

examine more than one type of peasant institution and, therefore, is a welcome addition. Yet, the book is not as valuable for its broad interpretations as for the detailed data the author has gleaned from national and regional archives, local newspapers, and published documents.

Focusing on local peasant organizations in Saratov and Astrakhan oblasts in 1917 and the first half of 1918, Gerasimenko discusses the emergence, structure, social make-up, and role of volost executive committees, land committees, volost zemstvos, and peasant soviets. His analysis of the volost executive committees is important. Even though they included "antidemocratic" elements (members of the rural intelligentsia and kulaks), the author argues that the committees represented the interests of the middle and poor peasants, particularly because the Stolypin peasants (the *khutoriane* and *otrubshchiki*) had lost their influence in village meetings (*skhody*). Thus, the author subscribes to the interpretation of Soviet historians such as O. N. Moiseeva, I. I. Mints, A. M. Andreev, and E. N. Burdzhilov. (Perhaps a "generally acknowledged opinion" is in the making.)

Gerasimenko then convincingly argues that the Provisional Government attempted to destroy the influence of the executive committees and land committees because they reflected the interests of the peasants. The revived volost zemstvos—which were the least peasant in outlook of the institutions examined—almost succeeded in this endeavor. But then the October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power. In the aftermath, peasant soviets clashed with the zemstvos as a definite shifting and realignment took place among the strata of the peasantry. Some *bedniaki* became *seredniaki*; some former Stolypin peasants became *seredniaki* with kulak pretensions. The *seredniaki* were a pivotal group whose support the Soviet regime needed. Gerasimenko's description of the middle peasants' composition—while fascinating and suggestive—fails to delve into peasant attitudes. His conclusion is that the middle peasants' support of the bourgeoisie forced the Soviet government to incorporate the "proletarian line" in the countryside and to create the Committees of the Poor.

Gerasimenko neglects several key issues. The large German and Muslim populations never appear in the otherwise rich mosaic that he presents. More disturbing is his reluctance to give credit to the Left SRs. Their support of the Bolshevik program, especially at the Third and Fourth Saratov Province Congresses of Peasant Soviets, made a Bolshevik "victory" in Saratov possible.

These criticisms aside, *Nizovye krest'ianskie organizatsii* is essential reading for anyone working on a social history of the Russian Revolution.

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THE LIFE AND DEATH OF LEON TROTSKY. By *Victor Serge* and *Natalia Sedova Trotsky*. Translated by *Arnold J. Pomerans*. New York: Basic Books, 1975 [1951, 1973]. viii, 296 pp. \$10.95.

TROTSKY: AN APPRECIATION OF HIS LIFE. By *Joel Carmichael*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975. 512 pp. + 8 pp. photographs. \$15.00.

Almost any library catalog will show more entries by Trotsky than about him. His own books continue to find readers and publishers (not only among his followers), but there is quite a modest body of biographical literature. The books considered here extend but do not greatly strengthen the list of works in English about Trotsky.

The collaborative short biography by Victor Serge and Natalia Sedova, Trotsky's widow, first appeared in French in 1951, and even at that time represented a rather minor contribution. Although the prefatory notes on the nature of the collaboration are somewhat contradictory, it appears to be a series of relatively short recollections by Sedova (appearing in quotation marks), linked by Serge's writing on Trotsky's career and its historical background, particularly the background. Written when Stalin was still alive, the book strives to refute Stalinist charges about Trotsky and to establish Soviet responsibility for his assassination. Even in 1951 it was disappointing that Trotsky's mate for almost forty years had so little to recall about their life together. Deutscher (and more recently, Carmichael), skimmed the most interesting portions of this material, which deal mainly with Trotsky's last years of emigration. Altogether, it is hard to see much justification for the translation of this book in the 1970s.

Joel Carmichael's book, the first full-length, non-Trotskyist biography of Trotsky in English, is disappointing. The research on which it rests is inexplicably weak. The Trotsky archive at Harvard is evident only insofar as quotations from it are borrowed from Deutscher (with acknowledgment). Trotsky's published writings have been used only partially, and Carmichael seems to have been uninterested in utilizing Louis Sinclair's remarkable bibliography of this corpus. Even the outstanding editorial work of Jan Meijer, two volumes of archival materials on the period 1917–22, is ignored, missing an opportunity to improve on Deutscher, who wrote before publication of this rich store. Acquaintance with secondary scholarship dealing with Trotsky is quite spotty.

Although one cannot expect richness of narrative detail from such a book, the main lines of Trotsky's life are there and in some areas interesting interpretative ideas emerge. Carmichael (unlike Deutscher) has made considerable use of G. A. Ziv's rather unfriendly recollections of Trotsky, as well as Joseph Nedava's recent volume, *Trotsky and the Jews*. In a chapter entitled "The Muezzin," Carmichael offers his main "appreciation" of Trotsky, which is indeed an alternative to the Trotskyist view. The kernel of Carmichael's argument, as I read it, is that Trotsky's own interpretation of the history of revolution cannot escape a fundamental commitment to the idea that the great leader can change history, and that Trotsky's inability to prevent the rise of Stalinism resulted from Trotsky's personal shortcomings. The crucial failing, "shyness," Carmichael links to Trotsky's self-consciousness of his Jewish origins and also to his childhood relations with his father, whom he supposedly rejected. But Carmichael seems unable to decide how he will approach the possibilities of psychohistory. While he appears to base his principal thesis about Trotsky on it, and he alludes to psychological problems (including the probability of psychosomatic illnesses) intermittently throughout the book, he flatly states that "Any psychoanalysis of Trotsky would be impossible," because of the absence of adequate material. Thus Carmichael's work in this area, and perhaps as a whole, remains unfinished, raising important questions without really coming to grips with them.

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