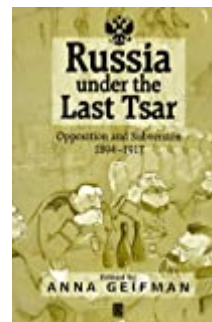


Anna Geifman, ed. *Russia Under the Last Tsar: Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*. Oxford, United Kingdom, and Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. 310 pp. \$59.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-55786-995-1.



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Rushin' Toward Revolution

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This book's main title, *Russia Under the Last Tsar*, suggests a far broader treatment than the book delivers. The subtitle, *Opposition and Subversion, 1894-1917*, reveals what the book is about: a discussion, through thirteen essays, of revolutionary and fractious forces in the Russian Empire during the tumultuous reign of Tsar Nicholas II.

Russia Under the Last Tsar is divided into four parts, each containing two-four essays. Part I, "Radical Socialism," contains essays on the Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, Bund, and Socialist Revolutionaries. Part II, "The Other Adversaries," discusses anarchists and national minorities, while part III, "'The Loyal Opposition' and the Russian Right," covers the State Duma, Constitutional Democrats, Octobrists, and right-wing monarchists. Part IV, "The Establishment," is represented by the security police, State Council, and Russian Orthodox Church.

In her introduction to the book, Anna Geifman, who also edited the book and contributed the essay, "The Anarchists and the 'Obscure Extremists,'" presents a pro-

file of an archetypal revolutionary, "a person of sensitive and soaring soul" (p. 5) who works hard "to make sure that the promised paradise will remain forever out of reach" (p. 8). She continues by pointing out how the Russian revolutionary movement proceeded to attract criminals and those who were psychologically unbalanced. While interesting, this material is tangential to main themes presented in the book; with development and substantiation, it would fit better as a separate essay. A more conventional introduction would have been helpful, especially since, as Geifman correctly states, "this volume does not have a unifying philosophy" (p. 2). What's needed is an explanation of how and why topics were selected and others omitted, and an illumination of themes that weave through the book.

Some essays are analytical, while others are survey articles or primary-source research pieces. Depending on one's particular interests, different approaches and topics will, of course, appeal to different people. The essays that appealed most to me were "Liberalism and Democracy: The Constitutional Democratic Party," by Melissa Stockdale and "The Bolsheviks," by Robert C. Williams. Both

essays are engaging, well-organized, and clear. They provide comprehensive, yet succinct, coverage of their subject matter.

Stockdale's essay on the Kadets takes a survey-article approach. Among other topics, she discusses the tension in the party between a commitment to constitutionalism and a commitment to democracy, its opposition to political violence, the divisiveness of the nationality issue, and its "unambiguous patriotism" (p. 168) during World War I. The endnotes to this essay are particularly thorough and useful.

On the other hand, Williams's essay on the Bolsheviks (previously published as a chapter in *Russia Imagined: Art, Culture, and National Identity*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1997) is of the analytical variety. It provides a chronological study in Western historiography, showing how and when new understandings of Bolshevism developed. For instance, the essay shows the evolution of Bolshevism into a phenomenon "more diverse and disputatious than orthodox Leninism" (p. 49). It also points out that the differences between Bolshevism and Menshevism were less than previously understood, the same observation that Andre Liebich makes in his essay, "The Mensheviks."

The inclusion of essays on nationalism and the Russian Orthodox Church, is particularly noteworthy, because these topics are frequently omitted in discussions of Russian revolutionary forces. In "National Minorities in the Russian Empire, 1897-1917," Theodore Weeks illustrates the relevant concepts and complexities through sketches of the Finns, Poles, Armenians, and Tatars. Gregory Freeze's essay on the Russian Orthodox Church, based on primary-source research, details how the Church distanced itself from the autocracy. Even though the priests have long been understood as a liberal and radical element, Freeze provides additional documentation. The bishops were far more conservative than the priests, yet Freeze shows how they, too, became "increasingly disenchanted and alienated" (p. 284) from the government.

Another fine, research-based essay is "Legislative Chamber History Overlooked: The State Council of the Russian Empire, 1906-1917" by Alexandra Korros. Since the State Duma typically receives the bulk of attention, it is refreshing and valuable for the State Council to receive equal billing. Created as the upper chamber "to support the tsar and his government" (p. 243), the State Council was intended to offset the expected radical nature of the State Duma. Korros points out in some detail, how-

ever, that the State Council was neither as conservative nor predictable as the autocracy had hoped (at least for 1906-1911). "It was never monolithic in its composition or scope of opinion" (p. 261). She also provides a good description of Petr Stolypin, his reform efforts, and his vigorous interactions with the State Council.

The other essays deal competently with their respective topics. So, individually, the essays have merit and substance, but the volume remains at the level of a collection of diverse and separate essays rather than achieving the coherence of a book.

Unfortunately, the index is sloppy and haphazard. Places are indexed poorly, and subjects even more so. Moscow makes its way into the index just once, even though references to Moscow understandably permeate the book. Saratov enjoys three entries, but is mentioned at least twelve times in the text. A subject as central to the revolutionary fervor as agrarian reform receives nary an index citation, not even to provide a cross-reference to "land policies," which in turn has only four entries. By my count, agrarian reform is mentioned in at least eight of the essays. Some of the most important passages on the Social Democrats are missed. Even people are treated spottily. Maxim Gorky is somehow skipped. And so on.

Even though this volume is a compilation of divergent and independent essays, it's no surprise that certain people, places, and topics appear throughout. A rigorous, comprehensive, carefully prepared index is therefore essential. This book doesn't have one.

Similarly, careful copy editing would have made the volume more consistent and readable. For example, one of the essay authors is twice listed as Dmitrii and twice as Dmitri. Dates sometimes are given as Old Style only and other times as Old and New. Transliterations are inconsistent: is it Kokostov or Kokovstev, Azef or Azev?

Geifman indicates that the book is intended for educated general readers, students, and academics. The educated general reader and the student may find individual essays valuable but will, I believe, find the overall book frustrating. Such readers may well be more satisfied with *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the Russian Revolution* (edited by Harold Shukman, Oxford, United Kingdom, and Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, revised and updated 1994). It is more comprehensive than *Russia Under the Last Tsar*, presents both topics and biographical sketches, and its index is better.

What about academics? When presented with a book

of essays, I look for “added value,” that is, something that makes the whole greater than the sum of the parts. In this case I don’t find the added value, and I do find a number of distractions, especially with the index.

Several additions would have strengthened this book and helped make it more coherent. These include suggestions for further reading for the book’s main topics; a glossary, with prime attention given to the manifold political parties and groups; and a chronology, at least of the State Dumas and Prime Ministers (Chairmen of the Council of Ministers).

In 1969 an earlier *Russia Under the Last Tsar* was published (edited by Theofanis Stavrou, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). It contained eight essays of considerably broader scope than those in the book un-

der discussion. It was highly regarded and widely used. (Curiously, even though this earlier book has the identical main title, it receives no mention whatsoever in Geifman’s tome.)

What would be valuable would be to start soon to prepare to bring out a third volume under the title *Russia Under the Last Tsar* on the centennial of the October Revolution. Such a volume should be broad in scope and draw on the insights of the new historiography both inside and outside Russia.

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