

THE ‘SOCIAL’ AND THE ‘POLITICAL’ IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION

The revolution of 1905: authority restored. By Abraham Ascher. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992. Pp. xii + 443. \$47.50.

The keys to happiness: sex and the search for modernity in fin-de-siècle Russia. By Laura Engelstein. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 461. \$29.

Socialist Europe and revolutionary Russia: perception and prejudice, 1848–1923. By Bruno Naarden. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. 595. £50.

Marxism and revolution: Karl Kautsky and the Russian marxists, 1900–1924. By Moira Donald. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 324. £30.

Revolution in Russia: reassessments of 1917. Edited by Edith Rogovin Frankel, Jonathan Frankel and Baruch Knei-Paz. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xx + 343. £15.95 (pbk).

Survival and consolidation: the foreign policy of Soviet Russia, 1918–21. By Richard K. Debo. Montreal, Kingston, London and Buffalo: McGill–Queen’s University Press, 1992. Pp. xiii + 502. £42.

‘*The Republic of the Ushakovka*’: *Admiral Kolchak and the allied intervention in Siberia, 1918–20.* By Richard Connaughton. London and New York: Routledge, 1990. Pp. ix + 192. £30.

The books under review deal with the turbulent period between 1905 and 1921 which saw the failure of the tsarist government’s efforts at modernization, the crisis of a short-lived liberal government in 1917 and the establishment of a Bolshevik dictatorship. Though diverse in subject-matter and approach, they reflect, to a greater or lesser extent, the main development that has taken place in western historiography during the past two decades: namely, the rapid advance of social history. In the aftermath of 1968, a new generation of historians, rejecting the cold war assumptions that structured much of the historiography of the Russian revolution, began to explore aspects of that revolution which had been deemed unworthy of attention by advocates of the totalitarian model. Exploiting the increased, but still limited opportunities to work in Soviet archives and libraries, they turned to the history of the popular classes, principally the working class, but also including soldiers, peasants and national minorities, during the last years of the *ancien régime* and the early years of Soviet power, with a view to analysing the social roots of the political crisis and, in particular, the social forces that lay behind Bolshevik victory. Though their concerns were various, the social historians, by revealing in detail the participation of the popular masses in the revolution, successfully challenged the view that this was a revolution made by radical intellectuals and/or political parties. In recent times, particularly in the light of the fall of communism, some of the limitations of this impressive body of innovative and illuminating work are beginning to be evident. One such limitation resides in the fact that social historians, by and large, left intact the conventional distinctions between ‘state’ and ‘society’, between ‘politics’ and the ‘social’ or, more precisely, failed to

pursue the logic of their investigations into mass mobilization and politicization by seeking to reconceptualize 'power' in the revolutionary period. They continued to think of the state as a set of institutions whose primary domestic purpose was to maintain order in society, and to think of 'power' essentially as a quantum possessed by the state, to be 'held' or 'captured'. In an important recent essay, one of the leading social historians of 1917, William Rosenberg, has begun to tackle some of these central issues.¹ More particularly, the social historians failed to address the politically charged question of what, if any, conclusions may be drawn about the nature of the Bolshevik regime in 1918 from its social base in 1917. Their failure to do so is, perhaps, a reason why a conservative historian, such as Richard Pipes, can simply choose to ignore their work, since he rejects the notion that there is any connection between social processes and the constitution of state power.² It is the purpose of this review, while judging the books on their own terms and merits, to try to indicate some of the ways in which the relation between the 'social' and the 'political' might be reworked.

Abraham Ascher's book is the second and final volume of his masterly study of the 1905 revolution. Together with the first,³ it chronicles the revolution from its origins in 1904 through to the moment in June 1907, when Stolypin finally brought the *duma*, the principal concession made by the tsar in October 1905, to heel. The two volumes offer a superb conspectus of the revolution in all its aspects, invariably astute and judicious in interpretation. They will remain the definitive work for many years. The volume under review deals with the concluding phase of the revolution from 1906 into the first half of 1907, when the autocracy and the liberal and revolutionary oppositions were still at an uneasy stand-off. Ascher shows how the authorities gradually reasserted control, arguing that their success had as much to do with the fragmentation and excesses of the opposition as with the use of repression. Even so, he suggests, the autocracy never succeeded in restoring the status quo ante, and significant elements of constitutionalism remained within the political order. He concludes that, if the prospects for the evolution of a constitutional monarchy were slender, they were by no means negligible. In contrast to Lenin's characterization of the 1905 revolution as a 'dress rehearsal for 1917', he considers it 'not as an event that made any one path of development inevitable, but rather as a critical juncture that opened up several paths'.⁴

The balance of the second volume is tipped towards high politics rather than social movements, in line with the author's belief that, in contrast to 1905, it was principally in the first and second *dumas*, comprised overwhelmingly of opposition deputies, that the conflicts of the final phase of the revolution were played out. He does not ignore social history, however, offering illuminating accounts of such important, but neglected topics as the Soviet of unemployed in St Petersburg in 1906 or the hideous pogrom in Bialystok in June 1906. He is at pains to emphasize the pervasiveness of lawlessness and political terror in this period. Yet he makes little attempt to ask how continuing unrest influenced and constrained the activities of the tsarist bureaucracy at central and local level. Nor does he explore the implications of the politicization of the popular classes for the behaviour of *duma* deputies. How and why, for instance, did peasants express

¹ William G. Rosenberg, 'Social mediation and state construction(s) in revolutionary Russia', *Social History*, xix, 2 (May 1994), 169–88.

² Richard Pipes, *The Russian revolution* (New York, 1990); *Russia under the Bolshevik regime, 1919–1924* (London, 1994).

³ A. Ascher, *The revolution of 1905: Russia in disarray* (Stanford, CA, 1988).

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 2.

enthusiasm for the *duma*, even as they continued to wreak vengeance on the landlords in the summer of 1906? Because he does not analyse the interaction between politics in the *duma* and politics in society, Ascher concludes rather lamely that responsibility for the failure of the constitutional experiment must be laid at the door of both the parliamentary opposition and the tsarist government. The former, he avers, were thoroughly unrealistic, believing they could change the system overnight, while the latter clung to the belief that they could rule as they had for centuries. The parliamentary opposition showed 'astonishing intransigence', while the tsar showed a 'failure of political leadership' (p. 370). Without suggesting that the constitutional experiment was doomed from the start, or that the actions of individuals and political groups had no bearing on the outcome, one is entitled to ask how far failure was due to what the author calls the 'chasm between state and society'. Greater attention to the civil society that Ascher recognizes as coming into existence might have led him to challenge the crude dichotomy of 'state' and 'society' and to expand the conception of 'politics' to take account of the ways that power was at issue at all levels of society and in institutions other than the *duma*. The emergence of competing political parties, trade unions, voluntary associations, professional bodies and a vigorous press is touched upon, but is not seen as reconfiguring the political arena, forging new political identities, creating a new agenda, inspiring *duma* deputies in their radicalism, stiffening the resistance of ministers and police chiefs. Paradoxically, the concentration on central political institutions and on the activities of politicians serves to undercut the emphasis on the openness of possibilities in late-imperial Russia, whereas a more sustained effort to utilize the concept of civil society might have reinforced it.

Far more original, though far less elegant, is the book by Laura Engelstein, a remarkable study of sexuality in late-imperial Russia. In a series of linked essays, she ranges brilliantly across sexual discourses in the period from mid-nineteenth century to the First World War, taking in legal reform, medical debate, female crime, the policing of prostitution, the pathology of syphilis, abortion, avant-garde art and boulevard fiction, stopping en route to offer portraits of such extraordinary figures as V. V. Rozanov, the conservative thinker and notorious anti-semite, and Anastasiia Verbitskaia, the title of whose sensational best-seller Engelstein appropriates for her own book. Following Foucault's conception of sexual categories and norms as a system of power relations, she opens up a novel and suggestive perspective on the workings of power in late-imperial Russia, which transcends the dichotomy of state and society. Her primary aim is to show that a new sexual regime was central to the modern civic order desired by liberal reformers. In particular, she focuses on the efforts of male professionals to create a public space in which liberal values, such as personal autonomy, the protection of privacy, individual equality and the rule of law, could be realized. Part 1 examines the legal and medical professions, showing how they used their expertise to define the sexual dimension of the civic revolution. In the fruitless attempt to reform the legal code in 1903, for example, Engelstein shows how (male) homosexuality tested the limits of the permissible in private conduct, while prostitution tested its limits on public ground. Similarly, in a fine chapter on female crime she shows how the intelligentsia's idealization of the peasantry interfered with attempts to explain female criminality, since its characteristic manifestations – in infanticide and spouse murder – suggested dysfunction in the peasant household, and hinted at a sinister dimension to that most organic female function, motherhood.

After 1905 men of the elites were freer to act in the political arena yet also beset by anxiety about the threat from below. In part 2 Engelstein argues that the role of youth

in the revolution heightened fears of sexual disorder, making continence popular as a social and moral ideal. For male professionals only a regime of disciplined rather than prohibited expression could enlist the potentially disruptive energy of desire in the service of civic virtue. Consequently, such men began to adopt more 'Victorian' sexual attitudes. Prostitutes, once seen as victims of economic need and men's depravity, came to represent a threat of biological as well as social pathology, and theories of organic determinism acquired greater plausibility. At the same time, intellectuals were increasingly drawn to themes of transgression, disorder, chaos and desire. By 1906 or 1907 the anxiety they generated had crystallized into a self-proclaimed 'sexual crisis', manifest in a number of public concerns and aspects of social policy. Images of the sexual abuse of children, for example, dramatized the threat of libidinous disorder posed by classes whose innocence and capacity for self-control were now in doubt, as well as the corrupt desires of manipulative elites. While the theme of sexual crisis runs through this second part, it is curiously underanalysed. Was it 'real' as well as imagined? How did themes of transgression connect with the general picture of an educated society obsessed with the problems of sublimation in the interests of civic responsibility?

Engelstein's readings of contemporary discourse are invariably trenchant and thought-provoking. Yet precisely because the book is so densely researched and so brimming with ideas, it cries out for more systematic organization. The reader has a hard time maintaining continuity through the abrupt transitions and congested prose, connecting the different (and sometimes contradictory) threads of argument made within and between chapters. Yet this should not detract from what is a marvellous and pioneering book. Its importance lies, first, in the fact that it opens up an entirely new subject to historians of late-imperial Russia, that of sexuality, hitherto completely uncharted terrain. Secondly, in demonstrating how the social and cultural organization of sexual difference was inextricably linked to the power relations between state and society, between bureaucrats and professionals, between elites and masses, and between men and women, Engelstein has opened up an exciting way of expanding and challenging conventional understandings of the political crisis in fin-de-siècle Russia.

The vogue for social history in the 1970s and 1980s led to a decline in the history of ideas, since socio-economic forces and social movements were deemed to be more influential than ideology and high politics in determining the course of historical development. In recent times, however, social historians have become increasingly uncomfortable with models of social determinism, premised on the grounds of material life. Under a variety of influences, including Foucauldian discourse analysis and cultural anthropology, they have begun to analyse the ways in which social reality is constituted through language, and the complex practices and discourses whereby social and cultural meaning is produced and communicated. Laura Engelstein's book is one of the first to register this shift in focus within the Russian field. At the same time, the renewal of interest in the ideational dimension of historical action is rehabilitating older modes of historical writing. Studies of the ideology and leading personalities of Russian social democracy had their heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, but we now have two studies which revive that tradition, while extending it in interesting ways. The books by Bruno Naarden and Moira Donald share much in common, both distancing themselves from the writings of the cold war era, which tended to construe Bolshevism as a peculiarly Russian phenomenon, whose roots could be traced back to S. G. Nechaev's *Revolutionary catechism* of 1869 or whatever. Both instead situate Russian social democracy squarely within a European context. Interestingly, however, this leads the

two writers to exactly opposite conclusions. Donald argues: 'Bolshevism pre-1914 was not only not out of line with the orthodox left wing of international Social Democracy, but in no major area did Lenin add anything of any weight that could be regarded as an original contribution to the development of marxist theory' (p. ix). By contrast, the implication of Naarden's account is that while the Mensheviks can justly be considered an integral part of the mainstream of the Second International, the Bolsheviks came increasingly to symbolize the otherness of Russia for many western socialists.

In his admirable study Naarden offers a detailed analysis of the attitudes towards Russia of European socialists between 1848 and 1923, arguing that these were rooted in perceptions of that empire buried deep within European political culture. From the late nineteenth century, socialists came to see Russia as the revolutionary country *par excellence*, and developments there provoked heated debate over such questions as terrorism and the mass strike. Although the author is keen to point up the ways in which entrenched assumptions about Russia's relation to Europe influenced these debates, it is hard to resist the conclusion that ideological differences and contemporary anxieties, such as that concerning the relation between the Free Unions and the SPD, played a more direct part in determining positions adopted. This is reinforced by the fact that individuals and groups changed their stance towards Russia: Kautsky, for example, revised his view in a steadily more positive direction. Yet, if Naarden tends to press socialist attitudes to the 'Russian question' too tightly into the Procrustean bed of traditional perceptions of Russia, this does not detract from what is a deeply-researched and learned study.

Given that his aim is to establish the otherness of Russia, it is curious that he should concentrate on Menshevism, rather than Bolshevism or the indigenous socialism of the SRs (about whom he is virtually silent), since Menshevism was the most 'European' of all the tendencies on the Russian left. It is almost as though a second book has been bolted on to the study of the 'Russian question' within the European socialist movement, a book comprising an examination of the role played by the Mensheviks as a legal opposition inside Russia after 1917. It is clear that Naarden is a passionate admirer of the Mensheviks' 'daring, vision and love of democracy' (p. 282), but the account he offers of their evolving analysis of, and strategy towards, the Bolshevik regime is judicious and comprehensive. Reading his book in conjunction with Donald's it is clear just how much Kautsky borrowed from the Mensheviks in developing his critique of Bolshevism. For it was they who first argued, albeit without Kautsky's rigour, that socialization of the means of production without democratic organization of society cannot advance proletarian power; that competition of parties, freedom of information and so on are vital to the realization of proletarian democracy, since the working class cannot rule *as a class*; that the Bolsheviks were creating a new kind of class society. Although it is hard to dispute Naarden's emphasis on Bolshevik repression as the key factor undermining Menshevism, a more sociological analysis would have revealed deeper weaknesses within Menshevism itself, ones which ultimately reflected the lack of congruence between Russian realities and European assumptions.

In her thoughtful and challenging book Donald seeks, first, to rescue Kautsky from the condescension of communist posterity, and second, to play down the novelty of Lenin's thought, by emphasizing its indebtedness to Kautsky. By analysing the issues that exercised Russian social democracy, she demonstrates that there was rarely any substantial difference of view between Lenin and Kautsky up to 1914. A Rosa Luxemburg or Anton Pannekoek stood much further from the orthodox mainstream than did Lenin. Indeed from the time of the Russo-Japanese war, Kautsky was a firm

believer in the imminence of the democratic revolution in Russia, ascribing a major role to the proletariat, backed by the peasantry. His support for something akin to the Leninist formula of a 'dictatorship of the proletariat and the poor peasantry' set him at odds with all non-Bolsheviks from Plekhanov to Trotsky. On the question of the peasantry, where Lenin is generally credited with greatest originality, Donald stresses the influence of Kautsky, though she points out that Lenin alone was dogmatic enough to believe that the peasants would support the nationalization of land. On the notorious question of party organization, she again emphasizes the identity of view between Lenin and Kautsky, suggesting that the difference between them was one of degree rather than kind. Yet the elevation by Lenin of the issue to what she calls the 'plane of Marxist theory' surely did have far-reaching implications, even if Kautsky himself did not recognize them (merely criticizing all the Russian comrades for their 'organizational particularism'), for at some point in Lenin's relentless stress on organizational matters, quantity became transmuted into quality, in accordance with Hegel's dialectic. And if one looks less at his substantive views on any issue and more at the underlying structure of this thought, it is evident that the intimate association of democracy and socialism, which was axiomatic for Kautsky, was foreign to Lenin's outlook. Donald's study is well argued, punchy in style, eminently readable. After so many decades when it was open season on Kautsky, her positive appreciation is to be welcomed. Her account brings out clearly the intellectual range, honesty, and openness of the man. But it must also be said that in her zeal to rehabilitate the 'renegade', Donald plays down the determinist, evolutionist and positivist cast of his thought. Yet it was, above all, in this respect that Lenin was the greater man. For he had the inestimable advantage over Kautsky of recognizing that revolutions are not produced through the inner motions of the capitalist mode of production: they have to be willed, planned and executed.

Such an emphasis on the voluntarism of Lenin and the agency of the Bolshevik party would once have been axiomatic for historians of 1917. That that is no longer so is evident from the collection of nineteen essays, edited by Jonathan and Edith Frankel and Baruch Knei-Paz in honour of Israel Getzler, the most consistently refreshing historian of the Russian revolution. Only three essays deal with Bolshevik ideology – Neil Harding's essay on Lenin, socialism and the state in 1917, Robert Service's essay on the Bolsheviks and the question of the war, and Baruch Knei-Paz's concluding reflections on Leninism – all of them are fine contributions. In addition, there is an ingenious essay by John Keep on Lenin's time budget and an engrossing study of the Soviet historiography of the February revolution in the 1920s by David Longley. All the rest of the essays are variously concerned with social and ethnic groups, popular movements, and politics in the localities. They are all of a high standard, and reflect the progress made in social history during the past two decades. *Pace* the blurb, only the intriguing introduction by Jonathan Frankel addresses the question which so agitated historians in the former Soviet Union in the first flush of perestroika, namely, whether in 1917 there were political alternatives to the Bolshevik seizure of power. He cogently presents both a 'pessimistic' case against the likelihood of a liberal democratic polity consolidating itself after February and – less satisfactorily but more provocatively – a counter-argument along the lines that the key to such a consolidation lay not with the liberals, as is usually supposed, but with the SRs. He suggests that, if elections to the constituent assembly had been called early (as was initially intended), a government centred on the SR party might have acquired broad legitimacy. Leaving aside the problems intrinsic to any counter-factual argument, the most pressing issue,

as Frankel recognizes, was the war, and there is little evidence that the SRs appreciated the urgency of bringing it to an end. It is doubtful that they would have gone down the path of separate peace with Germany in order to secure a parliamentary regime.

In a characteristically incisive piece, Israel Getzler argues that between February and October the soviets became quasi-parliamentary bodies, engaged in educating the masses in democratic elections, political pluralism and parliamentary procedures. He argues that the slogan 'All Power to the Soviets' was not anti-parliamentary in intent and was never counterposed to the call for a constituent assembly. However, his characterization of soviets as 'parliaments' of the 'toiling people' ignores the extent to which those two terms were in tension with each other. In a subtle study of political power in Saratov, for example, Donald Raleigh shows how the soviet of workers' and soldiers' deputies supplanted the pan-class committee of public safety in late spring, thereby linking the exercise of political rights to class rather than to citizenship. Similarly, in his fascinating account of the October revolution in the Ivanovo-Kineshma industrial region, David Mandel shows that in Ivanovo the workers wished to see a 'homogeneous government of social democracy' (i.e. without liberals and other representatives of the propertied classes). These two localities were not necessarily typical, but they suggest that there were two implicitly antagonistic conceptions of democracy at work, even before Lenin pronounced soviet democracy to be a superior form to that represented by the constituent assembly. This implicit antagonism was at the root of what is conventionally known as 'dual power', especially in the provinces, and it would have been illuminating if these local studies had subjected that particular shibboleth to scrutiny. Raleigh assumes that 'power' passed from the committee of public safety in Saratov to the soviet. Yet the situation he describes appears more to resemble one of 'multiplicity of power' (*mnogovlastie*) than of two competing power centres, since the *duma*, the *zemstvo*, the food-supply organs, etc. – all suitably 'democratized' – continued their activities down to and beyond October. What one misses here is a greater effort to conceptualize power, and this is a criticism of many essays in the volume. In his fine piece on the role of Red Guards, Rex Wade argues persuasively that the Bolsheviks did not lead these formations prior to October. In line with Getzler and Raleigh, he emphasizes the role of 'spontaneity, local leadership, self-organization and self-assertion'. Yet, in addition to failing to register differences between the workers' militias, the Red Guards and the people's militia, he fails to consider the impact of the attempt by the executive committee of the Petrograd soviet to incorporate these grass-roots organizations into a centralized civil militia. The emphasis on the autonomy of the popular movements is a recurrent one in the volume, but we learn little as to what, if anything, it meant for the nature of the Bolshevik regime that came to power in its name. Informative and scholarly as they are, the essays fail to pursue the implications of their findings, by calling into question the notion of 'power' that has structured our narratives. Only Edward Acton speculates on the significance of the new social history for wider interpretations of the Russian revolution, concluding that it tends to support a view of the revolution once considered beyond the academic pale – namely, that of the anarcho-libertarian left. This is fair enough so far as it goes: but that particular tradition offered an essentially metaphysical explanation of the subsequent rise of a Bolshevik dictatorship, suggesting that all who lead the masses are fated to dominate them. Most social historians would be unhappy with such an explanation; yet they have barely begun to sketch a more complex account that brings together elements of popular support, ideology, military and political organization.

So far the social historians of 1917 have paid little attention to the dynamics of counter-revolution, in contrast to their counterparts who work on the revolution of 1789. In a meticulous essay on the relation of the officers of the general staff to General Kornilov, Allen Wildman starts to fill this lacuna. He shows that only a small cohort of senior commanders and staff officers supported Kornilov's efforts to extirpate democratic organs at the front and in the rear. *En passant*, he quietly debunks George Katkov's thesis that there was no conspiracy by Kornilov to dictate a political settlement, merely a 'misunderstanding' between himself and Kerensky. What emerges is the political ineptitude of the nascent counter-revolution, and its failure to appreciate that success would require mobilization of a popular constituency. This surely had a bearing on the outcome of the civil war when the counter-revolution, in conspicuous contrast to its predecessor in the French revolution, failed to capitalize on popular discontent over food requisitioning, conscription, or attacks on the church. The reason may well be the one historians are no longer inclined to take on trust: namely, that the peasants had no confidence that the Whites would respect their title to the land.

In a concise and wide-ranging discussion of the historiography of the peasant movement in 1917, John Channon summarizes recent findings on the tempo, social dynamics and geographical distribution of peasant unrest in that year. While complaining with reason that the peasantry gets short shrift in much of the western historiography, he is left to deal with this huge subject in less than twenty pages. His conclusion that there is an emerging consensus that the 'peasant movement was organized mainly by the peasants themselves, that it was in large part not wantonly destructive, nor characterized by bloodshed' (p. 123) is rather disappointing, since it differs little from that reached by Launcelot Owen as far back as 1933. I would have liked to see greater effort made to use the advances in our knowledge to extend or challenge the terms of the debate. If, for example, it was the food question that was the 'main source of conflict between the provisional government and the peasantry' may this not suggest that the land question has loomed too large in our interpretation of the peasant revolution? And just how 'destructive' was it? Channon's endorsement of Richard Stite's remarks on peasant *mentalité* seems to undercut his earlier emphasis on the essentially rational character of peasant struggle. This touches on one of the thorniest questions of the social history of 1917, namely, the relationship between rational interest and affective elements, such as hatred, fear, unconscious desire. These elements, in turn, may be bound up with political culture, a subject which Channon, alone of all the contributors, touches upon.

A more probing, conceptually sophisticated approach is evident in a number of essays. In their essay on strikes in 1917 Diane Koenker and William Rosenberg posit that political conflict was not only about which class or party would come to dominate the emergent political and economic order, but also a conflict over social identities, over what it meant to be a 'worker', a 'bourgeois' or a 'Russian'. They see work stoppages as crucial to firming up class-based identities, and argue that the conflicting representations of strikes bolstered the sense that the working class 'in default of other social groups had become obligated to dominate society' (p. 134). In her essay on the commercial-industrial circles, Ziva Galili, instead of emphasizing the long-term structural determinants of employer behaviour in 1917, emphasizes how the conjuncture of the February revolution helped to popularize a vision of industrial relations pioneered by progressists in Moscow during the war. She shows how this vision shaped the collective behaviour of employers until the economic crisis of the

summer (a development that receives insufficient emphasis within the volume), when mounting worker conflict caused most employers to revert to an intransigent posture. Galili's is a stimulating piece, and raises important questions for further research. How did employers' organizations relate to demands for 'state control' of industry? How far did the progressist vision help a body like the Petrograd Society of factory and millowners to come to terms with the Bolshevik regime? The latter question may seem fanciful, but the society's journal for 1918 is characterized by a remarkable commitment to economic reconstruction.

Although the revolution of 1917 was waged under the banner of class emancipation, social historians have not neglected the other battles that were going on, notably, those for women's liberation and national self-determination. However, these were seen by the Bolsheviks as secondary to the struggle to liberate the working class, and have often been similarly treated by historians – as adjuncts to the main struggle. The collapse of the Soviet empire highlighted ethnicity as the main faultline of political relationships, and suggests that historians of 1917 would do well to attend to the complex relationships between class and ethnicity, and class and gender. In a superb *tour d'horizon* Ronald Suny captures the shifting relations between national and class identity in the Ukraine and Belorussia, the Baltic, and the Caucasus, stressing how class affiliation could reinforce or undermine ethnic identification at different conjunctures of the revolution. While conveying the complex social and political specificities of national identity in the different regions, he manages to make some compelling comparisons. Provocatively, he concludes that nationalism in the period between 1917 and 1921 was far weaker than most nationalists have allowed and, like class consciousness, was a 'disturbingly ephemeral phenomenon'. In the historic kingdom of Georgia peasant antipathy to the Russian autocracy and to the largely Armenian bourgeoisie took the non-nationalist political form of affiliation to Menshevism. In a fine essay Stephen Jones suggests that Georgian Menshevism adumbrated later marxist national-liberation movements. Strong organization and political experience quickly led Menshevism to dominate Transcaucasian politics after February (except in Baku), and Jones's central theme is how events, especially after October, forced its increasing 'nationalization'. As Turkey pressed its territorial claims, the Transcaucasian framework within which the Mensheviks had hitherto operated split asunder, leading in April 1918 to the creation of a separate Georgian state.

The disintegration and reconquest of the former empire and its restructuring along national lines as a federation of socialist republics is a key theme of the excellent study by Richard Debo. In November 1918 Lenin stated that foreign policy and international relations had been the 'main questions facing us' since October. Yet in most accounts, once the treaty of Brest Litovsk with Germany is concluded in March 1918, foreign policy is consigned to the margins of early Soviet history. Debo's volume, together with its predecessor,⁵ provides an outstanding account of Soviet foreign policy between 1917 and the spring of 1921. In engaging fashion, the first volume told how the Bolshevik government, bereft of significant military force, succeeded in its first year in not being swept away by the backwash of the ongoing war in Europe. After Brest-Litovsk, Debo argued, the commitment to international revolution rapidly gave way to a policy of *Realpolitik*, characterized by pragmatism and flexibility. This second volume develops the theme further. Debo shows how in the course of the civil war the preservation of the embattled state became the overriding goal of foreign policy. Against the current

⁵ Richard Debo, *Revolution and survival: the foreign policy of Soviet Russia, 1917–18* (Liverpool University Press, 1979).

fashion to stress the paramountcy of military factors in determining the outcome of the civil war, he sees it as essentially a political contest. The Soviet government acted decisively and effectively, whereas its enemies, foreign and domestic, did not. The indecision of the interventionist forces sprang mainly from the fact that they woefully misjudged the nature of the civil war and were badly divided. Two powers had the means to destroy the Bolsheviks – Germany and Japan – and both would have been pleased to do so but were restrained by France and the USA, respectively. Rivalry between Britain and France was almost as great, both seeking to prevent the other securing an advantage. An odd feature of the civil war, therefore, was that the intervening powers, while genuinely antipathetic to the Bolsheviks, did not see their defeat as a foreign policy priority. This was true even for the French, who wished to redeem their huge prewar investment in Russia. After being forced to withdraw the large expeditionary force sent to Ukraine in late 1918, France had to join the other intervening powers in leaving the job of fighting the Bolsheviks to the White generals. This is the theme of the lively book by Richard Connaughton, who paints a skillful picture of rivalry, mistrust, indecision and half-heartedness in relation to the British intervention in Siberia, described by Lord Curzon on its completion as a ‘highly discreditable enterprise’.

Soviet diplomacy worked to identify, exacerbate and promote differences among foreign powers, yet excelled at finding common ground with even its worst enemies (the Germans in 1918, Pilsudski in 1919, Lloyd George in 1920 and Kemal Ataturk in 1921). The Bolsheviks were prepared to yield territory to adversaries strong enough to take it, and to make far-reaching concessions to achieve their primary objectives of peace, regularization of diplomatic relations and the opening of commerce. Finland, the Baltic provinces, Belorussia, Poland, western Ukraine, the Crimea, central Asia, and the bulk of Siberia could all be left on the side while the Red army fought for the economically vital parts of the empire. By contrast, the Whites bridled over the smallest territory. They would not recognize the independence of Finland and the Baltic states; they would not negotiate with Pilsudski; they refused to co-operate with the independent states of the Caucasus. All antagonized the only allies they had. By the spring of 1921 the Bolsheviks had secured their frontiers and established acceptable (if not wholly satisfactory) relations with their neighbours. Moreover, they had sprung back to reclaim virtually the entire empire of Nicholas II. This was a wholly unexpected outcome to the events of the previous three and a half years, and nothing predetermined the final territorial settlement. Finally, as late as November 1918 few Bolsheviks believed their regime could survive the failure of revolution in the west. The possibility that they might survive the western assault and yet remain isolated emerged only slowly. It took shape from the fact that in the east there were no clear victors to the First World War. The Soviet–Polish war of 1920 revealed the reciprocal inability to effect significant change. The Bolsheviks thus concentrated on creating defensible frontiers behind which the Soviet order could be nurtured. Though Debo may underplay the element of utopian aspiration that persisted in Soviet foreign policy, his well-researched and clearly written volumes will stand as a balanced and reliable account for many years.

Foreign policy may appear distant from the concerns of social historians, yet it is a crucial means by which the domestic power and prestige of any state is enhanced or diminished. In seeking to rethink the relationships between the ‘social’ and the ‘political’ in late-imperial and early Soviet Russia we cannot afford to neglect the international state system and the international economy. Indeed the fall of

communism has made us more sensitive to the ways in which external pressures influenced internal developments in Russian society. This reminds us that the impulse to rethink the relationship between the 'social' and the 'political' comes not merely from the advance of scholarship, but from the radical shift in perspective that the fall of communism is beginning to bring about. We cannot, for example, now read the books by Naarden and Donald without wondering whether the cases of 'winners' and 'losers' in twentieth-century Russian history are not about to be reopened. Is it any longer self-evident that Lenin had the better of the argument with Kautsky? From the vantage point of the next century, may not Kautsky's 'centrism' or Menshevism come to appear as way stations along the main highway of socialist development, while communism comes to appear a cul-de-sac (albeit one that lasted seventy-two years)? As far as the theme of this review article is concerned, does not the fall of communism compel us to ask more searching questions about the relationship between the 'social' and the 'political' in twentieth-century Russian history? For many years, for example, it was virtually axiomatic that a leviathan party-state held sway over a weak, if not passive, society in the Soviet Union. From amid the rubble of that state, it is no longer so obvious. Similarly, as has already been mentioned, the fall-out from the collapse of communism makes us more sensitive to the ethnic faultlines within the former Russian and Soviet empires. For the Bolsheviks it was a truth, established by science, that social class was the principal basis on which power in society was exercised. And because class so saturates the historical record for the Soviet period, it is difficult for the historian to break with it as the means of categorizing reality. Yet the book by Engelstein and the essays by Suny and Jones remind us that other bases of social cleavage and power, notably gender and ethnicity, shaped the development of Russian society, and historians should try to deploy these concepts to reconstruct the relations between the 'social' and the 'political'. In other words, our task is not only to utilize the vast amount of new material that has become available in the once-closed archives, but also, and more importantly, to devise new ways of thinking about Soviet reality that break with the categories of its own self-presentation.

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