

THE RUSSIAN FASCISTS: TRAGEDY AND FARCE IN EXILE, 1925–1945.

By John J. Stephan. New York: Harper & Row, 1978. xxiv, 450 pp. + 24 pp. plates. \$15.00.

In this lively and well-researched story of a self-styled Russian Fascist movement, both tragedy and farce are correctly situated in the lower depths of the Russian emigration. The tragedy is most apparent in the 1930s, in the Harbin colony, where Konstantin Rodzaevskii and his followers collaborated with their Japanese overlords for meager subsidies and later perished at the hands of a man they singularly admired, Joseph Stalin. The farce occurred in Thompson, Connecticut, on the estate of the wealthy heiress Marion Buckingham Ream, wife and patroness of the *vozhd'* Anastase Vonsiatsky and his playmates. Here, at a golf course close to the "Russian Bear" restaurant, a small group of Russians sported Fascist-style uniforms, painted swastikas on turtles patrolling the Ream estate, launched a navy of toy battleships bought at Woolworths, took pot shots at portraits of Stalin and Beria, and ran a sweepstakes contest to guess the next purge victims. In the end, Vonsiatsky spent five years in prison on conspiracy charges during World War II and helped make the reputation of his Justice Department prosecutor, Thomas Dodd. What began as farce also ended in tragedy.

Russian fascism thus emerges in this book as an émigré political movement of the 1930s without roots in any society. As would-be imitators and collaborators of Hitler and the Japanese, the Russian Fascists adopted their coloration while claiming to represent vaguely defined Russian national interests. Yet they were long on symbols, slogans, and songs like "We're with you, St. Vladimir," and short on ideas and ideology. They were Slavs supporting an ideology devoted to the destruction of the Slavic race, Russian nationalists supporting countries at war with their homeland, and anti-Communists who considered Stalin "the best Fascist of them all." They were no better off in practice than in theory. Rodzaevskii was able to claim a sizable following in Harbin and a Japanese-sponsored "Asano Brigade" of exile volunteers during World War II, but he lacked any solid financial base. Vonsiatsky had a great deal of money but few supporters, and his main organization was a newspaper printed in a hen coop. Russian Fascists were, in sum, a collection of rather desperate and nostalgic men with slogans evocative of their day. In exile they were pathetic; in power they would have been vicious.

The author has unearthed, through great diligence, a story of exile intrigue long buried in Japanese, American, and German archives. His research is formidable, and his story is well told for the general reader as well as for the specialist. Yet the reader learns more about the politics of exile than about Russian fascism. Although the emigration did produce a self-styled Russian Fascist Party, it was a party that existed totally outside Russian or Soviet society and bore no more than symbolic resemblance to other Fascist movements. As a result, the larger story of fascism, or protofascism, inside Russia is missing; little is done to link the exiles in any real detail to their pre-1917 predecessors (the Union of the Russian People and other right-wing groups), to investigate fascist elements in Stalinism, or to examine Soviet public responses to émigré fascism.

The author properly concludes that Russian Fascists were "egoistic dreamers" of the diaspora, plotting an unlikely future to pass time in an unacceptable present. Yet the precise manner in which the movement was a "fascist mutation of Russian nationalism" is never explored in depth. Nor does the author answer the question of why this curious group of exiles so admired the Stalinist society they dreamed of overthrowing. Nevertheless, *The Russian Fascists* is a significant contribution to the history of the Russian emigration, even if less successful as a study of Russian "fascism."

ROBERT C. WILLIAMS
Washington University