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BOOK REVIEWS/КНИЖНЫЕ РЕЦЕНЗИИ

Scott B. Smith. *Captives of Revolution: The Socialist Revolutionaries and the Bolshevik Dictatorship, 1918-1923*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. 380 pp. $45.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-8229-4403-4.

Elizabeth White. *The Socialist Alternative to Bolshevik Russia: The Socialist Revolutionary Party, 1921-1939*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011. 180 pp. $150.00 cloth. ISBN: 978-0-415-43584-0.

It is so seldom that historians of revolutionary and Soviet Russia turn their attention to the Socialist Revolutionary (SR) party that I can hardly believe my good fortune in reviewing one monograph on this subject, let alone two. Both are in fact noteworthy contributions to a sparse field dominated for the last fifty years by Oliver H. Radkey, who meticulously reconstructed and analyzed the party's role in national politics throughout the revolutionary year of 1917 in two volumes: *The Agrarian Foes of Bolshevism: Promise and Default of the Russian Socialist Revolutionaries, February to October 1917* (1958) and *The Sickle under the Hammer: The Russian Socialist Revolutionaries in the Early Months of Soviet Rule* (1963). Only a few scholars since then have produced significant studies of the party that mitigate Radkey's rather condemnatory depiction of SR "failures" in 1917, most of which he lay at the feet of chief party theorist Viktor Mikhailovich Chernov. These more recent contributors include Michael Melancon, author of a monograph on the SRs' role in the anti-war movement of 1914-17; Konstantin Nikolaevich Morozov and Manfred Hildermeier, whose studies focused on the SR party from the revolution of 1905-1907 to 1914; and Mikhail Ivanovich Leonov, Maureen Perrie and Christopher Rice, specialists on the foundational period of the party from 1900 through the revolution of 1905-1907.

Published in 2011, the two works here under review complement each other well in coverage and focus. Scott Smith commences his study in early 1918 and, much on the model of Radkey, carefully charts the party's path through the complex and chaotic events of the Russian civil war. Elizabeth White's monograph bookends Smith's insofar as she provides comprehensive background on SR theory and practice from 1901 to 1921 before delving into an examination of the party leadership in European emigration from the end of the civil war to the outbreak of World War II. Whereas Smith focuses on SR resistance to Bolshevik power as a critical factor in the early Soviet state-building process, White views the SRs' post-revolutionary years as a development in SR party history as a whole; she also places the SR émigré experience firmly in its interwar European context. Both authors have grounded their analyses in an impressive array of sources.

Scott Smith is straightforward in stating that his purpose "is not to restore a neglected political party to scholarly attention, but to explicate the politics of the Russian civil war." (p. xiv) Indeed, by referencing the show trials of 1938 in the first and final pages of his monograph, Smith indicates that his overriding interest is in the SR actions of 1918 that led the Bolsheviks to formulate the "master plot" behind those trials – the Bolshevik myth of the "renegades of socialism" who threatened Soviet power – rather than in the SR party itself. In other words, Smith is only concerned with the SRs insofar as they interacted with and affected the emergent Bolshevik style of rule. This sets him apart from Radkey, though like Radkey, he seems to have little to no liking or respect for the SRs as individual political actors.

What is most important to acknowledge, however, is that Smith provides in three core chapters of his book a masterly reconstruction of SR involvement in the civil war that fully augments Radkey's path-breaking history of the party in 1917. Respectively, chapters 3 through 5 recount the rise and fall of the SR-dominated Komuch (Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly) regime in Samara from June to October 1918; the failed SR struggle to control the Siberian government in Omsk from June to November 1918; and the party's resultant decision in April 1919 to fight the Whites independently from the Bolshevik government and the Red Army – to become, in Chernov's phrase, a "third force" between the Reds and the Whites. The sixth chapter relates more briefly the party's persecution and subsequent decline on Russian territory as of 1920, with some attention to the party in European emigration; it then discusses SR support for the Tambov peasant rebellion in 1920-21 and the Kronstadt sailors' revolt in early 1921.

One disadvantage of this work is that some of Smith's most cogent analytical points are buried in the later pages of his chapters following lengthy and intricate expositions of events. Although his narrative of the SRs' role in the struggle for power is incisive and compelling, it would benefit from making stronger connections at the outset of each chapter to his overarching themes, particularly those concerning the SR party: for example, the bitter division between nationalist-minded right wing and the socialist-minded center-left wing that caused the party's own membership to "work at cross purposes." (p. 176) Moreover, in his weaker first two chapters, which set up the Bolshevik-SR conflict on the Eastern front, Smith tends to veer away from his purported focus on the SR party, as though magnetically drawn into the dark and deadly maw of "the Bolshevik imagination." It is, of course, crucial that he situate the SRs' political behavior in the context of the civil war – the formative experience for Bolshevik rule, as the SRs' leading theorist Chernov pointed out long ago. Yet Smith sometimes gives the impression that his true mission is to deconstruct Bolshevik policy, actions and discourse rather than that of the SRs.

In his seventh and final chapter, Smith examines the Bolsheviks' trial of the SRs in 1922 as a precedent for Stalin's show trials of the Old Bolsheviks in the 1930s. Both his account and the analysis that underpins it make for

fascinating reading, perhaps because here Smith demonstrates some degree of approval for the SR leaders' behavior under fire. At their trial, Smith notes, the SR Central Committee members "effectively resisted" their Bolshevik prosecutors' attempt to cast them as agents of counterrevolution while never denying that their party had acted in opposition to the Bolshevik government. (p. 252) Loyal to the revolutionary ethics that they had learned in the anti-tsarist underground and practiced in tsarist courtrooms, the SR leaders used their final pleas to the court as opportunities to present their own accounts of the party's role in the civil war. Smith even commends Central Committee member Abram Rafailovich Gots for the "courage and moral force" of his courtroom address before criticizing his failure to grasp that the Bolsheviks were a permanent fixture in Russia rather than a temporary phenomenon, a mere "avant-garde of [the coming] counterrevolution" as Gots viewed them. (p. 258)

Aside from all the signs that Stalin himself feared for the impermanency of the Soviet regime – or at least used that fear among his fellow Communists to justify state terror against the "enemies of the people" – Gots and his SR comrades in the early 1920s had reason to retain their conviction "that a Marxist party could never stabilize in agrarian Russia," according to Elizabeth White's interpretation of SR history. (p. 45) For the SRs, the Bolsheviks' forced retreat from maximalist War Communism to the hybrid New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921 "showed the regime had completely failed its approach to the Russian peasants." (p. 39) Reports from SRs in Soviet Russia continued to reach the hub of center-left SR emigration in Prague until the late 1920s, and these, in combination with the debates and statistical analyses published in the Soviet press during the NEP era, provided the SRs with sufficient evidence "for optimism about the end of the Bolshevik regime and the validity of their own programme." (p. 55) Not only did the agricultural cooperative movement flourish in post-revolutionary Russia, but communal land tenure actually expanded in the 1920s through peasant choice. In addition, contemporary European socialist theory and practice validated the SRs' longtime endorsement of the cooperative movement, which peaked in Europe in the 1920s.

Consistently throughout her study, White emphasizes the *narodnik* or populist intellectual tradition on which the SR party was founded. Her purpose in examining "the activities and the intellectual life" of the SR émigrés based in interwar Prague is to demonstrate that the post-revolutionary history of the SR party and the SRs' populist critique of early Soviet developments are "part of the history of the Russian Revolution in a wider sense." (pp. 1-2) Contradicting the stereotypical notion of Russian émigrés as nostalgic and opportunistic monarchists, the Prague SRs, members of the Socialist International since 1904, considered themselves participants in the European socialist movement. They enjoyed particularly close ties with the Czechoslovakian government and Czechoslovakian political groups dating from the SR alliance with the anti-Bolshevik Czechoslovak Legion, an army of Austro-

Hungarian POWs and deserters on Russian territory that assisted in establishing the Komuch regime in Samara. In fact, the first SRs arrived in Prague together with the returning soldiers of the Czechoslovak Legion in 1919, following the White seizure of power in Siberia.

Although the Prague SRs are the focus of her analysis, White references their ongoing tensions with a rival SR group based in Paris, the center of Russian emigration in the interwar period. The Paris SRs, who represented the nationalist-oriented right wing of the party, continued to move further away from socialism in the 1920s, adopting many of the religious and cultural values of the more conservative mainstream Russian emigration. As André Liebich shows in his superb study of the post-revolutionary Menshevik party, *From the Other Shore: Russian Social Democracy after 1921* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), the Menshevik emigration was similarly split between a larger, more leftist group in Berlin and a smaller, more rightist group in Paris.

Unlike the émigré Mensheviks, who expected NEP to continue for the foreseeable future, the Prague SRs began to predict in 1925 that the Communist leadership would make a "sharp turn" to the left to correct the problems of the hybrid Soviet economic system. Yet Stalin's replacement of NEP with a centrally planned industrialization drive and the collectivization of agriculture in 1928-30 left the center-left SRs theoretically stranded. "For the Prague SRs," White writes, "the 1920s had still been a time of hope. The period between 1929 and 1932 was a time of demoralization." (p. 125) The establishment of state control over agricultural land, products and labor rendered irrelevant the SR program for socialization through communal land tenure and agricultural cooperatives.

Furthermore, in the late 1920s the Prague SRs lost contact with their sources of information inside the Soviet Union. Living in emigration, with little knowledge of the new society and system under construction in their former homeland, they were incapable of revising the SR program to inspire a popular revolution against the Communist regime. White concludes that the SRs, seemingly "hypnotized by the numerical weakness of Bolshevik rule in the villages," had once again "underestimated the Bolsheviks," repeating their error of 1917. "Despite 10 years of close observation [and] recognizing that the [Soviet] regime survived through its political culture and the creation of revolutionary institutions, such as the Cheka, the GPU and the Komsomol . . . they did not believe it could bypass the peasantry and create the economic and social conditions for its own dictatorship." True to their populist intellectual tradition, the SRs retained their faith in "self-activity (*samodeiatel'nost*) as the lever of the revolution," never expecting that in Russia, the state would become the agent of transformation for society. (p. 77)

As a historian who sees much to appreciate and even to admire in the SRs, I found it a pleasure to read a scholarly work that does not view the party's leaders through the lens of their supposed "failure" to make socialist revolution on their own terms or to prevent the establishment of the Bolshevik al-

ternative. Elizabeth White argues instead for the value that can be gained from studying the SR experience in the Russian revolution and in post-revolutionary emigration: "Many of the Prague SR categories of [*narodnik*/populist] thought are now widely accepted ways of looking at Russian development, most specifically concerning the peasantry." (p. 142) Like André Liebich, White looks beyond the factionalism and infighting common in émigré movements to the unique perspectives these political actors can offer on their socialist comrades and rivals the Bolsheviks, the founders of the world's first "socialist" state. Since White's monograph is a sister study to Liebich's tome on the Menshevik party in emigration, however, a more integrated comparison with Menshevik readings of Bolshevik/Communist policy would have added an intriguing dimension to her findings on the SRs. After all, as White herself remarks, the Mensheviks and SRs who fled Europe in advance of Hitler's invasion "more or less" coalesced into a single party in the United States (p. 139).

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