

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Metta Spencer, *The Russian Quest for Peace and Democracy*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010, 346 pp. \$US 80.00 hardcover (978-0-7391-4472-5)

On March 4, 2012 Vladimir Putin was elected as President of the Russian Federation for a third four-year term. Most political analysts predicted that Putin would be the Russian president once again in what has been referred to by analysts as a form of “Brezhnev Light” politics. This term refers to the limited circulation of political elites during the period of time when Mr. Leonid Brezhnev was the President of the Communist Party during the Soviet period in Russian history. Professor Metta Spencer has written an engaging political narrative analyzing the politics of the Soviet era that contributed to the demise of the Soviet State and which are the foundation of current Russian politics. Her analysis is drawn from hundreds of interviews with political dissidents, academics, political analysts, politicians, and journalists. Spencer has been a long time member of the world peace movement and through her interaction with many of the key players in Soviet and Russian politics, has developed a well grounded understanding of a country which is considered by many to be a political and social enigma.

Spencer uses four categories to describe Soviet citizens. The first group, which she calls Sheep, were the 257 million ordinary citizens who did not challenge the political actions of the regime. The second group, which she calls Dinosaurs, were the 19 million citizens who were committed to the Soviet State. Termites are the third group of citizens who were reformers led by President Mikhail Gorbachev the former President of the Soviet Union. The final group she has named the Barking Dogs and they include a few thousand people who bravely spoke out against the regime and supported the idea that democracy and change should be a social movement that is supported by the people.

Spencer asks several salient questions about the role(s) that these four groups played in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. For example, she examines the disarmament movement, Soviet and Russian military strategy. She also introduces the term GRIT, which refers to Graduated Reciprocation in Tension Reduction, to describe the situation in which unilateral initiatives to reduce arms stimulate similar arms reductions in other countries. Spencer is an unwavering supporter of Gorbachev

who she credits with bringing the Cold War to a peaceful end, granting freedom to Eastern Europe, dismantling the Soviet regime with ease and reversing the arms race. She proposes that Gorbachev placed Russia on the road to peace and democracy but that this plan was derailed by President Boris Yeltsin's government; this government comprised political elites who she suggests were more interested in capitalism than democracy. She describes the positive role that Western countries played in pressuring Russia to support human rights initiatives, but is critical of President Bill Clinton's and President George Bush's governments which she claims did not do enough to support Russia. She proposes that the United States and other European countries could have given more economic, social and political support to Russia during its struggle to establish a more democratic state. Spencer concludes by offering some sage advice about the roles that truth telling and trust building play in building a democratic state.

The Russian Quest for Peace and Democracy is a very interesting and informative text, especially for readers who are interested in political sociology, social movements, and Russian history. Spencer shares her profound observations with the reader, which have been drawn from 50 years of research and political activism both inside and outside of Russia. This book is very well written and the author has supported her arguments with rich detail and thick description. Anyone who wishes to understand the nebulous state of affairs in Russia today should read Professor Spencer's enlightening and thought provoking book on Russian politics.

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