



The Ghost of the Executed Engineer: Technology and the Fall of the Soviet Union (Russian Research Center Studies)

By Loren Graham

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Stalin ordered his execution, but here Peter Palchinsky has the last word. Palchinsky tells of Soviet technology and industry, the mistakes he condemned in his lifetime, the corruption and collapse he predicted, the ultimate price paid for silencing those who were not afraid to speak out. The story of this visionary engineer's life and work, as Graham tells it, is also the story of the Soviet Union's industrial promise and failure.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

After Soviet engineer Peter A. Palchinsky (1875-1929) was arrested in 1928, his voluminous files of correspondence and professional papers were carted away by the secret police to languish unknown in a Moscow archive until 1991 when Graham, a well-known historian of Russian science and technology, rediscovered them. Two chapters of this work cover Palchinsky's life and professional accomplishments; three show how Soviet engineering is the poorer for not adopting his ideas of "humanitarian engineering." A graduate of the St. Petersburg Institute of Mining, Palchinsky was always interested in the political and economic facets of any construction project (such as housing and living conditions of the crew members). His ideas led to trouble with both the tsarist and Soviet governments. Some of the spectacular failures of Soviet construction (including Chernobyl and the steel complex at Magnitogorsk) Graham blames on Stalin's propensity for building the biggest, regardless of the human aspects. This short, specialized monograph belongs in both engineering and area studies collections.

- *Marcia L. Sprules, Council on Foreign Relations Lib., New York*

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Review

In this gem of a book, Loren R. Graham, our foremost authority on Soviet science and technology, draws the reader into the life story of Peter Palchinsky, a remarkable Soviet engineer who was executed in 1929 for treason...Like all memorable books, [this one] leaves the reader wrestling with large questions. The fate of Palchinsky was specific to Stalinist Russia, but the story Mr. Graham tells prompts us to reflect on the tenuous position of the state-supported social critic in all places, at all times. (Susan Gross Solomon *New York Times Book Review*)

Loren Graham has written a wonderful book about the relationship between technology and society. He has woven together an account of the life and work of a Russian engineer, Peter Palchinsky, and an analysis of the failures of Soviet engineering projects. The result is an elegant and concise essay on the dangers of engineering which ignores human values...This superb book distills in a vivid and moving way the results of Graham's many years of research on Soviet science and technology. (David Holloway *Science*)

Loren Graham clarifies important questions concerning the interface between politics and technology, the significance of which extend beyond the Soviet experience. Among the most striking of these is the way his examples illustrate how arbitrary political power can be deployed both to impose irrational policies, which flew in the face of scientific laws, technical parameters and human capabilities, and to misrepresent their consequences for public consumption...This book will provide an invaluable insight into the long-term impact of Stalinism on Soviet technical culture. (Peter Kneen *Times Higher Education Supplement*)

[A] provocative and engaging volume. (S. Frederick Starr *New Republic*)

This remarkable book by Loren R. Graham deals with one of the many independent minds crushed by the Soviet government. (Hiroaki Kuromiya *American Historical Review*)

A terrific read, and a needed reminder of what happens when technology is loosed from social responsibility. (Chet Raymo *Boston Globe*)

From the Back Cover

Stalin ordered his execution, but here Peter Palchinsky has the last word. As if rising from an uneasy grave, Palchinsky's ghost leads us through a miasma of Soviet technology and industry, pointing out the mistakes he condemned in his lifetime, the corruption and collapse he predicted, the ultimate price paid for silencing those who were not afraid to speak out.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Connie Sims:

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