

The Urals. From tractor manufacturing city to armorer's workshop



Chelyabinsk. View of the street from the beginning of the 20th century.

Lennart Samuelson
Tankograd. Den ryska hemmfrontens dolda historia 1917–1953

[Tankograd: The Secret History of the Russian Home Front, 1917–1953]. Stockholm: SNS Publisher 2007. 368 pp., illustrated.

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT the city of Chelyabinsk in the southern Urals, and the region surrounding it, which became the center of Soviet tractor manufacturing, and which, later, during World War II, was transformed into a giant armaments workshop where the bulk of Red Army tank production took place. After the war, the region was also where most of the development of Soviet nuclear weapons took place.

This is the story of how an agriculturally dominated and, in many respects, backwards country rapidly industrialized, and how the economy was militarized. It can reasonably be said that the military-industrial capacity that was rapidly built up in the Ural region, which would have been too distant for a German attack to be able to reach, is one significant explanation for the Soviet victory in the war. Germany underestimated the military-industrial potential that the Soviet Union managed to build up in the East in a relatively short time.

Author Lennart Samuelson, who works at the Stockholm Institute of Transition, Ecoeconomics and East European Economies (SITE) at the Stockholm School of Economics, is a prominent expert on the Soviet defense industry and, in a number of previous works, including *Röd koloss på larvfötter. Rysslands ekonomi i skuggan av*

1900-talskrigen (1999) [Red Colossus on Caterpillar Treads: Russia's Economy in the Shadow of the Wars of the 20th Century], has delved into questions concerning the military-industrial mobilization.

During the war, Chelyabinsk became known in popular parlance as "Tankograd" – hence the title of the book. The depiction of how Chelyabinsk emerged as a major arms production center is also a history of Soviet society in general, with a primary emphasis on the role that the home front played in the war effort.

SAMUELSON HAS HAD access to material in both the central and local archives not previously available to researchers. (For a long time, Chelyabinsk was closed to foreigners.) Samuelson can thus identify and chart Soviet defense planning, and demonstrate how civilian production from the very start was organized so that it could quickly be adapted to wartime needs. In the case at hand, we have an account of how the plant for the manufacture of caterpillar tractors for agricultural use is rapidly transformed into a giant tank factory where, based on the experience the army had on various fronts, new tank types can constantly be developed. For example, many lessons were learned from the experiences of the



"Keep quiet! Be on your guard. In these times, even the walls have ears." Nina Vatolina's poster was the most widespread equivalent of the Swedish motto "En svensk tiger" (literally, both: "a Swedish tiger" and "a Swede keeps quiet").

Winter War against Finland.

Chelyabinsk, which during the 19th century was a small, insignificant city in the Russian Empire, began to become more important with the Trans-Siberian railway, the western branch of which, from Chelyabinsk to Kurgan and Omsk, was completed in 1894. The city became an important gateway to Siberia. It was only after violent conflicts that the Bolsheviks became established in the southern Urals, which for a long time – much like Siberia – had been controlled by the White Army. Kolchak's troops suffered a decisive defeat in the battle of Chelyabinsk in the late summer of 1919, which would be the bloodiest and most extensive on the eastern front of the civil war. Peasant revolts and a major famine occurred in the region at the beginning of the 1920s.

The construction of the tractor factory in Chelyabinsk began in the late 1920s with an eye towards producing 40,000 tractors per year. The technology was obtained primarily from the U.S. The first tractor was a copy of the American Caterpillar.

STARTING IN THE MID-1930S, the Soviet leadership regarded another great war in Europe as inevitable. Although the principal aim was to concentrate the weapons manufacturing in areas far away from the western part of the country, because of a lack of investment



SUNE JUNGAR Professor of Nordic history at Åbo (Turku) Academy University, 1976–2000. Together with Bent Jensen, editor of the anthology *Sovjetunionen och Norden: Konflikt, kontakt, influenser* [Soviet Union and the Nordic Countries: Conflict, Contact, Influences] (1997), he has also published "Stalinismen – kring en ständig forskningsdiskussion" [Stalinism – Concerning a Continual Research Discussion] in *Medströms–Motströms. Individ och struktur i historien* [With the Current – Against the Current: Individual and Structure in History] (Festschrift in honor of Max Engman, 2005).

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capital, a large part of the defense industry ended up being built up where it was cheaper, that is, in European Russia and the Ukraine. This meant that, when the war came, a great many industries quickly had to be evacuated. Over 700 businesses were moved to the Urals.

During the conversion of the tractor factory in Chelyabinsk into a tank and armaments factory, equipment and trained technical staff from companies in Leningrad and Kharkov were utilized. During the war, the total work force grew to 50,000. During the years 1941-1945, the Soviet Union produced a total of some 100,000 tanks and mobile artillery pieces.

POLICY MAKERS DIDN'T care about developing infrastructure at the pace that the rapid expansion required. Samuelson devotes considerable attention to an analysis of living conditions in Chelyabinsk. The lack of food and housing was legion. A significant portion of the workers lived in dug-outs.

Stalin's repression also affected Chelyabinsk. On several occasions, the entire political and economic leadership was arrested. Presentations of the life stories of individuals within the so-called *nomenklatura* offer interesting insights into how members of the local elite, both the political and technical elite, were recruited, trained – and in many cases weeded out. Samuelson,

however, sees a certain rationality in the seemingly arbitrary acts of persecution. In many cases it was a matter of "tightening up the industry with more careful technological discipline as a benchmark".

Samuelson by no means belittles all the human sacrifices, but, in general, he believes that previous research (by Conquest and others) gives an exaggerated picture of the scale of the terror. In addition, he believes that the development of anti-tank weapons and artillery suffered less under the repression than, for example, aircraft manufacturing did.

The role that forced labor has played in Soviet industrialization has been a contentious issue in academic research. According to Samuelson, new archival research shows that the role of forced labor has been exaggerated. His argument is that the gulags accounted for only a few percent of Soviet industrial production. That is not a convincing argument. For an assessment of the entire significance of forced labor, one should take into account the central role prison labor played in the extraction of a number of metals that were important in industrialization (work often done in remote, inhospitable regions), in the building of the infrastructure (such as channels), and in the utilization of natural resources as an important means of increasing the necessary foreign exchange earnings. One example is the exploitation of forest resources in Soviet Karelia and northern Russia, which has recently been studied in a monograph by the Finnish historian Sari Autio-Sarasmo.

THE STUDY CONCLUDES with an overview of how historical memory is formed in today's Chelyabinsk. So much secretiveness, so many historical falsifications, and so many taboo issues have existed regarding the history of the Chelyabinsk region that this contribution is welcome and justified. One can only hope that

the readiness to come to terms with one's history evidenced by the efforts of the inhabitants of the region might also exist in official Russia.

This is an impressive book in many respects. It is packed with facts and rich in documentation. The partly unique illustrations deserve special mention. Samuelson's knowledge of previous research and the way he makes use of it is exemplary. This book is a welcome example of a study that sheds light on the interplay between center and periphery in the Soviet empire.

sune jungar

Pioneering work.

RELATIVELY FEW PROFESSIONAL Russian historians have been interested in the history of the Baltic states during the period beginning in 1920 and running through the 1980s. To some degree, this is rooted in the Soviet tradition of preferring to have officially approved works on the Baltic Soviet republics written by people from said countries, as long as they respect the requirements of the "party line" and the demands of censorship. During the Soviet era, the important research on the Baltic states was conducted in institutes of higher education in Western Europe and the United States, with whatever sources were available there. Of course, the language barrier means that few Russian historians can be expected to address Estonian, Latvian, or Lithuanian themes. But there are also problems that result from political controversies, which have overshadowed the academic debates. In the lead up to the official commemoration in Russia in 2005 of the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II, the Baltic and Eastern European countries' interpretation of the significance of the events was accentuated. What for Russians and other peoples in the Soviet Union was the memory of the hard-won victory over Nazi Germany, brings back memories in the Baltic states and large parts of Eastern Europe of a long period of oppression via the Sovietization of these states. The same conflicting interpretations of the relevance of the past for today's Estonia lay behind, on the one hand, the decision in 2007 to move the Bronze Soldier in the center of Tallinn, and, on the other hand, the violent protests that the decision aroused in some Russian circles. The official Russian perspective is that passages in the Latvian historical works taken out of context have been highlighted in a tendentious way. Russian writers and journalists have tried to provide explanations for the anti-Russian attitudes in the Baltic states in politicized, anti-Baltic terms.¹

THE EFFORTS OF PROFESSIONAL historians have so far fallen flat in the face of these controversies. For this reason, Elena Zubkova's new book can be described as an unparalleled pioneering work. It could pave the way for new research and new dialogues between interested parties in Russia and the Baltic countries, despite the political opposi-

The history of Soviet incorporations

tions on both sides. In her appearances last year, Zubkova expressed her belief that the traumas of the respective peoples – for Russia, the Nazi German attack of 1941, for the Baltic states, the Sovietization of 1940-1941, which resumed in 1944 – will at some point become part of a common past. In the same way that other antagonisms in Europe between



Generalissimus J.V. Stalin.

different peoples have been overcome, Russians will come to gain an understanding of the Baltic peoples' perspective. But Zubkova emphasizes that this is actually not the task of a historian. The historian works with the documents of the time and carries on a conversation with the historically relevant people in order to create greater understanding of their actions. Zubkova also engages in a polemic against the many Russian journalists who have asked for her views on past conflicts.² She therefore draws a sharp contrast between history as a science of past events, and, on the other hand, the memory of the past or the politicized use of historical events. This attitude is directed against both Russian and Baltic publishers. Historians of course have a moral responsibility to their own time. But, Zubkova emphasizes, it would be bad history, if not a flatly falsified history, to use the values and standards of our own time as a screen for representations of the past. Historians must, then, carry on a dialogue with the people of the past based on documents and other source materials emanating from other times.

ELENA ZUBKOVA IS A professor at the Institute of Russian History at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, and teaches at the Russian State University for the Humanities (RGGU). Her research in the 1990s revolved around Soviet social life in the period immediately following World War II.³ She has also edited a source volume on postwar Soviet society, which is used alongside her monograph in course instruction.⁴ Zubkova has compiled CD-ROM-based teaching materials on the Communist Party's 20th Congress, which was presented at a conference at RGGU in

March 2003 in connection with the 50th anniversary of Stalin's death.⁵

Zubkova's new book about the history of the Baltic states from the 1930s to Stalin's death in 1953 is primarily a study of the decisions, deliberations, and objectives of the leadership of the Communist Party and the Soviet state. Her research goal is clearly delineated and is focused on the areas where the Russian source material can supplement the already familiar picture

of developments in the Baltic region. She makes exemplary use of some of the central Russian archives to survey and identify Stalin's deliberations and the information sent out by the Politburo, as well as the reports by foreign, defense, and interior departments (the latter known, before 1946, as the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs) on conditions in Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

THE FIRST CHAPTER of the book (pp. 15-43) provides a lucid description of the authoritarian regimes that were established in the Baltic region during the interwar period. Under the heading *The Long Year of 1940* (pp. 44-127), Zubkova describes how the Soviet leadership, with as much determination as what appears to have been improvisation, annexed the Baltic states, beginning with the small step of negotiating over military bases in September of 1939, and progressing to the deportations of tens of thousands of people from the elites in June of 1941. To shed light on the extensive repression that took place in 1940-1941 and during the postwar period, she bases her work here on the most recent Russian and Baltic research, at least that which has been translated into English or German. Chapter 3 of the book (pp. 128-190) describes how the Soviet leadership planned and carried out the construction of the Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania after World War II. In this context, she provides new data on the origins of the large deportations of 1949. Chapter 4 (pp. 191-256) contains a detailed review of the armed resistance in the Baltic republics that was led by the so-called Forest Brothers. Their story has been surrounded by legends and myths because of the lack, until the 1990s, of source material and research in the Baltic region. Zubkova supplements the latest Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian research with information from the archives of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in Moscow. The book concludes with an analysis of how Moscow sought to establish a new political elite, and how the Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian cadres were recruited from the few communists that existed in these countries and in other parts of

the Soviet Union. Zubkova's tentative summary of the changes that the Soviet leadership sought to bring about during the year after Stalin's death is that the Baltic Soviet republics should have an informal status that separated them from the other Soviet republics.

Zubkova criticizes what she takes to be a misleading application of the terms "occupation" and "genocide" to phenomena in the history of the Baltic region.

IN A MILITARY CONTEXT, the notion of occupation denotes the temporary possession of territory belonging to an enemy. But Stalin's intentions, Zubkova stresses, in no way involved anything temporary. Before 1939, he had already focused his foreign policy on restoring as much of the empire as possible, in the west as well as in the east. Through blackmail, the Baltic regimes were forced to accept Soviet bases in the area. However, it was evident that the Kremlin lacked a detailed plan for how the area would be incorporated. Zubkova's reluctance to use the customary term "occupation" does not mean that she, like certain Russian writers and journalists, would deny the widespread repression that was directed against various groups within the Baltic elites. On the contrary, Zubkova believes that the concepts annexation, incorporation, and Sovietization more clearly show how thorough the Kremlin was in its efforts to rebuild the entire state apparatus, the political leadership, and in fact all areas of social life. In violation of international law and human rights, a hard, repressive policy was pursued against large segments of the populations of these countries. To speak of occupation would lead to misleading comparisons.

Zubkova also considers it wrong to apply the term "genocide" to instances of deportation to work settlements or concentration camps in the interior of the Soviet Union. None of these actions were taken on the basis of ethnic criteria, nor were they intended to eliminate the possibility of the future existence of these peoples. From the Kremlin's point of view, these were socially and politically motivated actions that once and for all would make it impossible for a bourgeois intelligentsia or a bourgeois or conservative regime to be reestablished in these states. Since 1937, similar steps had been taken on the basis of

Elena Zubkova
Pribaltika i Kreml,
1940–1953

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LENNART SAMUELSON
Associate professor of economic history at the Stockholm School of Economics. His dissertation was a study of the Soviet war economy during the 1930s. Has published *Plans for Stalin's War-Machine* (2000), and was editor of the anthology *Bönder och bolsjevik. Den ryska landsbygdens historia 1902–1939* [Farmers and the Bolsheviks: The History of Rural Russia, 1902–1939] (2007), to which Moshe Lewin and Teodor Shanin, among others, contribute. Received in 2000 the newly established Hugo Raab Prize for solid contributions to military-historical research, and, in 2007, the Tilas Prize for highly useful military-historical efforts.

Interior. Tank-manufacturing.

