power. His victory in the plebiscite to install the constitution of the Fifth Republic and to create the office of an elected president was no less dictated by his grasp of democratic majority rule as the foundation stone of political legitimacy. Similarly, when the French populace effectively withdrew his legitimacy in the Événements of 1968, de Gaulle chose to depart from French politics in 1969 after losing the vote on a relatively minor issue of regional autonomy.

Finally, the volume might have been strengthened if it had devoted some attention to de Gaulle’s conception of the proper relationship between political leaders and the populace and the range of actions that leaders are permitted in pursuit of national interest—even at the risk of manipulating a populace uninstructed in what is in its best interest. De Gaulle’s reliance on popular support was ever in tension with his willingness to defy or to deceive popular will to gain power as a means of transforming popular support for his vision of what France should do. His Delphic “Je vous ai compris” before a cheering crowd in Algiers clamoring for the retention of French Algeria exemplifies de Gaulle’s mastery of democratic politics even though he was later toppled from power by popular will.

A lot more work is needed to achieve a fuller understanding of this complex man and to profit from his ideas in a globalizing world. Certainly not everything de Gaulle thought or believed has stood the toll of time and changed circumstances. His curious attachment to the gold standard as a sufficient basis for global finance and trade illustrates one of a number of bad ideas he espoused. Conversely, his rejection of empire as the basis for national power and wealth and his understanding of the indispensability of political legitimacy as the foundation of national regimes and the relations of states and peoples warrants more study not only of this aspect of Gaullist political thinking but of the full corpus of his ideas—good and bad.


Reviewed by Jacob W. Kipp, University of Kansas

The war on the Eastern Front was not “the good war” remembered in the West but a total war fought by totalitarian regimes capable of mass mobilization that the Western democracies did not and could not match. Two cities represented the greatest excesses of the Vernichtungskrieg, the ideological war of annihilation without limit on the use of force or reference to political objectives: Warsaw was destroyed by its occupiers, and Leningrad was subjected to material privation by the symbiotic relationship between besiegers and defenders. In both cases, the end result was the mass loss of civilian life. In Warsaw this came in stages from 1939 to 1944 with first the conquest of the city, then the destruction of the ghetto, and finally the destruction of the rest of the
city. Leningrad was one long narrative, from the isolation of the city on 8 September 1941, through the winter of starvation, to the lifting of the blockade on 27 January 1944.

This book focuses on the city and not the frontlines. It resulted from the collaborative effort of two scholars, Richard Bidlack of Washington and Lee University and Nikita Lomagin of St. Petersburg University, who offer a detailed and nuanced assessment of the situation inside Leningrad during the blockade. Bidlack and Lomagin begin with a review of the historiography of the blockade as it evolved in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. They give the reader direct access to key primary documents, including many from the files of the Leningrad party committee; and those of the oblast’, city, and district governments; the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD) and the People’s Commissariat of State Security (NKGB). The authors build their narrative around these documents and discuss the fate of the civilian population in the ongoing war between besiegers and the besieged. Much of the story concerns the relations between Iosif Stalin and his deputies in Moscow running the larger war, and the local officials, especially Andrei Zhdanov, trying to execute government policy under conditions of near complete isolation and extreme privation. Adolf Hitler set the policy for his besieging army: isolate the city, prevent its civilian population from escaping, and destroy the city once the resistance collapsed. This was an ideological Vernichtungskrieg with no mercy or compassion. Before the war, Leningrad’s population stood at 3.5 million. At the end of the siege only 700,000 remained. An estimated 1.5 million civilians and military personnel died. Yet the population endured and then prevailed. Ten-year-old Nikolai Vasiliev’s diary provides an account of the horror of the starvation winter: “Saturday, 10 January: The first misfortune struck my father. They stole his ration card from him and that is why he died.” Later, Vasiliev’s mother died. He was placed in a children’s home and then evacuated by steamer.

The authors suggest that much of the material privation during the first winter of the war resulted from callous disregard for the fate of the population and blundering incompetence at the center and in Leningrad. The local leaders did not order evacuation of the city before the blockade closed. Nor did they disperse the storage of Leningrad’s food reserves, which were substantially reduced in early September when Germans bombed the Badaev bakery warehouse complex. Moreover, they shifted food and livestock out of the city. Even as Leningrad came under complete blockade, Moscow continued to press for higher arms output and longer hours for defense workers. The heroic stand of the Soviet troops holding the city could not prevent a winter of starvation with ever-decreasing rations of bread. The fuel supply dwindled, electric power stopped, and people froze to death in their homes and workplaces. Bidlack and Lomagin expose the authorities’ egalitarianism in the distribution of rations: more went to workers, technicians, and managers, less to those who did not work, and none to those without resident permits. Instances of cannibalism occurred among the population during the first terrible winter. The turning point came with the organization of the ice highway across Lake Ladoga, which evacuated people from the city and brought in needed supplies. Stalin was slow to grasp the importance of
the road of life, and it was not fully organized until late January 1942. The failure of efforts to break the blockade in 1941 and 1942 affected morale.

The authors offer a detailed examination of the local officials within the Communist Party, government, and security services charged with running the besieged city. Aleksei Kuznetsov, the Second Secretary of the Leningrad party organization, was a competent official facing impossible tasks. From the trials of the blockade, Kuznetsov emerged with a vision for the revival of Peter the Great’s city as a window on the outside world. That was not to be. He was executed during the “Leningrad affair” in 1950.

The other side of the control apparatus in Leningrad was the NKVD and the NKGB, which handled internal affairs and state security respectively. These men were the sword and shield of the revolution who fought the battle against counterrevolutionary agitation, subversion, and sabotage, relying on a network of informants. The “competent organs” provided to party and state officials periodic assessments of public attitudes, with special attention to signs of discontent. There was no shortage of discontent. But their archives provide evidence of mishandled investigations reminiscent of Captain Louis Renault’s “arrest the usual suspects” in *Casablanca*. The security services began the war still arresting Trotskyites but then found echoes of the Platonov and Tukhachevskii affairs to explain conspiracies among academicians and professors who were supposedly scheming to turn Leningrad over to the Germans. The historian Evgeny Tarle, who had been arrested during the Platonov affair, was presented as the candidate for foreign minister in a pro-German government following the defeat of the USSR, the same position Tarle supposedly would have received in the case of the Platonov affair in 1930. It did not matter that Tarle was the author of popular patriotic works, and as a Jew not likely to be an agent of Nazi Germany. On at least one occasion, Petr Kubatkin, the head of the Leningrad NKVD, quashed an investigation involving a *stukach* (informer) who was guilty of acting as an agent provocateur to promote his own interests, dropping the matter of the “activists” or “starving professors.”

This book makes an important contribution to our understanding of the siege of Leningrad and the operation of the Soviet system in times of crisis.


Reviewed by Kevin Jon Fernlund, University of Missouri, St. Louis

Gretchen Heefner asks a good question: why did ordinary citizens in the American West agree to cede portions of their own land to the U.S. government, knowing their property would be used indefinitely as launch sites for Minuteman intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The first of these nuclear-armed ICBMs were deployed on 22 October 1962. By 1967, 1,000 had been positioned and aimed at the Soviet