Stephen J. Collier, *Post-Soviet Social: Neoliberalism, Social Modernity, Biopolitics*

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Reviewed by Ilya Matveev
European University at St. Petersburg,
North-West Institute of Management RANEPA

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Pipes, Wires, Soviet Modernity, and Neoliberalism

Stephen Collier's *Post-Soviet Social* is an important contribution to the growing literature on neoliberalism's genealogies and political conundrums. Collier makes a highly original argument about neoliberalism and Russia by skillfully employing Foucault's ideas and theoretical orientations. This argument is centered around a strong claim: neoliberalism should be disentangled from austerity and state retrenchment. It is not intrinsically opposed to the value orientations of the welfare state. In certain conditions neoliberal reforms can even reproduce such value orientations.

The book consists of two parts. The first part is a kind of archaeology of Soviet social modernity as it emerges in discourses on city-building. Collier shows how Soviet industrialism and the Soviet architectural avant-garde inform the conception of the city economy (*gorodskoe khoziaistvo*), which brings together a plethora of elements—"pipes, wires, apartment blocks, bureaucratic routines, and social norms"—into a new form of collective life (2). He demonstrates how the process of total planning produced a distinctively Soviet form of urbanization (a widely dispersed network of mid-sized industrial cities) and an enterprise-centered system of infrastructure and social service provision. The analysis is based on fieldwork in the Russian cities of Rodniki and Belaya Kalitva. The "bundling" of industry, infrastructure, social services, budgetary routines, and social norms proved to be quite resilient during the turbulent post-Soviet years.

The second part of the book deals with attempts at "unbundling" this tight system of *khoziaistvo* through neoliberal reforms. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 present a series of problematizations. First, Collier demonstrates the contingent nature of the "structural adjustment" program comprising

"a lending modality, a package of policies, and a vision of transformation." He maintains that this program "was the product of conjunctural factors, not the outgrowth of an idealized neoliberal blueprint for reform" (143). In the next two chapters he studies the new generation of neoliberal reforms in the late 1990s to early 2000s, in particular budgetary reform and the reform of communal services. This section is perhaps the most provocative and original. By tracing the genealogy of Russian budgetary reform to James Buchanan's "fiscal federal theory," Collier shows first of all that this reform is not purely formal—it takes into account the substantive dimension of the Russian economy. And second, he demonstrates that the reform recognizes and even reproduces Soviet value orientations concerning social welfare. Thus, the institution of "calculative choice" on the level of municipalities, which become responsible for managing their own financial affairs in the competitive environment, is complemented by the creation of regional "equalization funds" that alleviate poor municipalities' conditions by redistributing money. Crucially, the decision as to the size of the "equalization fund" is supposed to be the matter of political choice, not economic rationality. "This is straight Buchanan, and straight Weber: The task of the economist is to clarify what is at stake in alternative policies, not to tell politicians what their values ought to be," Collier concludes (200).

In the final chapter Collier investigates efforts to reform Russian communal services, particularly the notorious "heating apparatus." This is the story about the limits to neoliberal transformation imposed by physical infrastructure itself. The universal, centralized, and enterprise-based Soviet system of heating that consists of kilometers upon kilometers of pipes heating the apartments with hot water, is almost impossible to transform along the lines of "calculative choice"—for example, "customers" simply cannot regulate the amount of heat they receive due to the engineering solution implemented in the system. Thus, efforts to reform Russian heating apparatus proved to be very limited in scope and effect.

Collier's careful and theoretically nuanced treatment of neoliberalism is indispensable for the analysis of reform processes in Russia. The logic of (ultimately limited) "patterning of social welfare mechanisms with techniques of commercialization and calculative choice" (26) reveals a lot about the nature of welfare reform in the 2000s. My biggest objection to Collier's approach, however, concerns the issues of politics and power. Striving to avoid misguided and politically charged generalizations about neoliberalism, Collier produces a peculiarly depoliticized account of it. Fifteen years ago Wendy Larner noted: "As yet, however, the governmentality literature has not paid a great deal of attention to the politics surrounding specific programmes and policies" (2000: 14). Collier's book apparently follows the same path. Politics rarely features in his analyses of reform, yet one has to ask: is it fruitful to separate

neoliberalism as "a form of critical reflection on governmental practice" (2) from the actual messy and politically conditioned process of state transformation?

For example, public sector reform (which is connected to budgetary reform) in the 2000s did have the features revealed by Collier: it was not premised on the abandonment of the state's welfare commitments; it reworked but did not reject the values of the social state; it was not purely formal and did take into account the substantive dimension of welfare provision in Russia. However, all these features were as much a product of the specific intellectual genealogy of the reform as they were a product of the political process. This process, for instance, involved attempts at de facto privatization of public sector organizations such as universities through the introduction of the new organizational form, "State (Municipal) Autonomous Non-Commercial Organization," in the mid-2000s. Despite the name, these were intended to be private organizations, fully independent from the state. Legally, they could go bankrupt. This plan encountered opposition from the Russian Rectors Union and the Education and Science Employees Union and was ultimately abandoned. In a similar manner, the 2005 reform of welfare benefits was substantially changed after dramatic protests. An analysis of neoliberal reforms in Russia, their design and implementation, cannot be reduced to the question of intellectual genealogy. It should take into account the political conditions of the reform process.

Bibliography

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