



Socio-Economic Foundations of the Russian Post-Soviet Regime. The Resource-Based Economy and Estate-Based Social Structure of Contemporary Russia

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Simon Kordonsky, *Socio-Economic Foundations of the Russian Post-Soviet Regime. The Resource-Based Economy and Estate-Based Social Structure of Contemporary Russia*. Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2016, 320pp., £29.00/€34.90 p/b.

SIMON KORDONSKY'S BOOK BRINGS TOGETHER IN A (NOT ALWAYS ELEGANT, but serviceable) English translation various extracts and sections from his previously published work in Russian. As presented in this monograph, they comprise an extended essay on the resource-based state, taken from his 2007 book *Resursnoe gosudarstvo*; two sections on social stratification and material on Kordonsky's division of society into estates rather than classes, taken from his 2008 book *Soslovnaya struktura postsovetskoi Rossii*; a further section on the qualitative and quantitative meaning of these divisions in practice, which includes tables and demographic statistics, taken from two 2012 articles, 'Soslovnnye komponenty v sotsial'noi strukture sovremennoi Rossii' and 'Soslovnnye komponenty v sotsial'noi strukture Rossii: gipotetiko-deduktivnyi analiz i popytka modelirovaniya' (both co-authored with D. K. Dekhant and O. A. Molyarenko); and a final section on the implications of these divisions, which includes discussion of the resulting cyclical nature of politics, taken from other sections of the 2007 and 2008 books. The monograph also contains two appendices. The first elaborates the types and ranking of 'threats', which provide the estate system with pretexts for deploying resources to help perpetuate itself (in contradistinction to a market-type socio-economic system). The second appendix comprises in turn a hierarchical list of over 300 state and governmental functionary titles. The translated material of the main sections is prefaced by a short introductory essay by the author as well as a summarising foreword by Svetlana Barsukova.

Barsukova's foreword draws attention to the key ideas: any market activity or class formation is overshadowed or stunted by the logic of a resource-based economy that is organised into a system of estates. The resources (extractive), which are not themselves the focus of the study, feed the top estate (the state and government functionaries): everyone else has therefore to make do with what is left or what the state deems they deserve. Dividing resources among estates is the core process of social life. Crucially, service, not labour, is the marker of compensation in this system; therefore classes cannot fully emerge. Instead, there are non-titular estates of professionals. Kordonsky enjoys provoking the reader in a running joke that lumps scientists, lawyers and prostitutes in the same category. Similarly, people receive estate rent and 'pay' estate 'taxes' based on their estate position alone. This is why the visible signs of estate membership are so important—think regalia, uniforms, cars with blue lights—estates make themselves known to other estates based on ritualised and symbolic practices, leading to widely accepted notions of 'distributive' rather than 'corrective' justice.

The distributive resource model owes a debt to the broad and diverse literature on the political economy of scarcity and resource allocation under socialism, but here the author mainly references the work of Russian economists and sociologists such as Olga Bessonova and Svetlana Kirdina who used the term *razdatochnaya* (distributive) economy from 1996 onwards. The author also points to Ovsei Shkaratan's work on social stratification to support his thesis. 'Administrative currency' measures the right to influence the processes of distribution and is familiar from the Soviet period. Indeed, the cyclical nature of the estate system is traced back to the Soviet period. The resource-based economy dominates until a crisis occurs or the resources run out. Forms of marketisation then develop to compensate, but as soon as they start to bear fruit, the service estates recover their position. A key aspect of this is that, typically, growth is facilitated by an expansion of the resource base rather than through investment and production. Readers will be reminded of the widely held thesis that, from the earliest historical period, Russian territorial expansion resulted from the drive to expand the resource base.

Kordonsky asserts that there is no real economic growth (p. 101), only redistribution of extractive resources or, echoing Bessonova, expansion of the resource base (p. 98). He then defines four rather unwieldy estates of ‘public workers/employees/pensioners’ (approximately 72 million adult individuals), ‘entrepreneurs/active population’ (approximately 17 million), the ‘government’ (8 million) and marginalised persons (17 million). Arguably, incipient classes and more complex economic interest groups in Russia deserve more granular treatments. However, Kordonsky is careful throughout to provide detail on how different types of professionals (for example, prostitutes and journalists), and sole proprietors, fit into the same overall estate.

While a little uneven and repetitive in places, the book is an excellent English introduction and summary of Kordonsky’s recent research, which is itself an indispensable contribution to the political economy of post-communism. The major strength of this book is the way it forces the reader to consider the path-dependent relationship between group-based entitlements in the Soviet period and the current system. Other important contributions include Kordonsky’s reading of the informal economy’s role in the Soviet era and in structuring social relations between estates today, the distinction between corrective and distributive justice, the logic of estate generation of ‘threats’ as a mechanism to claim more resources, and the under-explored role of *otkhodniki* (mobile/seasonal) workers in the socialist and current periods (who account for 10–15 million people in the ‘active population’ estate). While the democratic, market-based society to which Kordonsky opposes Russia is an ideal type, readers may question so stark a differentiation—after all, in the ‘West’, estate-like phenomena such as the significance of unearned income, professional/estate ‘aristocracies’, barriers to social mobility, and differential rights, obligations and inequality before the law, also feature to various extents.

Finally, the characterisation of Russia as in anti-phase with the rest of the global economy may also give pause for thought (p. 101). Kordonsky argues that this is due to Russia not having true internal markets; in other words, it cannot meaningfully interact with multinational corporations or global markets. On the contrary, he argues that for Russia, ‘markets’ are external and the state is one big corporation. On this point, rather than arguing for anti-phasality, one could provocatively respond that Russia, as an authoritarian, marginalised extractive economy, is precisely what the current phase of global capital finds useful—it has finally become a truly dependent periphery.

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Danielle N. Lussier, *Constraining Elites in Russia and Indonesia. Political Participation and Regime Survival*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, xiv + 313pp., £64.99 h/b.

THE SURVIVAL OR THE FAILURE OF DEMOCRACY REMAIN TIMELY TOPICS EVEN after almost half a century has passed since the third wave of democratisation. The literature on democracy-supportive and democracy-inhibiting factors has developed significantly in recent decades with extensive empirical evidence from across the globe. Danielle Lussier’s book is a refreshing attempt to approach democratic theory from a new angle. The author takes two deviant cases under scrutiny—post-Soviet Russia and post-Suharto Indonesia—as two contexts where common theories of democracy cannot explain the observed trend. The central question postulated in the book is why Russia, despite having relatively high social-economic levels of development and a long history of independent statehood, rolled back to