



A Normal Totalitarian Society: How the Soviet Union Functioned and How it Collapsed

By Vladimir Shlapentokh

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Shlapentokh undertakes a dispassionate analysis of the ordinary functioning of the Soviet system from Stalin's death through the Soviet collapse and Russia's first post-communist decade. Without overlooking its repressive character, he treats the USSR as a "normal" system that employed both socialist and nationalist ideologies for the purposes of technological and military modernization, preservation of empire, and expansion of its geopolitical power. Foregoing the projection of Western norms and assumptions, he seeks to achieve a clearer understanding of a civilization that has perplexed its critics and its champions alike.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

The subtitle of this work accurately describes Shlapentokh's thrust more than the contrived title. The author of 22 books, including *The Center Versus the Province: From Submission to Rebellion*, Shlapentokh is a former senior fellow at the Moscow Sociological Institute and currently a sociology professor at Michigan State University. Here he breaks new historiographical ground, contrasting societies as either "normal" or "abnormal." This approach allows him to set his own context when evaluating the normalcy of the Soviet totalitarian state. He does an excellent job of pulling together the period 1985-91, laying the blame for collapse squarely at the feet of Gorbachev: "What ensued as a result of Mikhail Gorbachev's initial reforms was brutal irony. Within a few years the fundamentals of the totalitarian society were demolished." Similar themes are dealt with in Heyward Isham's *Russia's Fate Through Russian Eyes* (LJ 2/1/01) and Stephen Shenfield's *Russian Fascism* (LJ 4/15/01), but Shlapentokh offers the unique perspective of an insider. Recommended for academic libraries and public libraries with strong Russian collections. Harry Willems, Southeast Kansas Lib. Syst., Iola

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