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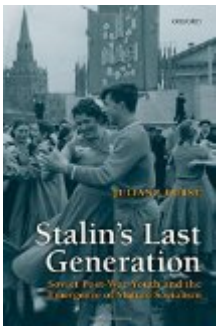

Juliane Fürst. *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. XIV, 391 S. $99.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-957506-0.

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The immediate post-war years in the Soviet Union are traditionally regarded as a monolithic and repressive era, as the peak of Stalinist rule. Recent studies on the period, however, challenge this point of view, arguing that late Stalinism should rather be approached as a dynamic period which prepared the ground for many developments in the Soviet Union during its last decades of existence. Elena Zubkova, Poslevoennoe sovetskoe obshchestvo. Politika i povsednevnost', 1945-1953, Moskva 2000; Juliane Fürst (ed.), Late Stalinist Russia. Society between Reconstruction and Reinvention, London / New York 2006. Juliane Fürst's book on post-war youth builds on this perspective and demonstrates neatly the multilayered and dynamic character of the period. Focusing on youth, she fills a huge gap in historiography: since Ralph Fisher's study on the congresses of the Young Communist League (Komsomol), which was written in 1959 and is still considered the standard work, no historian has seriously addressed the topic so far. Ralph T. Fisher, Pattern for Soviet Youth. A Study of the Congresses of the Komsomol, 1918-1954, New York 1959.

Given this background, it is not surprising that Fürst's study is ambitious: The book "aims to present the whole length and breadth of the experience of being young in Stalin's later years, creating a multifaceted image of how young people related to the Soviet system" (p. 4). To achieve this goal, Fürst combines social history with analysis of discourses and chooses three areas of interest: the relationship between state and youth; the context of the Cold War; and the significance of the post-war period as an era in its own right. The eight individual chapters start at a macrohistorical level and gradually adopt a microhistorical perspective on the topics. The first chapter outlines the war experience of this generation, which was too young to fight in the Second World War but still suffered from its consequences. The following three chapters focus on the late Stalinist campaigns, which led to a growing disengagement of youth from the system, and the related "mechanisms of integration" (p. 95) such as participation in the Komsomol, rituals and the "Soviet pantheon" of heroes and idols (p. 112). Moral panic is the main subject of the following three chapters, which are concerned with juvenile delin-

quency, Western influence on Soviet youth culture, and the growing importance of sexuality and shifting gender roles. Finally, the last chapter outlines several ways in which young people could find their "self in the system" (p. 292), ranging from integration to "opting out" (p. 321).

The first overarching topic concerns the renegotiation of the relationship between state and youth. Here, Fürst sheds light on what it meant to be young and Soviet and how this resulted in new forms of Soviet youth culture, the formation of which undoubtedly took place within the framework of Soviet values. The problem with this approach is that it suggests a clear-cut division between the official sphere of the state and youth as individuals who tried to be independent from the system. In later chapters Fürst does take into account the nature of the state as consisting of individuals, and analyzes the Komsomol as a place where its members were both young individuals and representatives of the official authorities. However, in many places the binary conception of state versus youth remains a frequent category of analysis.

The uneasy relationship between state officials and youth is also resonant in Fürst's analysis of youth culture, which was shaped by the context of the Cold War. She identifies the West as both the rival in an ideological and economical competition and an essential source of inspiration for Soviet youth, which developed an affinity for consumption similar to that of Western youth culture. Integrating elements of Western lifestyle into their own habits and thereby "accommodating contradictory values and practices" (p. 24), postwar youth increasingly developed the ability to think in a two-fold manner, which later became so characteristic of the so called "homo Sovieticus". According to Fürst, it was during the period of late Stalinism that young people became able to combine doubt about and belief in the Soviet system. Here and in other places it becomes clear that Fürst operates without a theoretical framework for addressing the question of the self, and it remains unclear which approach she takes to the self in a historical perspective. She seems to shift constantly and unconsciously between the pragmatic self, an approach which dominates among social historians, and the postmodern conception of the self within the framework of "Soviet subjectivity". The former conception of the self is that of a liberal subject which had acquired certain strategies to benefit from the system and learned to "speak Bolshevik" Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilzation, Berkeley 1995, p. 220; see also Sheila Fitzpatrick, Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s, Oxford 1999. ; the latter conception regards the self as produced and significantly shaped by Soviet discourse. See examplarily Jochen Hellbeck, Revolution on my Mind. Writing a Diary under Stalin, Cambridge 2006; Igal Halfin, From Darkness to Light. Class, Consciousness and Salvation in Revolutionary Russia, Pittsburgh 2000.

The third topic of interest relates to Soviet post-war youth as the link between the pre-war generation and the generation of "mature socialism", with the years between 1945 and 1953 regarded as a distinctive period of change in Soviet history. Although Fürst clearly defines the chronological boundaries of her analysis as the late years of Stalinist rule, she frequently refers to phenomena and examples from later years. For example, when examining the role of the stiliagi, a fashion-oriented youth culture in the mid-1950s, Fürst is clearly looking beyond the year 1953. Only in the epilogue does she explain that the years between 1953 and 1956 are regarded as a transitional period, which must be included in her approach. This point of view ignores completely the Khrushchevian Thaw as a distinct period, combining it with the Brezhnev years in the concept of "mature socialism". This approach, however, is coherent insofar as the immediate post-war years heralded many of the developments that were significant for late socialism. Youth culture "shattered into

more and more tiny fragments of cultures, subcultures, and sub-subcultures" (p. 28), which made alternative ways of self-identification possible. Along with a growing dissatisfaction about the conservative role which was ascribed to youth for the preservation of their parents' revolutionary achievements, this gave rise to a growing disengagement from the system which became more and more obvious during the last years of the Soviet Union.

The study draws from an immense range of archival and media sources from Moscow, as well as from regional archives; it also touches on fiction and poetry. Although the sources are not always used systematically, this broad range of material is probably necessary for a project as ambitious and courageous as writing the whole history of the Soviet post-war youth. And it is probably only without an overwhelming theory that Fürst could have succeeded in writing a book which makes reading enjoyable and gainful for both professionals and non-professionals. Despite the points of criticism mentioned above, the book provides a solid basis for further, more specific studies on the topic and it will definitely be the standard work in this area of research in the years to come. As Fürst states herself, she has created "a picture that still has many gaps, yet provides a strong framework for discussion" (p. 30).