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## Russia under the Bolshevik Regime

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spokes of Western military history." Thomas Fleming refers to George Washington's disastrous attempt to conduct a positional defense at White Plains as a "bitter pill [that] purged the last vestige of entrenchment-tool illusions from Washington's mind." Robert Utley quotes George Crook on Philip Sheridan: "The adulations heaped on him by a grateful nation for his supposed genius turned his head [and] caused him to bloat his little carcass with debauchery and dissipation." Robert F. Jones gives us T.E. Lawrence on the remarkable Captain Meinertzhagen: He "took as blithe a pleasure in deceiving his enemy (or friend) by some unscrupulous jest, as in spattering the brains of a cornered mob of Germans one by one with his African knobkerrie." Editor Robert Cowley cogently observes that the absence of shell marks from subsequent wars on the resplendent monuments at Gettysburg "may be the most signal difference between European and American history." Finally, in one of the most revealing utterances ever recorded regarding the Italian conception of military effectiveness, Geoffrey Ward recounts the Italian chief of staff's response to Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1918 observation that perhaps the fleet should leave Taranto occasionally for gunnery practice: "Ah, but my dear Mr. Minister, you must not forget that the Austrian fleet has not had any [practice] either."

*Experience of War* does not offer its reader a solid meal for intellectual development, but its collection of tasty morsels constitutes a very satisfactory dessert cart; the book provides a

number of illuminating insights. This being the case, the hardbound version should be reserved in the main for library collections. The 1993 paperback edition released by Dell Publishing for \$14.95 is, however, a worthwhile investment for both students and practitioners of the art of war.

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Pipes, Richard. *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*. New York: Knopf, 1993. 587pp. \$35

This is the third volume of Harvard professor Richard Pipes' trilogy on Russian history, the first two being *Russia under the Old Regime* (1974) and *The Russian Revolution* (1990). This volume limits itself to the period 1918–1924; it begins with the Civil War and ends with the death of Vladimir Ilich Lenin. In Pipes' view, this period constitutes the brutal formative period of Soviet totalitarianism, Stalin's later contributions notwithstanding. Like the earlier studies, this book is filled with highly contentious interpretations and conclusions.

The Civil War (1918–1920) was, in the author's view, the "most devastating event in that country's history since the Mongol invasions in the thirteenth century." The devastation, however, was not merely the consequence of military conflict between the Red and White armies but equally the result of the Bolsheviks' use of violence to effect the socialist transformation of backward Russia. Pipes believes that economic

transformation, "War Communism," to have been "not so much emergency responses to war conditions as an attempt as rapidly as possible to construct a Communist society." Consequently, it was Lenin's economic experiments that, by April 1921, "left Russia's economy in shambles."

The author's interpretation is extreme and has been disputed by many scholars. The late Alec Nove, author of *An Economic History of the USSR, 1917-1991* (Penguin, 1992), cautioned that War Communism was "a process of interaction between circumstances and ideas." R.W. Davies concludes in his book *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945* (Cambridge, 1994) that each of Lenin's major economic steps under War Communism was "undoubtedly a response to emergency." Similarly, Paul R. Gregory asserts that "War Communism may have been thrust upon the Soviet regime by the civil war of 1918," in his book *Before Command: An Economic History of Russia from Emancipation to the First Five-Year Plan* (Princeton, 1994).

Pipes also overstates the evidence on the effect of the Bolsheviks' war with Poland in 1920. His conclusion is that the Red Army's move into Poland "was but a stepping-stone from which to launch a general assault on western and southern Europe to rob the Allies of the fruits of their victory in World War I." This argument is based largely on one document made available in 1992: a stenographic memorandum of Lenin's 22 September 1920 speech to a closed meeting at the Ninth Conference of the Russian Communist Party. Were one able to put aside the fact that Poland invaded Russia and

to discount the nationalistic fervor it aroused, Pipes would be more persuasive.

Yet, one does find that certain Bolsheviks, such as M.N. Tukhachevskii, believed that revolution could be brought to Europe by the efforts of the Red Army. However, given that the army had already "overreached" itself in Poland, Leon Trotsky's later assessment was probably more realistic—that such thinking was "naive exaggeration." Therefore, Pipes again reads too much into the evidence when he implies that a "culturally much superior" Poland thwarted the Bolsheviks' designs for world revolution.

Even more troubling is the author's comparison of communism, fascism, and National Socialism. He distorts both the genealogy and history of National Socialism and communism when he states that "the origins of the right-radical movement in interwar Europe . . . would have been inconceivable without the precedent set by Lenin and Stalin." Unfortunately, space does not permit the detailed rebuttal which these overwrought and counterfactual assertions merit.

Pipes is more persuasive, however, when he argues that the distinction between Stalinism and Leninism is one of degree, not kind—especially with respect to the use of terror, the assault on religion, and the proliferation of intrusive controls. He would have been even more convincing had he been able to explain why Lenin tolerated independent artistic creativity whereas Stalin demanded stultifying conformity; why Lenin could be at ease with his fellow Bolsheviks but Stalin had them executed; and why Lenin

conceded that “transforming” the peasant would require a cultural change that might take generations but Stalin, hoping to succeed where Lenin had failed—and establish his place alongside Lenin in the pantheon of revolutionaries—unleashed a revolution that resulted in the second enserfment of the peasant.

These criticisms notwithstanding, Pipes is a serious and influential scholar. His impressive ability to unearth evidence is apparent. But if the evidence does not always fully support his conclusions, it is probably because the author has consciously eschewed disinterested and dispassionate scholarship in favor of passing judgment upon the Soviet debacle. Who can deny that it was a debacle? Pipes should also be given credit for returning our attention to the role played by individuals, especially among Russia’s intelligentsia, in bringing about a revolution—even if his emphasis ends with Lenin and he ignores the extensive attention given by the so-called “revisionist” historians to the role played by social forces.

Perhaps this work’s most serious flaw is the author’s belief that “Soviet totalitarianism” (itself a dubious concept) is somehow the consequence of “Russian patrimonialism”—even more dubious. The author believes that Russia’s tsars treated everybody and everything as personal property to be used and disposed of at will. This Russian patrimonialism, “which underpinned the Muscovite government and in many ways survived in the institutions and political culture of Russia to the end of the old regime,” contained “unmistakable affinities” with the “Communist

regime as it looked by the time of Lenin’s death.” Not only do such conclusions constitute a sweeping, and erroneous, indictment of most of Russia’s history, but naive readers of Pipes might be excused were they to conclude that Russian patrimonialism, through Lenin’s totalitarianism, was responsible for Hitler’s National Socialism. More to the point, as Robert Conquest has recently noted in *The New York Review of Books* (14 July 1994), “it can hardly be maintained that Communism was no more than a continuation of Russian history.”

It is precisely such conclusions that undermine Richard Pipes’ formidable scholarship and place him perilously close to what Nicholas V. Riasanovsky called the historical “school of extreme and blind hatred.”

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Noble, Dennis L. *That Others Might Live: The U.S. Life-Saving Service, 1878–1915*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1994. 177pp. \$27.95

Dr. Noble, a retired U.S. Coast Guardsman with a Purdue University Ph.D. in history, is the first to place the unique humanitarian federal agency, the U.S. Life-Saving Service (USLSS), within a national context. Previous works dealt merely with single lifesaving stations or those of one geographical region. Only Noble’s painstaking, decades-long research could document so faithfully the evolution of organized lifesaving in the United States.