



## *Stalinism at War: The Soviet Union in World War II* by Mark Edele.

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In *Stalinism at War*, historian Mark Edele (Univ. of Melbourne) covers the Soviet Union from the NKVD's forced relocation of ethnic Koreans from the Soviet Far East to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1937 through the defeat of anti-Soviet guerrillas in western Ukraine and the Baltic states in 1949. Although the most intense fighting of the Second World War was in the western part of the USSR against Germany, Edele notes that the Soviet government provided crucial aid to China in its fight against Japan. This is a wider geographical and chronological purview than found in most histories of the Soviet Union during World War II, which typically focus on the European areas of the USSR and East Central Europe in 1941-45. In addition, Edele clarifies the domestic effects on Soviet civilians of their governments's policies and Axis actions as well as the war itself. Due attention is also given to the displacement of populations in the USSR, the Soviet Union as a multi-ethnic state, the experience of non-Russians, particularly Jews, and the repressive nature of the Stalinist regime.

The first of the book's nine chapters asks whether the USSR was ready for the war and returns an ambiguous answer. Chapter 2 concerns East Asia in 1937-39 and how Soviet victories in border conflicts with Japan redirected Japanese military aggression southward against China. Chapter 3 covers the period 1939-41 in the western borderlands with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the Soviet annexation of eastern Poland, the Baltic states, Moldavia, and parts of Finland. The next chapter treats the first part of the Soviet-German war in 1941-42, a period when the German offensive was successful, before the Soviet military finally stopped and reversed the German advance. Chapter 5 explains why the Soviet Union under Stalin was able to halt the German military and start to push it back west. Chapter 6 covers the years 1943-45, when the Soviet military triumphed over Germany and then Japan. Chapter 7 analyzes how the Soviet government managed to mobilize large-scale support from its population during the war. Chapter 8 highlights the Soviet pacification of the Baltic states and western Ukraine (1944-49) and the restoration of social order in the USSR proper. The final chapter explores the impact of the war on Soviet and post-Soviet history and collective memory.

Based on a range of Soviet archives and such primary sources as memoirs, Edele argues convincingly that the years 1937-40 and 1945-49 should be considered part of World War II from the Soviet perspective.

For this victory over National Socialism, the Soviets paid a heavy price: 27 million war-related deaths, or about 12 per cent of the pre-war population. According to a government commission collecting data on the devastation, 1,710 towns and cities had been destroyed, more than 70,000 villages burned and bombed. The destruction affected more than 6 million buildings, some 32,000 industrial enterprises and 98,000 collective farms. Millions were homeless: millions more were disabled and sick, traumatized by years of relentless misery and horror. To make things worse, soon after Stalin's triumphant address a terrible famine ripped through the war-weakened population, killing between 1 and 1.5 million people in 1946-7. (2)

The plethora of quantitative particulars combined with details from memoirs and interviews is a great strength of this admirably succinct (192-page) book.

Edele is open about his emphasis on the experiences of Soviet and Baltic Jews during the war despite their relatively small numbers. This in itself is fine. But his preoccupation with the victimization and heroism of Jews, particularly from Lithuania, leads him into some serious errors. First, he implies that most of the 400,000 men and women mobilized by the Soviet government into the punitive labor army (*trudarmii*) were Jews from the Baltic states and eastern Poland (76). In fact, over 315,000 (c. 78 percent) were ethnic Germans from within the 1939 borders of the USSR.<sup>1</sup> There were few Jews in the labor army, which was chiefly an instrument for the repression of ethnic Germans.

Also problematic is the author's treatment of NKVD officer Nachman Dushanski whose actions during and after the war he tries to justify based on a 2008 interview conducted by G. Koifman in Israel (151–54). Missing altogether are eyewitness testimonies and other material unearthed by the Lithuanian government in trying to extradite Dushanski from Israel for trial. This included his participation in the Rainiai Forest massacre (24–25 June 1941),<sup>2</sup> *prior to the Holocaust*. Hence the torture and murder of Lithuanian political prisoners in this particular instance cannot be explained as revenge for the Holocaust.

Despite such errors, *Stalinism at War* is a fine, detailed general history of the USSR in 1937–49. In particular, it successfully argues that the Soviet participation in World War II included Asia, starting in the 1930s, and was extremely destructive owing to the actions of both the Axis and the Stalin regime. This longer and larger framework better fits the domestic history of the USSR than do previous works on the subject.

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1. See, e.g., A.A. German and A.N. Kurochkin, *Nemtsy SSSR v trudovoi armii (1941–1945)* (Moscow: Gotika, 1998), table 5, p. 67.

2. See Rokas M. Tracevskis, “Court Sentences Soviet Butcher to Life,” *Baltic Times* (12 Apr. 2001).