

**Iuri A. Petrov (ed.): Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda: Vlast', obshchestvo, kul'tura [The Russian Revolution of 1917: Power, Society, Culture], 2 vols, Moscow: ROSSPEN 2017, Index, Illustrations, ISBN: 978-5-8243-2151-7**

It has almost become a cliché amongst historians that Russians have paid more attention to the centenary of the First World War than that of the Revolution. Nevertheless, if 2017 saw no new monuments or lavish commemorations of the events of 1917, the fall of the Romanov dynasty and its replacement with Lenin's Bolsheviks did not go unnoticed. The thick, two-volume collective survey by members of the Institute of Russian History is particularly welcome in this respect, for it is a good indication that, after the chaotic quarter century that followed the Soviet Union's collapse, its scholars now examine the Revolution with relative dispassion.

A Hegelian might see the way Russians have considered their revolution over the past century as a dialectic. In the Soviet era, at least officially, the phenomenon was considered to be the inevitable and progressive transition towards the radiant future of Socialism. But as the USSR disintegrated, many came to regard it as an immense tragedy that wrought needless violence and destruction. In both cases, the emphasis often seemed to be on identifying its heroes and villains. Today, however, Russian historians tend to be more interested in understanding how the Revolution came about rather than attribute blame.

This is the goal Iurii Petrov, the Institute of Russian History's director, explicitly set when commissioning his colleagues to contribute to "Rossiiskaia revoliutsiia 1917 goda" (The Russian Revolution of 1917). As he explains, they were to respond to "the growing demand by contemporary Russian society, after the lengthy reign of ideological, political and historiographical mythology, objectively to re-examine [the Revolution] as natural stage in the uninterrupted historical development of Russia." (p. 1, 9) Like the international multi-volume series, "Russia's Great War and Revolution" – some of whose authors also contributed to this essay collection – Petrov's approach is look at the broader "arc of crisis," which regards the Revolution not as a single, radical break in with the past, but rather, as a "complex, multisided process" that spanned the seven years from 1914 to 1917, although he largely leaves the Great War out of the story.

After the obligatory historiographical survey, the volumes are divided into seven sections that cover foreign affairs, society, the economy, political institutions and parties, as well as culture. The first part is devoted to a relatively neglected aspect of the Revolution, with an extensive discussion of the Provisional Government's diplomacy by Dmitrii Pavlov, while Vladimir Buldakov describes the Bolsheviks' difficult negotiations at Brest-Litovsk with Germany to take their infant regime out of the war. If the former conducted its foreign policy largely in isolation of domestic events, much as its imperial predecessor, after October 1917 the two were intimately linked. Indeed, Buldakov points out, in 1918 "the very distinction [between foreign and domestic affairs] lost its traditional meaning" (p. 1, 125).

As a specialist in the field, Iurii Petrov naturally contributed to the lengthy (230 page!) section devoted to the economy, along with seven other scholars. Its chapters examine industry, agriculture, and transport, as well as the relevant policies of the successive governments. Turning conventional wisdom on its head, the authors point out that the economy was actually improving by the beginning of 1917. The problem was that the lion's share of the recovery was due to military production, while that of consumer goods continued to lag.

Meanwhile, with one third of the male working population in uniform, labour shortages in the field hampered agricultural production. After February, however, the economy went into free fall due to the Provisional Government's indecisive and confused management.

The volumes also devote considerable attention to politics, with two rich sections on "The Transformation of Government Institutions" and "Russian Political Parties during the Revolution of 1917." As in the chapters about the economy, the Provisional Government comes across as hopelessly irresolute. While its ministers undertook sweeping reforms to move the erstwhile empire towards Western style civil liberties, they lacked the confidence and will to make difficult decisions. Kiril Solov'ev notes that the Provisional Government was "a dictatorship bashful about its dictatorial authority [...] a revolutionary government that didn't consider itself fully revolutionary" (p. 479).

Interestingly, the authors suggest that the workers and soldiers' soviets in Petrograd initially bore little blame for the Provisional Government's fecklessness. They point out that, in the immediate aftermath of the February Revolution, these assemblies were willing to cooperate with the new regime. Therefore, there was no mutually competing "dvoevlastie" (dual authority). Instead, the ministers simply let power slip out of their hands, ultimately leaving it to the Bolsheviks to pick it up in October.

One of the most intriguing sections covers revolutionary culture. While it has long been studied in the West – the work of the late Richard Stites comes to mind – this is a relatively new field for Russian historians. Here too, the authors challenge the conventional wisdom that held that the Revolution appeared entirely to reject the Silver Age that preceded it, with the latter's emphasis on exoticism and art for art's sake. Instead, Tatiana Filippova points out, Russia's *fin de siècle* actually set the path for 1917, "In its content, style and specifics, the empire's culture of the early 20th century prepared (or predicted) how the crisis would unfold in a revolutionary way" (p. 2, 393). However, she concludes, even with the perspective of a 100 years, understanding the ways tradition and revolution were interwoven in the Soviet Union remains unclear.

Iurii Petrov and his "kollektiv" have produced an excellent reference that will be invaluable to students of Russian history (and their professors) in helping them understand the dramatic events of 1917. Even an essay collection of over 1 300 pages inevitably has a few shortcomings. Thus, while acknowledging its impact, it pays surprisingly little attention to the First World War itself. At the same time, the authors might have cited more foreign sources. But this in no way diminishes the volumes' importance. And they confirm that, at least amongst historians, the Cold War's ghosts are at last being laid to rest. If in the Soviet era, domestic and Western scholars tended to be divided into two very distinct solitudes when they studied the Revolution of 1917, they now carry out their dialogue in a "single, historiographical realm," as Petrov rightly points out.

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye, Ontario

**Sara Reguer: My Father's Journey: a Memoir of Lost Worlds of Jewish Lithuania, Brighton: Academic Studies Press 2015, 155 S., ISBN: 9781618114143**

„Von Waloschyn machte ich mich auf den Weg nach Vilnius, das von den Litauern besetzt worden war. Die Reise war so gefährlich wie die Durchquerung des Roten Meeres.