
REVIEWS

JOURNEY INTO REVOLUTION : PETROGRAD, 1917–1918. By *Albert Rhys Williams*. Edited by *Lucita Williams*. Foreword by *Josephine Herbst*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969. 346 pp. \$8.95.

RUSSIA AND HISTORY'S TURNING POINT. By *Alexander Kerensky*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1965. xvi, 558 pp. \$8.95.

LA RÉVOLUTION DE 1917: LA CHUTE DU TSARISME ET LES ORIGINES D'OCTOBRE. By *Marc Ferro*. Paris: Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 1967. 606 pp.

Albert Rhys Williams was one of a small band of radical young journalists from the United States, veterans of the American socialist and pacifist movements, who were drawn to Russia in the aftermath of the February Revolution. A onetime Congregational minister, Williams was thirty-three and a correspondent for the *New York Evening Post* when he arrived in Petrograd in early June 1917 knowing little about Russia and her past and speaking no Russian whatever. Overwhelmingly impatient to witness the creation of a free and just society, he was won almost immediately to the side of the Bolsheviks as the party of the enslaved and oppressed, the party of social revolution. Like his companion John Reed, Williams viewed the socialist struggle in Russia as his own. Again like Reed, Williams was everywhere, rushing from barracks to factories, from the Taurida Palace to Smolny, touring the provinces and the front; he participated in the first congresses of soviets and witnessed the storming of the Winter Palace. January 1918 found him working in the Russian Foreign Office preparing antiwar propaganda for distribution among German soldiers, and a short time later he helped organize an International Legion to aid in the defense of the revolution against the threatened German attack. Williams left Russia for the United States in September 1919 bent on mobilizing American public opinion against the policy of intervention. Returning to Russia several times during the 1920s and 1930s and again in 1959, he was to remain loyal to the commitment of winning friends for the Russian Revolution and the Soviet regime until his death in 1962.

William's first memoir of events in 1917–18, *Through the Russian Revolution*, a highly impressionistic glorification of the October Revolution, appeared in 1921. In this account, Russian conservatives, liberals, and moderate socialists alike appeared as vile reactionaries bent most of all on denying the fruits of revolution to the people; October represented the triumph of Russian workers and peasants over economic exploitation and social oppression, the opening round in the universal struggle for economic equality and social justice. Williams was expanding and reworking this account at the time of his death. *Journey into Revolution* is the product of this effort as brought to fruition by Williams's wife, Lucita.

While retaining the tendentious, propagandistic quality of its predecessor, this book constitutes a significantly more ambitious and sophisticated attempt to interpret the Russian Revolution to the Western public. For example, while Williams's first account of the fall of the Provisional Government was limited to a few brief pages conveying the impression that Kerensky was swept aside by an

elemental tidal wave of popular frustration and indignation (the work of the Bolsheviks in planning and organizing the revolution is given scant consideration), *Journey into Revolution* draws upon newspaper materials, published documents and memoirs, as well as Williams's diaries, correspondence, and recollections, to present quite a detailed account of Bolshevik activity in this period.

As an evocative record of the October Revolution, *Journey into Revolution* pales by comparison with Reed's classic, and too often the narrative is interrupted by tedious digressions on relatively obscure problems (several pages are devoted to clarifying the history of Reed's abortive appointment as Soviet consul in the United States). Nonetheless, Williams's journalistic talents were substantial; he describes much of what he experienced in an altogether moving and meaningful way. He met and talked with Lenin on several occasions, and, his adoration of Lenin notwithstanding, the descriptions of these encounters are of considerable interest. Moreover, in Russia Williams was close not only to John Reed but to a number of radical "Russian-Americans," many of them Bolsheviks who were to play important roles in the party. Scholars will be genuinely interested in the insights he offers into Reed's elusive character and his personal descriptions of such English-speaking Bolsheviks as A. Krasnoshchekov, onetime Chicago lawyer who became president of the Far Eastern Republic, V. Volodarsky, a member of the American Socialist Party who was one of the most popular Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd in 1917, and Jack "Jake" Peters, destined to become Felix Dzerzhinsky's assistant in the Cheka. For the most part, however, *Journey into Revolution* adds relatively little to existing accounts.

By the time of the February Revolution Alexander Kerensky had already achieved a national reputation, first as a successful defense attorney in major political trials and later as leader of the moderate agrarian-socialist Trudovik faction in the Fourth Duma. Kerensky played a prominent role in the creation of the first Provisional Government in which he served as minister of justice. Also initially a deputy chairman of the Petrograd soviet, he became minister of war and the navy in the aftermath of the April crisis, and as prime minister from mid-July 1917 until the triumph of the Bolsheviks in October he shaped the ill-fated efforts of the moderates to maintain Russia's commitments vis-à-vis the Entente powers and to establish a liberal political system on the Western model.

Russia and History's Turning Point is by no means Kerensky's first attempt at autobiography; much of the book will in fact seem familiar to those who have read *The Catastrophe* (1927) and *The Crucifixion of Liberty* (1934). Kerensky's writing conveys little of the "you are there" spirit that has made a classic of Sukhanov's *Notes*, and in its revelations to the scholar it suffers by comparison with such recently published recollections as those of Iraklii Tseretelli. Perhaps more than anything else, *Russia and History's Turning Point* represents Kerensky's most ambitious effort to clarify and justify the policies of the Provisional Government to the Western public, and this orientation inevitably compromises its value to the specialist. Unfortunately, the book is also marred by numerous, sometimes minor but nonetheless annoying, factual errors and contradictions, many of which careful editing should have caught.

Still, this work is not without interest to historians of the Russian Revolution. In discussing his political activities after 1905, for example, Kerensky provides some tantalizing tidbits of fresh information on the structure, program, and political importance of the still largely obscure Russian Masonic movement, of which

he must be one of the last surviving members. Understandably, Kerensky devotes considerable attention to the background, organization, and development of the Kornilov affair, which, he maintains, sealed the fate of the Provisional Government. One need not view the prospects for the survival of liberal government before Kornilov as optimistically as Kerensky does to recognize the enormous significance of the Kornilov affair in facilitating Lenin's victory. Drawing heavily on little-known memoirs by participants published in Paris in the mid-thirties, Kerensky traces that ludicrous attempt at counterrevolution back to the aspirations of eminent financiers and high-ranking officers for a military dictatorship, and historians are indebted to him for these investigations. Much less persuasive is Kerensky's analysis of the July uprising. That the Bolsheviks were recipients of substantial subventions from the Germans during the revolution is now apparent; however, a large mass of published evidence belies Kerensky's frequently voiced claim, reasserted in *Russia and History's Turning Point*, that Lenin organized the July uprising at the direction of the German General Staff, who timed the insurrection to coincide with its counteroffensive at the front.

Through a half century of Soviet rule Kerensky has remained remarkably faithful to the principles that guided his policies during the revolution; consequently this book will undoubtedly be of genuine importance to Kerensky's biographers. During the revolution he was impelled by a fierce love and pride in country, a stubborn dedication to the principles of constitutional government, and an all-abiding confidence in the great role he was destined to play in history. (Kerensky is as much the dominating hero of his own accounts as Lenin is in those of the Soviets!) In 1917 he operated on the assumptions that a majority of the Russian people shared or could be made to share his views and that Russia was fundamentally ripe for democratic government on the Western model. Neither the more recent experiences of other developing nations nor the results of much Soviet and Western scholarship have shaken Kerensky's conviction that the policies he pursued in 1917 were essentially correct and that Russia was diverted from her path toward a Western parliamentary democracy only as a consequence of the subversive activities of the extreme right and the radical left, the latter nurtured, sustained, and controlled by the Germans.

Marc Ferro is assistant director of studies at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* in Paris and editor of *Annales*. His *La Révolution de 1917: La chute du tsarisme et les origines d'octobre*, a broadly focused analysis of Russian politics and society from the beginning of World War I to mid-summer 1917, presents an interpretation of the revolution diametrically opposed to Kerensky's (in this sense it is closer to Williams's), which, perhaps better than any other yet published, suggests why Kerensky failed.

Following squarely in the path of Soviet interpretations and several recent investigations by Western historians, Professor Ferro's study rejects Kerensky's assumptions regarding Russian society's readiness for liberal representative government in 1917 and its essential support for the goals and policies of the Provisional Government. Carefully tracing the political, economic, and psychological impact upon the Russian people of governmental mismanagement, military defeat, and the collapse of the old regime, Ferro shows that as Russia's fleeting period of liberty began, not only political leaders but the various elements of Russian society as well held differing, often mutually incompatible aspirations in regard to the war and the goals of the revolution and that political and social disintegration expanded

apace as the popular hopes awakened by the February Revolution remained unfulfilled.

A brief summary cannot do justice to Ferro's research. In the most general terms, he contends that as a social group the bourgeoisie aspired to realize the ideals of 1789 in Russia. Most immediately concerned with restoring order, developing the economy, and winning the war, it had little empathy for the plight and aspirations of the masses and sought to postpone decisions on fundamental political and social issues until the convocation of a constituent assembly. Ferro finds that the earliest goals of the workers were quite moderate; they were impatient to win such material benefits as an eight-hour day and salary increases. However, they tended to view the Provisional Government and the Soviet with ever-increasing distrust and antagonism, ultimately looking ahead to the proletarian revolution. The primary aspiration of the peasantry was to obtain more land. When the Provisional Government counseled patience, the peasants rejected its authority and seized land on their own. Regarding the crucial question of the war, Ferro concludes that neither the workers, peasants, nor soldiers were particularly concerned with that issue in the February Revolution's immediate aftermath, evidently assuming that the new government would inevitably seek the quickest possible compromise peace. However, as the war dragged on, and as officials of the newly created first coalition government backpedaled on the democratization of the army, seeking instead to restore military discipline, the authority of the officers, and in general the fighting capacity of the army in preparation for an offensive, the soldiers, too, began actively to oppose the government. Meanwhile, in Ferro's view, neither the Provisional Government nor the majority socialist leadership of the Soviet had any sense of the degree to which their policies were divorced from the aspirations of the masses.

In short, Ferro attaches decisive importance to the differing objectives and latent hostilities that motivated Russian political leaders, and more generally to the centrifugal tendencies that pervaded Russian society and made collaboration between political groups and effective representative, democratic government impossible. To Kerensky, the period of the first coalition was a time when the government, supported by a majority of the people, restored morale at the front and continued to press ahead with solutions to Russia's political, social, and economic ills. In Ferro's view, what is most significant about the April through June period is that it was precisely then that the positions of the bourgeoisie and its political representatives hardened, while at the same time workers, peasants, and soldiers alike, alienated from both the government and the Soviet by the frustration of their most immediate aspirations, began taking matters into their own hands and displayed an attraction for increasingly extreme solutions to the problems confronting them. To Ferro, June 18, when the Petrograd masses transformed a demonstration sponsored by the majority socialists into a massive display of support for the Bolshevik program, reflects this process and represents the beginning of a new, more intensified stage in the revolution (this interpretation brings Ferro close to that of Soviet writers). Significantly, Kerensky ignores the June 18 demonstration altogether.

Ferro's study constitutes a significant contribution to scholarship on the Russian Revolution. At the same time, his altogether interesting and important conclusions regarding political and social attitudes lean heavily on a relatively small sample of unpublished letters, resolutions, and petitions from Soviet archives, the reliability of which needs to be tested more fully by reference to other kinds of

evidence. Particularly tenuous, it seems to me, is the contention that in mid-June the Soviet was as discredited as the Provisional Government in the eyes of the masses. To be sure, the stature of the majority socialist leadership in the Soviet was greatly compromised; often it was no more effective than the government in controlling the restlessness of the masses. However, even in October popular allegiance to the Soviet as an organ of revolutionary government was so strong that the Bolsheviks were unable to dispense with the slogan "All Power to the Soviets!" In analyzing increasing militancy among workers in the pre-July period, Ferro attributes a greater degree of class consciousness to their actions than may be warranted. One wonders whether the opposition of the workers to collaboration with the bourgeoisie was as deeply ingrained as Ferro suggests; certainly their growing frustration with the results of the revolution could explain this attitude. Similarly, that the government and factory owners hedged on the concessions most desired by workers and peasants is clear. However, Ferro's suggestion that this was most of all the result of narrow self-interest on the part of the bourgeoisie, of its fundamental coldness to worker demands, is open to question; the war and the underlying weakness of the Russian economy were probably at least equally responsible. Finally, to this reviewer Ferro's far-ranging narrative seemed a bit fragmented; that is to say, more might have been done to weave the analyses of the February Revolution, political and social attitudes, and foreign policy developments into a more cohesive whole.

In summary, the character of the Williams and Kerensky books is similar; both are reworkings of earlier memoirs by participants whose lives were shaped by the revolution. Of the books reviewed, only Ferro's deserves to be added to the relatively short list of studies, among the many published in the West in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, that contribute substantially to our understanding of that event. Yet this paucity of historically significant literature need not be cause for discouragement. To this reviewer, at any rate, the importance of the fiftieth anniversary to Western historiography lies less in the many works on 1917 that have already appeared than in the fresh scholarly research which the commemorative year stimulated. Surveying the numerous doctoral dissertations dealing with the revolution recently completed in American and West European universities and, perhaps even more important, the many major research projects currently under way, one can predict with some confidence that the ultimate fruits of the anniversary year will be rich indeed.

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OXFORD SLAVONIC PAPERS, New Series, vol. 1. Edited by *Robert Auty, J. L. I. Fennell, and J. S. G. Simmons*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. 140 pp. 40s.

We have not been used to expecting contributions of principal character in *Oxford Slavonic Papers*, which mostly printed occasional lectures and sometimes source material on bibliography. The issue under review—which initiates a "new series" under the triumvirate editorship of Robert Auty, J. L. I. Fennell, and J. S. G. Simmons—impresses the reader with both the range and the substance of its contents. It is on the whole rather unusual to find, in periodicals of this kind, articles in which the authors take a stand on matters of principal and controversial