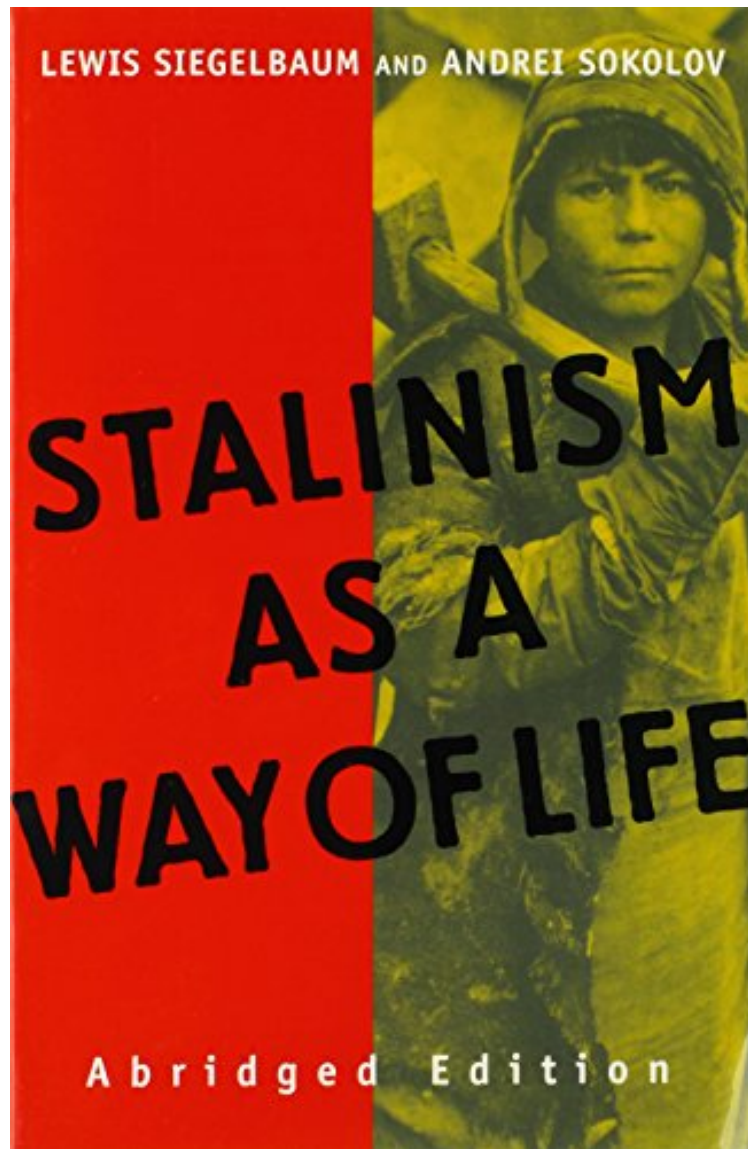


(Read now) Stalinism as a Way of Life

## Stalinism as a Way of Life

*Lewis Siegelbaum, Andrei Sokolov*  
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#447543 in Books Lewis Siegelbaum 2004-05-10Original language:EnglishPDF # 1 9.21 x .82 x 6.14l, 1.13  
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**Lewis Siegelbaum, Andrei Sokolov : Stalinism as a Way of Life** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Stalinism as a Way of Life:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A fair portrayal of life in the early years of the USSRBy G.E.This book chronicles the time period from around when Stalin assumed power in the USSR to just before World War Two. So, basically we're talking about the 1930's, mostly. Many of the documents are quite revealing about the state of affairs in the USSR, both positive (increased education, literacy and skills, for example) and negative (the atrocious

agrarian policy with the kolkhoz farms, the appalling conditions in Soviet orphanages, etc.) Many letters reveal a populace that wasn't afraid to voice their opinions and complain to the state that claimed to represent them, though, which in a way puts the lie to the claim that the USSR was a monolithic terror-state that would execute anyone who spoke out (although there was plenty of grovelling towards "comrade Stalin" as well, who had an impressive personality cult by any measure, as this book demonstrates). The USSR was actually a weak state in some ways...backstabbing was a favorite past-time for Soviet bureaucrats. Mass executions and a chaotic situation in the countryside don't point towards a state that was firmly in control. This book includes extensive commentary from the authors, who help place the letters and events in Soviet society in their proper context. I'd recommend reading this if you're interested in the social and economic history of the USSR.

3 of 7 people found the following review helpful.  
Chilling dig into the archives reveals the horrors of Soviet life  
By David Ljunggren  
Thanks to careful digging through some of the many archives in Moscow, Siegelbaum and Sokolov have produced a minor masterpiece. They selected 157 documents (many of them letters, but some secret reports) showing the devastation wrought on the lives of Soviet citizens during the 1930s. Reading through these often heartbreaking pleas, denunciations and complaints gives you an idea of the damage done to people by Stalin's decisions to rip apart the agricultural system, focus blindly on industrialisation while purging millions of allegedly unreliable elements. As the authors say: "In reading the documents, one cannot help but be astonished at how skilfully the country's leadership created hardships and problems for its citizens, only to solve them with considerably less success." Tens of millions starved while others walked around in bare feet or attended wretched schools because all elements of society were in total chaos. What also comes through clearly is that the quickest thinkers usually did best, for they had the foresight to loudly pledge allegiance to the Communist system while the majority of the population struggled to work out what was happening. And if you take the documents here at face value, those Communist bosses were often total incompetents, more keen to curry favour with Moscow and steal what they could for family and friends rather than doing their jobs. When you finish this remarkably depressing work you do wonder quite how anything ever got done in the Soviet Union and you also marvel at how much potential the country squandered.

5 of 7 people found the following review helpful. "Incredible physical and psychological overload"  
By Harry Eagar  
The popular picture of the Soviet Union in the 1930s as a bloody, erratic, dark prison inhabited by scurrying, cowed, silent victims of totalitarianism is only half correct. The victims were not that silent. Using their often newly acquired ability to write, they sent outspoken complaints right to the top, or nearly the top, and to newspapers. They even wrote the NKVD demanding and -- evidently -- expecting justice. Few of these complaints were published, but they weren't cast into the round file either. They were catalogued and saved and now they are being mined for an unparalleled worm's eye view of "Stalinism as a Way of Life." It was not different in principle from tsarism, even if the government was far more efficient at persecuting its citizens. But just as their grandparents had blamed misery on local officialdom and believed that if only "little father the tsar" knew what was happening, changes would be made, grandchildren believed in the goodness of centralism. Change "little father" to Stalin, or, more often, Kalinin or Krupskaja, and the grandchildren's complaints are not greatly different from what the grandparents had. Except that, as Siegelbaum and Sokolov point out (in the last words), we don't have the written thoughts of the tsarist underclasses, since tsarism was careful to keep them illiterate. More than half a century ago, Alexander Werth wrote that Russian parents, despite the persecutions, were often grateful to the Bolsheviks for at least teaching their children to read. Kneejerk anti-Bolsheviks label Werth a Red stooge for saying so, but we now know that parents do think like that. Micronesian parents felt that way about the Japanese, after centuries of indifference and oppression by the Spaniards and Germans, although otherwise it would seem they had no more reason to admire the Japanese than the Russians (and non-Russian nationalities) had to like the Communists. These selections from letters and some government reports are assembled into six categories: the beginning of collectivization, the emergence of the nomenklatura, the constitutional "debate," the false dawn before the mass roundups, the countryside and childhood. The chapter on childhood is the most poignant. Not all were complaints, some were denunciations by (probably) ambitious apparatchiks or sincere "new socialist men." As the authors say, "Social support for the regime . . . (was) located in distinct social groups . . . to whom the prodigious expansion of state power under Stalin appealed." Or who just enjoyed being overdogs after having been underdogs. You have to read the endnotes to get the full flavor. The editors barely allude to, but they do hint at the reason these letter writers expected improvements despite hunger, Kafkaesque arrests, rapes and other sufferings: People believed Bolshevik promises that the government was trying to improve things. No one ever had any reason -- not even a false hope -- to expect anything better out of tsarism. As one old peasant who, late in life, acquired a piglet, something he'd never had before, put it: "I don't remember any youth in my past." Siegelbaum and Sokolov cut to the heart of the matter with a pithy comment about the "two eternal questions" of Russia: What is to be done? and Who is to blame? The letters are explicated and commented on in passages by the editors that are sometimes obscure. This abridged version is intended primarily as a text in undergraduate classes but is anything but a tedious textbook. Thanks to the Internet, purchasers can avoid the cost of the expensive full edition by reading the excised letters on line.

"Maybe some people are shy about writing, but I will write the real truth. . . . Is it really possible that people at the

newspaper haven't heard this. . . that we don't want to be on the kolkhoz [collective farm], we work and work, and there's nothing to eat. Really, how can we live?"—a farmer's letter, 1936, from *Stalinism as a Way of Life* What was life like for ordinary Russian citizens in the 1930s? How did they feel about socialism and the acts committed in its name? This unique book provides English-speaking readers with the responses of those who experienced firsthand the events of the middle-Stalinist period. The book contains 157 documents—mostly letters to authorities from Soviet citizens, but also reports compiled by the secret police and Communist Party functionaries, internal government and party memoranda, and correspondence among party officials. Selected from recently opened Soviet archives, these previously unknown documents illuminate in new ways both the complex social roots of Stalinism and the texture of daily life during a highly traumatic decade of Soviet history. Accompanied by introductory and linking commentary, the documents are organized around such themes as the impact of terror on the citizenry, the childhood experience, the countryside after collectivization, and the role of cadres that were directed to “decide everything.” In their own words, peasants and workers, intellectuals and the uneducated, adults and children, men and women, Russians and people from other national groups tell their stories. Their writings reveal how individual lives influenced—and were affected by—the larger events of Soviet history.

"An extremely valuable contribution to the study of Stalinism."From the PublisherSelected by Choice as an Outstanding Academic Title for 2001; *Annals of Communism* SeriesFrom the Back Cover"This remarkable collection of documents from the Soviet Union in the 1930s provides a wide-angle lens on the decade's dizzying events. Through citizens' letters to newspapers and party officials, the reader is made aware of the confused and often contradictory nature of Russian politics and society under Stalin."--Leonard Benardo, *New York Times Book* ; "Siegelbaum provides an excellent introduction as well as informative commentary throughout the book."--Harold J. Goldberg, *History*; "An extremely valuable contribution to the study of Stalinism"--Slavic