

Hill, Fiona & Clifford Gaddy, 2003. *The Siberian Curse: How Communist Planners Left Russia in the Cold*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press. xxii + 303 pp. ISBN 0815736452.

It might appear an overstatement to claim that this is one of the most important books on post-Communist Russia; however, I expect that among those who actually take it in their hands, a few would disagree. This slim volume has everything that a demanding reader would expect: it is thoroughly researched and written in clear and jargon-free language, beautifully designed and supplied with an index and bibliography; the argument is logically consistent and perfectly structured. Economists, geographers, experts in politics and naïve Russia-lovers will in the years to come again and again refer to and argue against its main conclusion: Russia can modernize and advance only if it ‘downsizes’ Siberia. The authors acknowledge and even evaluate the technical difficulties of moving population out of large Siberian and Ural cities, but the thrust of their argument is political: the leadership in Moscow (the only booming place in the whole vast country) has to reverse its flawed policy of keeping people in the East. It would perhaps amount to more than giving a rest to the myth of Siberia; if economic rationale becomes the guideline, Russia would change beyond recognition indeed. The only minor thing that does not quite work in the book is the ‘Potemkin’ metaphor: those proverbial villages were absent in the places where should have existed, while with the likes of Komsomolsk-na-Amure, it is rather the other way around.

Pavel Baev