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Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918-1923

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movement is regarded with suspicion by many Central Asians—and not merely by those with official positions. The sense of unease is heightened by the fact that many of the NGOs are funded, and sometimes staffed, by foreigners, thereby creating the impression that they represent some sort of covert Western operation to overthrow the incumbent governments. (In fact, in Kyrgyzstan during the ‘Tulip Revolution’ of 2005 some foreign NGO representatives allegedly did play this role.)

The second part of the book covers ‘The Present’, from the early 2000s up to the time of publication. There are three themes. One describes developments in Kyrgyzstan before and after the ‘Tulip Revolution’. However, many of the problems that led to the explosion of violence in 2010 were not immediately apparent in the areas that the author was examining, so reading it now there is a sense of disconnect. A second theme is the Women’s Movement. This is perhaps the most successful part of the book, providing an engaging account of the achievements and obstacles that marked these years. A third theme is devoted to civil society networks. It is an important topic and it is to the author’s credit that it is included. However, it tries to be comprehensive, covering everything from water-user groups to religious associations. The result is a series of notes rather than a reasoned discussion.

The last, and shortest, part of the book is entitled ‘The Future’. It is more a summing up of the recent past and an attempt to link this to the global context, than an attempt to predict the future. Developments in Kyrgyzstan just a few weeks after the book went to press were a dramatic, painful reminder of quite how fragile the situation was and would undoubtedly continue to be for the foreseeable future.

This book may not satisfy the most exacting students of the region, but it does provide a sincere and sympathetic account of a particular aspect of the development of the Central Asian states at an exceptionally difficult period in their history. If it raises more questions than it answers, that is, in a sense, a compliment to the author, for he highlights important issues and stimulates further thought, discussion and research.

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Scott B. Smith, *Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918–1923*. Pitt Series in Russian and East European Studies. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011, xx + 380pp., \$45.00 h/b.

HISTORIANS TEND TO NEGLECT STUDY OF THE SOCIALIST REVOLUTIONARY (SR) PARTY, but it was nevertheless a factor in the early stages of the Russian Revolution and civil war. During the summer of 1918 SRs assassinated the German ambassador in Moscow and ranking Bolshevik officials, including an attempt on V. I. Lenin. Still others conspired with Anglo-French and American interventionists to overthrow the Soviet government. For a brief period it appeared they might succeed.

Soviet Russia teetered on the brink of collapse, isolated and blockaded by internal and foreign enemies. One hard push was all it would take, so it seemed, to hang the Bolsheviks from a long line of gallows. Could the SRs deliver the fatal blow? Scott B. Smith, an American historian publishing his first book, explores the ideas and activities of the SRs during the revolution, and he succeeds in retrieving them from relative obscurity.

The SRs descended from the Russian populists whose revolutionary masses were the peasantry and whose strategy centred on the assassination of tsarist officials including Tsar Aleksandr II in 1881. They organised the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries in 1902 and continued their campaign of assassinations during and after the abortive revolution of 1905. A

dress rehearsal for 1917, some thought in hindsight—the revolution is dead, long live the revolution—but which revolutionary parties would learn from that experience?

Guided by the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and focused on the proletariat as the revolutionary vanguard, the Bolsheviks made the better transition from the hazy ideas of the café terrasse to the life or death wielding of state power. Lenin did not think much of assassination as a winning strategy: organise a professional, disciplined revolutionary élite, determined cadres rooted in the proletariat, and then make the revolution. All else was pipe dreams and dangerous diversions.

The author likes to draw comparisons between the world view of the Bolsheviks and that of the SRs to understand why the former succeeded and the latter floundered. Profiting, or perhaps being hampered by ‘culturalist’ jargon, Smith sees the Bolsheviks ‘constructing a discourse’ of class revolution compared to a more complex SR concept of ‘nationhood’ or ‘national independence and popular sovereignty’ (pp. 121, 169). Lenin said there was no middle ground between revolution and counter-revolution, whereas the SRs defined themselves as a ‘third force’. The SRs took the risk to ‘contest the Bolshevik monopolization of revolutionary discourse, and . . . the dualist ideological operations that had helped sustain Soviet power since 1918’ (p. 266). The author sees the Bolsheviks successfully promoting or foisting off their ‘construction’ of reality on a populace apparently too unsophisticated to accept more complex ideas. In the end, the SRs were just not effective in ‘constructing the national consciousness’ (p. 146).

The SRs were wedded to ‘democracy’ in the Constituent Assembly (January 1918), where they coincidentally held a controlling majority, as opposed to the Soviets which were controlled by the Bolsheviks and their temporary Left SR allies. In fact, the Constituent Assembly and the Soviets were competing legislative institutions. The SRs were likewise wedded to ‘the nation’, dishonoured by the Bolshevik signature of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918 which ceded large territories to Germany and its allies. Smith neglects to mention that Lenin did not intend to respect the terms of Brest-Litovsk one moment longer than necessary. However, if the revolution was to survive, the Soviets needed ‘breathing space’ to build up their strength. L. D. Trotsky, the Soviet equivalent of Carnot and Lenin’s right arm, set about organising the Red Army.

Not having forces of their own, the SRs had to depend on foreign armies: American, British, French, but especially the Czechoslovak Legion. These outsiders did not offer their services for nothing. What price then would the SRs have to pay for ‘nationhood’? The author never raises the question, though Anglo-French and American interventionists had long lists of demands, all the while evoking false ‘tropes’ of ‘democracy’. Were the SRs then simply the Trojan horse of foreign intervention and counter-revolution?

Insisting they were not, Smith says the SRs wanted to re-establish an ‘Eastern Front’. They did too, briefly, against the Bolsheviks. The SRs never organised a front against the Germans, never got even close to it, though Red partisans fought them in the Ukraine. The Western allies promoted the ‘Eastern Front’ against Germany, a canard if ever there was one, as a convenient cover—sorry, ‘construction’—for another more basic objective: destruction of the Soviets before they could spread.

Speaking of ‘tropes’, consider the Western images of the smoking bomb and long, blood-drenched dagger in the hands of a ‘Bolsh gorilla’, threatening the innocent *bourgeoise* in her diaphanous robes. Bolshevism was ‘catchy’, especially in 1918–1919, and governing elites knew it. In February 1918 the American Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, declared that the ‘Bolos’ were a greater threat than the Germans! Ironically, Lansing, who was far from alone in thinking thus, preferred Lenin’s class ‘construction’ over the SRs’ more nuanced conceptualisations.

So who was more committed to ‘nationhood’? The Bolsheviks had their own conception of a proletarian–peasant state, where toffs and bankers would have no place in power. In 1919–1920 the Bolsheviks evoked traditional Russian nationalist themes to mobilise their forces against the foreign intervention and against Polish ‘pans’ who launched, with French complicity, an

offensive into the western Russian ‘borderlands’ in April 1920. Even Smith notes how Bolshevik propaganda began to promote nationalist ideas. On the other hand, SR ‘democracy’ appeared to be a cover for the continuation of the capitalist order, reinforced by demanding foreign interventionists and anti-Bolshevik ‘white’ armies, who had ‘learned nothing and forgotten nothing’.

The author’s main theme is clear, but can the victory of the Bolsheviks, pyrrhic though it was, be explained by their successful ‘construction’ of reality, foisted on a presumably unsophisticated populace? Or did the masses, radical, violent and anarchistic, but with a fairly good understanding of their interests, impose their ‘construction’ of reality on the Bolsheviks? Or, put another way, did the Bolsheviks manipulate the masses or did they recognise political, economic and social realities and try to operate within them?

As one reads this interesting account of various SR theoretical positions and fruitless political manoeuvres, one may wonder if these represented merely the death spasms of an isolated political and intellectual élite, disconnected from their desired constituencies. Not because their ‘construction’ of reality was unconvincing, but because the SRs did not have the know-how, the political programme and the revolutionary cadres to win popular support.

Whenever the SRs negotiated with former tsarist generals and politicians, they were outmanoeuvred, co-opted or eliminated. The masses would not have missed their failures and they made the calculation that the Bolsheviks, whatever their shortcomings, knew who the enemy was and how to beat him. If you had to choose between the Bolsheviks, who held the Kremlin and commanded the Red Army, or the SRs, who depended on foreign troops and ‘White’ generals, the answer was relatively easy for most workers and peasants. Nevertheless, large sectors of the peasantry tolerated the Bolsheviks only as a *pis-aller* against a tsarist restoration, and it says something about the inadequacy of SR ‘tropes’ that they did not attract peasant support.

This book is impressively researched in Russian and other archives and examines in detail the activities of the Socialist Revolutionaries, especially in 1917–1918. Readers will meet SRs who were courageous men and women, revolutionaries who in the end could not get from the council hall to the shop floor, the peasant village or the battlefield.

All this one learns from Smith’s work, sometimes in spite of the author. One has to plough through the clutter of culturalist ‘constructions’, ‘conceptualisations’, ‘representations’ of civil war, ‘monopolisations’ of revolutionary ‘discourse’, ‘binaries’, semiotics and so on. Like other younger scholars, one supposes Smith had to make his peace with the ‘tyranny of the culturalists’ and their *histoire molle*, as certain colleagues call it, for otherwise how else can one advance in a profession where more ‘traditional’ historical approaches are considered out of date? Of course, it may be superfluous to note that certain scientific approaches and principles are ‘traditional’ because across generations of scholars they have been valued and passed on while the approaches at the disciplinary ‘cutting edge’, so to speak, come and go, thankfully, with some regularity.

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MICHAEL JABARA CARLEY © 2012

Ronald F. King & Paul E. Sum (eds), *Romania under Basescu: Aspirations, Achievements, and Frustrations during His First Presidential Term*. Plymouth, MA: Lexington Books, 2011, 381pp., £51.95 h/b.

THIS VOLUME IS AN ACADEMIC ATTEMPT TO EVALUATE VARIOUS ASPECTS of Romanian politics between the end of 2004 and the end of 2009, coinciding with Traian Băseșcu’s first presidential