

PAVEL AXELROD AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF MENSHEVISM. By *Abraham Ascher*. Russian Research Center Studies, 70. Hoover Institution Publications, 115. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972. ix, 420 pp. \$18.50.

If it were not for the efforts of the academic community, mostly in the United States, many important figures in the Russian liberation movement would fall into oblivion. After studies on Trotsky, Martov, Miliukov, and Struve we now have a full-size biography of Akselrod. In this book Professor Ascher succeeds in presenting a very readable, solidly constructed, and reliable account of the activities and thoughts of the cofounder of the Russian Social Democratic Party who was also the brain and soul of Menshevism. The revolutionaries of the 1870s abounded in distinguished men and women. Even among them Akselrod stood out for his intellectual and moral acumen. Ascher dwells on the main stages of the life of this unusual personality, who was born into a very poor Jewish family, received only the rudiments of a formal education, and, thanks to his natural faculties, acquired knowledge and culture and, already as a young man, occupied a respected place on the Russian and international socialist Olympus.

Not an orator or a writer, Akselrod was, as Ascher points out, a born propagandist (p. 90). He influenced people and exercised his leadership primarily by means of the spoken word. He gathered around him those who wanted to listen to him, and discussed with individuals or small groups ideas dear to his heart. In this way he drafted disciples who disseminated his political designs. In an outline of Akselrod's biography Potresov called him a philosopher of tactics (St. Petersburg, 1914). Indeed, Akselrod was a master of political strategy. He could discern in the changing situations new vistas for the labor movement. Many years ago, for example, this reviewer heard from B. O. Bogdanov that the so-called *likvidatorstvo* originated from Akselrod's talks to the Petersburg Social Democratic *praktiki*, who met regularly in Akselrod's temporary residence in Finland in 1906 (Bogdanov took an active part in these gatherings).

Akselrod always opposed the practice and theory of self-appointed "do-gooders" who, implementing the prescriptions conceived by themselves, endeavored to render the laboring masses happy, and who perpetuated their leadership ad infinitum. The undeservedly forgotten, gifted Menshevik publicist Gregory Bienstock, referring to one of the constructions of Roman law, named such a political model "negotiorum gestio" ("Geschäftsführung ohne Auftrag"). Akselrod's attitude in this respect is clear from one of his writings quoted by Ascher: "Revolutionaries from the intelligentsia' should 'strive . . . to dissolve into the proletariat. . . . And in this way they should transform the revolutionary party . . . into a workers' party'" (p. 180).

This formula coincides to such an extent with Lavrov's platform that one is inclined to consider Lavrov and Akselrod as partisans of the same school of political thought. Lavrov wrote in the program of his publication *Vpered!*: "The reconstruction of Russian society must be carried out not only *with the aim* of people's welfare, not only *for* the people, but also *through* the people" (*Vpered!* 1873, vol. 1, p. 12). Akselrod's expectations remained unfulfilled. This does not have to mean, however, as Ascher thinks, that "as a political figure in Russia, Axelrod cannot be judged a success" (p. 389). I submit that history has not yet pronounced its last word on the controversy between Menshevism and Bolshevism. The dissident movements in the USSR may still have many surprises in store. The fact that one

of the dissident groups, "Seiatel" ("The Sower"), has introduced its declaration of aims with the statement "Our goal is the creation of a Social Democratic party in Russia" (*Seiatel'*, no. 1, September 1971) perhaps represents a beginning of Akselrod's vindication as a political figure.

I noticed a few minor inaccuracies in this otherwise excellent book: not P. A. Garvy but B. O. Bogdanov belonged, together with K. A. Gvozdev, to the leadership of the Labor Group of the Central War Industry Committee (p. 260); the Menshevik party was active in the USSR at least until the end of the 1920s and not to the middle of 1922 (p. 374); M. P. Dragomanov was a well-defined and not a "somewhat enigmatic figure among Russian émigrés" (p. 53); dissensions were not a specific characteristic of the Menshevik party (p. 273)—the Mensheviks used to disagree among themselves probably not less but hardly more than the members of the socialist parties in and outside Russia did.

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KRUSHENIE ESEROVSKIKH PRAVITEL'STV. By *V. V. Garmiza*. Moscow: "Mysl'," 1970. 294 pp. 1.07 rubles.

This is a history of the S.R.-dominated anti-Soviet governments which were established in various parts of Russia in the aftermath of the October Revolution. Substantial individual chapters are devoted to the "Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly (Komuch)," "The S.R. Governments in Siberia," "The S.R.'s and the Interventionists in Arkhangelsk," "The Socioeconomic Policies of the S.R.'s," and "The Ufa State Conference and the Directory." Concluding chapters treat "The Workers Movement and Bolshevik Underground in the S.R.-White Guardist Rear," "The Struggle of the Peasants against the S.R.'s," and "The Destruction of Komuch: The Liberation of the Volga Region."

In his general approach to these problems, Garmiza does not break new ground. At the start he states that "study of the historical experiences of the nature and destruction of the [S.R.] governments brings to light the deception of the laboring classes by the old and new standard-bearers of capitalism and so will strike a blow at contemporary imperialist ideology with its false declarations about the democratic character of bourgeois government." Inevitably the aspirations, and even more the practices, of the S.R. governments, the authority of each particular S.R. regime in the eyes of the local population, the alleged subservience of the S.R.'s to capitalist interests and the extent of the party's dependence on foreign powers, the involvement of the S.R.'s in and the scope of White terror, and so forth, are subject to distortion. Still, this is the first systematic, comparative study of all of the S.R. governments taken together; Garmiza makes extensive use of central and local archives, the contemporary Soviet and White press, and hard-to-obtain early memoir accounts representing both the Soviet and anti-Soviet side. The book provides great detail and some fresh insights into such problems as the often complex internal politics and operations of Komuch and the important Ufa State Conference. Therefore, its underlying bias notwithstanding, it should be of genuine interest and value to the specialist.

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