

BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Oleg Budnitskii. *Russian Jews between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920*. Translated by Timothy J. Portice. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. x, 508 pp. \$79.95 (cloth). ISBN 978-0-81224-364-2.¹

The author of this insightful and meticulously researched work has sought to explain why between 50,000 and 200,000 Jews perished in “over 1300 cities, villages, and towns in Ukraine alone” from 1918 to 1921, leaving in their wake in addition to those slaughtered, over 200,000 casualties. (pp. 216 & 219) At first glance the book under review would seem to be a contribution, and it must be said a major one, to the history of the Jews in the revolutionary and early Soviet periods. In fact, it is far more. Oleg Budnitskii has made a significant contribution to the history of the Russian military in the First World War as well as offering a credible explanation for the military outcome of the Russian Civil War that followed. At the same time, he refutes the work of highly respected interpreters of the period. In sum, his book is an important and original work of scholarship that should be read by both Russian military historians and scholars of the early NEP era. It is also vital, touching as it does on the resonance of the pogroms in Western Europe and the U.S., for Jewish history in the modern period.

Budnitskii believes the key to the pogroms in Ukraine and elsewhere in the period under consideration lies with the Russian military. He sees their origins in the attitudes and policies of the Tsarist army and then the White Forces after 1917. He argues that the Russian military initiated both the White movement and the pogroms of the Civil War. Both in fact originated within the same military culture. He rejects, for example, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern’s contention that the existence of rampant anti-Semitism in the Tsarist army should be “reevaluated.” Budnitskii counters that Dmitrii Miliutin’s 1874 military reforms did nothing to encourage promotion of Jews. Only one Jewish officer before 1917 rose through merit even though he faced continuous anti-Semitism throughout his career. (p. 123) It was no different in the White armies where, as of 1919, the worst year of anti-Jewish violence in Ukraine, Jews were excluded from White forces. (p. 159)

Budnitskii observes that the word “pogrom” connoting civilian violence against Jews may be inappropriate for the Civil War. “The perpetra-

1. The book was originally published in Russian as *Российские евреи между красными и белыми (1917-1920)* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2005).

tors were often regulars, or members of quasi-regular formations within well-disciplined military organizations.” (p. 224) He contends that the violence against Jews really began in 1914. At that time newly mobilized troops sequestered in railroad hubs attacked “local Jewish populations.” (p. 225) At the same time antipathy for Jews infected the Russian army’s command structure. “The commanders of the Imperial army viewed the entire Jewish population with suspicion . . . The fear of espionage took on an almost pathological character” as World War I began. (p. 225) The military regarded Jews in particular as potential traitors in league with the Kaiser.

He cites Peter Kenez with approval that the “normal” anti-Semitism of the Tsarist era acquired “a murderous obsession” that metastasized among White forces during the Civil War. (p. 222) “Sinister Jewish conspiracies” replaced rational explanations for the turmoil White officers confronted in the immediate aftermath of World War I.² According to Budnitskii the obsession with Jewish treason and conspiracy among the officer corps of the White Army had two consequences for the anti-Bolshevik cause. The White forces disintegrated “into bands of robbers and murderers” (p. 271) and anti-Semitism too often replaced reasoned arguments to justify the Whites as a political cause. Budnitskii in effect refutes the claim by Evan Mawdsley and others that “the pogroms had no effect on the outcome of the Civil War . . .”³ He also rejects Richard Pipes’s contention that simple greed encouraged the violence against the Jews of Ukraine in the Civil War.

Budnitskii closes his work by relating his research on the Russian Civil War to debates on the origins of the Holocaust. He cites Pipes again that “the rationale for the Nazi extermination of the Jews came from Russian right-wing circles.”⁴ He counters that with Richard Evans’s explanation: “Nazi anti-Semitism . . . was born out of a political fantasy in which the Jews . . . were held responsible for all that the Nazis believed was wrong in the modern world.”⁵ By the same token, Budnitskii shows that the Russian military at the start of World War I embraced a similar fantasy about Jewish espionage and a Jewish “conspiracy . . . secretly determining the course of historical events.” (p. 239) The Tsarist officer corps infected the White cause with the same poison that fed on itself in the defeats and confusion of the Civil War. Small wonder the Jews gravitated to

2. P. Kenez, “Pogroms and White Ideology in the Russian Civil War,” *Pogroms: Anti-Jewish Violence in Modern Russian History*, eds. J. D. Klier and Sh. Lambroza (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), pp. 310-11.

3. E. Mawdsley, *The Russian Civil War* (Boston: Pegasus Books, 1984), p. 210.

4. R. Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Random House, 1994), p. 258.

5. R. J. Evans, *In Hitler’s Shadow* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), p. 40.

the Bolshevik regime. The move, however, bore its own pain. Budnitskii ends with the perceptive judgment of the late John Klier: “the ‘Great October Revolution’ was good for the Jew, but bad for the Jews.”⁶

Alexis Pogorelskin

University of Minnesota Duluth

6. J. D. Klier, “Velikii Oktiabr’: Khorosho dlia evreia, plokho dlia evreev,” *Evrei i russkaia revoliutsiia: Materialy i issledovania*, ed. O. V. Budnitskii (Moscow and Jerusalem, 1999), pp. 443-50.