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978-0-521-62743-6 - Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, Networking and Informal Exchange

Alena V. Ledeneva

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The word *blat* refers to the system of informal contacts and personal networks which was used to obtain goods and services under the rationing which characterised Soviet Russia. Alena Ledeneva's book is the first to analyse *blat* in all its historical, socio-economic and cultural aspects, and to explore its implications for post-Soviet society. In a socialist distribution system which resulted in constant shortages, *blat* developed into an 'economy of favours' which shadowed an overcontrolling centre and represented the reaction of ordinary people to the social constraints they faced. In social and economic terms, *blat* exchanges became vital to the population, and to the functioning of the Soviet system. At the same time, however, *blat* practices subverted the ideological and moral foundations of Soviet rule, and the study of *blat* provides concrete evidence of the tendency of the Soviet system to subvert itself. Finally, the book shows that the nature of the economic and political changes in contemporary Russia cannot be properly understood without attention to the powerful legacy of the *blat* economy.

ALENA V. LEDENEVA is a Research Fellow at New Hall, University of Cambridge. She previously lectured in sociology and social theory at Novosibirsk University

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