades

covered by this book marched under its banner, or so argues Martin Edwards, who brings an analysis of rhetoric to the history of the clinical trial in Britain. He is a bit ambivalent about the function of rhetoric of science, for while he understands well its legitimacy in any endeavour to persuade, often it seems to be accompanied by a tacit "mere". The "control" that was exalted had no specifiable meaning, he argues, and a "'controlled trial' did not designate a single methodology, but signified approval for a trial conducted under the proper supervision and regulation of the M[edical] R[esearch] C[ouncil] and which should therefore, by implication, be regarded as trustworthy and reliable" (p. 176). Mere practitioners of medicine, though they sometimes experimented, were always vulnerable to the charge of inadequate control. Deprived of this tonic, they succumb to low spirits and brain fog.

This book is based principally on five episodes or case studies, sandwiched between an introduction and conclusion. The narrative template of the first four cases involves an illegitimate victory of illusory or meaningless "control" over alternative conceptions of medical expertise. In the first two of these, the MRC victory is won over faddish therapies of the 1920s: the treatment of diabetes by a diet of raw animal pancreas, and medical deployment of the healing power of light for a variety of ailments. The next two chapters concern tests of new therapies that were favoured by laboratory medicine: first serum therapy for pneumonia, then influenza immunization. Here Edwards is better able to bring out ambiguities, since the researchers themselves had to argue that conditions were somehow never quite right to make visible the effectiveness of their potions. His final case is a struggle between two versions of the medical experiment, one advocated by Almroth Wright, sometime opponent of statistics, and the other by Austin Bradford Hill, patron saint of the randomized clinical trial. Here Edwards speaks rather of semantics than of rhetoric, and interprets the triumph of statistics as a