

From the *Slavic Review* Editorial Board:

Slavic Review publishes signed letters to the editor by individuals with educational or research merit. Where the letter concerns a publication in *Slavic Review*, the author of the publication will be offered an opportunity to respond. Space limitations dictate that comment regarding a book review should be restricted to one paragraph of no more than 250 words; comment on an article or forum should not exceed 750 to 1,000 words. When we receive many letters on a topic, some letters will be published on the *Slavic Review* website with opportunities for further discussion. Letters may be submitted by e-mail, but a signed copy on official letterhead or with a complete return address must follow. The editor reserves the right to refuse to print, or to publish with cuts, letters that contain personal abuse or otherwise fail to meet the standards of debate expected in a scholarly journal.

To the Editor:

I trust readers won't find my *Practicing Stalinism: Bolsheviks, Boyars, and the Persistence of Tradition* as simplistic as Michael David-Fox's review (vol. 73, no. 3) made it seem.

David-Fox is more interested in interpretive tendency than in the new archival evidence I presented on how the Soviet Communist Party worked in practice. Unfortunately, the general public reads our work less and less because we historians have come to care more about theory than evidence, more about historiography than history. As Natalie Zemon Davis opined some time ago, historians can apply theory or parts of theories to their material without making it the centerpiece of their work.

Accusing me of incautious generalizations, David-Fox misrepresents my work. Thus he accuses me of equating Old Bolsheviks with nobles. Many historians have compared Russian elites past and present to grandees, oligarchs, and the like. None of us mean that they were Spanish noblemen or Greek rulers. David-Fox rejects these common functionalist analogs (and my discussion of them) and instead accuses me of grand blanket statements of a kind that can be found his own review.

More seriously, he caricatures my views with quotes out of context. When I wrote that "little changed in the imperial period," I was not making a general statement. Pity that he did not quote my next words: "Proximity to persons and clientelism continued to govern the Russian political system" (91). As he knows, this section of the book refers not to the imperial period generally but to specific personalized practices. Similarly, when he accuses me of claiming that "little had changed" after World War II (267), he knows that the paragraph is about cliques and clans and not about the sweep of Russian history.

David-Fox is worried that I minimize ideology and that my book "reduces complex processes to a single dynamic" (637). Although I wrote that "the Bolsheviks were ideologues in their bones. . . . Make no mistake, they were convinced communists" (20–21), David-Fox wants me to foreground ideology as "an important sphere in Soviet history with its own dynamics" (637). Yet he disapproves when I did the same for practice.

In showing the remarkable long-term continuity of elite political practices over watersheds when ideology and economy changed dramatically, I made the case for a separate study of practices, something sociologists and anthropologists routinely accept.

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Today's Russian state institutions are vehicles for personalized politics; patrons and clans move in and out of institutions, which are promiscuously created and abolished. The modernizing institutions of the late imperial period were the anomaly; they vanished after a few months in 1917 when patrimonialism reasserted itself in "the revenge of Muscovy," to use James H. Billington's phrase. Could Russian political elites enact revolutionary, modern change with archaic practices? I think they could, did, and still do.

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Professor David-Fox chooses not to respond.