

ASCHER, ABRAHAM. *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*. Stanford University Press, Stanford 1988. xiii, 412 pp. Ill. \$ 39.50.

SURH, GERALD D. 1905 in *St. Petersburg. Labor, Society, and Revolution*. [Studies of the Harriman Institute, Columbia University.] Stanford University Press, Stanford 1989. xix, 456 pp. \$ 45.00.

Even ten years ago, it was common to hear laments that far too little research had been done on the 1905 Revolution in Russia. These complaints were then largely justified, but the situation has since altered significantly for the better. A number of detailed studies by Soviet scholars have provided valuable information, in particular on aspects of labour and political history. Western scholarship, particularly in the USA, has made considerable progress in interpretative as well as informational terms, with important monographs being published on a wide range of subjects, including the army, the labour movement in Moscow and St. Petersburg, the doctors, the womens' movement, the universities, schools and teachers, and the tsar and his entourage. Large gaps still remain, notably with regard to the peasants, the non-Russian nationalities, the right-wing and counter-revolutionary movement and, perhaps above all else, the revolution in the provinces.

Nevertheless, the time was ripe for a new overview of the first Russian Revolution, incorporating the findings of the fresh research and replacing Sidney Harcave's *First Blood. The Russian Revolution of 1905* (New York, 1964), which, although excellent in its time, has now become seriously out-dated.

Abraham Ascher has tackled this daunting task with notable success. This volume, *The Revolution of 1905. Russia in Disarray*, is the first of a projected two-volume set. It covers the year 1905. The second volume, entitled *Authority Restored*, will examine the collapse of the revolution and the restoration of the tsar's position in 1906 and 1907. Professor Ascher has not used Soviet archives, with the exception of the wide range of published documents. He has, however, utilized the diplomatic archives in Paris, London, Vienna, Bonn and Washington. Although foreign diplomats were far from infallible in their accounts, some of their insights which he quotes are of value. In terms of sources, the great strength of Professor Ascher's book is his extensive use of contemporary Russian newspapers and journals. Like some other Western scholars, he owes a great deal to the marvellous collection and outstanding working conditions of the Slavonic Library of Helsinki University. His discerning use of the press gives his narrative a sense of immediacy and many valuable insights.

Professor Ascher does not claim to have written a detailed history of every aspect of the 1905 Revolution during its first fifteen months. He does, however, succeed in his stated aim of attempting a comprehensive account which makes sense of the critical episodes of the period. There are historians, even among those writing on Russia, who select their facts in order to support grandiose interpretations. Professor Ascher does not belong to this school of writers. Instead, he does not attempt to conceal the complexity of the events of 1905 and lays great emphasis on the fragmented nature of society and of the forces opposing the regime as well as the

divisions among the supporters of the tsar. There was no united opposition; likewise the defenders of the regime differed greatly in the tactics they advocated to counteract the disorders. Professor Ascher is surely correct in seeing the assassination of Plehve, the Minister of the Interior, on 15 July 1904, as a decisive turning point. Plehve, far from being the monster of popular legend, had believed in firm and resolute action to keep the opposition forces under control. The concessions made by his successor, Sviatopolk-Mirsky, enabled the enemies of the regime to meet and to organize popular support. Thereafter the inconsistencies of government policy, carried out by warring ministers, created an explosive mixture of concession and repression which aroused expectations without frightening society into submission. This marks the first stage of the revolution when the lead was taken by liberal elements, divided though they were.

Professor Ascher blames the tsar for the Bloody Sunday massacre. To have received the petition and to have made a few concessions would have won the workers over to his side. This is by no means certain. Gapon had by then come under the sway of a group of worker radicals, and expectations, as voiced in the petition, were now so high that the tsar could hardly have appeased them without undermining his own position to an extent which he then would have found totally unacceptable. The revolution now moved into its second phase when lawlessness and mass violence took precedence over political agitation in confronting the authorities.

For a time, liberals worked in conjunction with the working class to take advantage of the floundering government. Professor Ascher is particularly good in his analysis of this confusion. A tsar who failed to understand the nature of the popular disorders and who blamed intrigue for them presided over a disunited government of reformers and conservatives. There was no unified government policy either in St. Petersburg or the provinces. Trepov, the new Minister of the Interior, was seen as a ruthless policeman, but he favoured the intimidation of employers into improving life for their employees, and also made concessions to the students in order to calm their unrest. He reopened the universities, a fatal step which allowed the opposition a safe haven in which to prepare for the October general strike. Trepov's view that allowing the professional movement to let off steam would defuse the situation completely misfired. A crucial weakness in the government's position was its lack of an adequate police force, notwithstanding Russia's reputation as a police state. Its feeble response to the growing disorders allowed the situation to slip out of its control, whilst the tsar's intransigence and duplicity came to convince many liberals that a revolution was necessary since the reforms which were offered were proffered without conviction and on a grossly inadequate scale.

Professor Ascher characterizes the general strike of October 1905 as "a classic example of a momentous historical event that developed spontaneously". The leaders of the revolutionary left were, he asserts, taken by surprise to such an extent that they did not appreciate the significance of the strike movement and became active in it only after vast numbers of workers had actually laid down their tools. Starting with the printers' strike, the industrial proletariat emerged as an organized, and also for a time the most dynamic force in the revolution. The establishment of the St. Petersburg Soviet was a further testimony to the political activism of the workers. However, what gave the general strike its force was the remarkable degree

of support forthcoming from the middle classes, unified around the goal of eliminating the autocratic regime. The tsar detested both Witte and his reform programme, and was only prevailed upon to accept the October Manifesto after the grand duke Nikolai Nikolaevich had refused to serve as dictator. The manifesto was greeted with joy by the strikers who had mostly returned to work within a few days.

Professor Ascher provides an excellent analysis of the dramatic disintegration of social and political order which followed the publication of the October Manifesto. Violent pogroms against the Jews, students and supporters of the manifesto spread through the empire, with some connivance by local officials. Little was done to stop these riots. Witte's attempts to punish those held to be responsible were frustrated by the tsar who saw the violence as a natural popular reaction by loyal citizens. The prime minister was increasingly isolated, challenged by revolts among the reservists on their way back from the war and by rural unrest, openly criticized by the tsar and dependent for the implementation of reforms on officials who did not support them. Liberals generally refused to serve in his government, which lacked popular support and credibility. The "Days of Liberty" which lasted for six weeks degenerated into anarchic chaos. Radical activists became more militant, with calls for armed struggle or another general political strike. The revolutionary left increased its strength while the increasing political polarisation divided the urban movement which had earlier succeeded because it had united all classes. The Moscow armed uprising of December was a dramatic culmination to the year of violence but also a disastrous failure, ineptly organized by the revolutionaries and suppressed by a relatively small force of disciplined and ruthless soldiers. The opposition was fatally weakened by the rising and was unable to resist the authorities' successful campaign of repression.

This book is an admirable piece of traditional historical writing in the best sense, combining lucid and elegant narrative with balanced, cautious and sensible analysis. The author is outstanding in his depth of understanding of the diversity of the liberal and social democratic movements, and of the failings of the tsar and of his government. His section of the students' movement would be difficult to better as a succinct and discerning appraisal. He is less impressive on the workers' movement and his account of the peasant disorders is too brief, perhaps reflecting the unsatisfactory nature of much that has been written on that subject. He does his best to give an overview of developments in the provinces and the non-Russian areas of the empire, but the paucity of systematic scholarship in this field inevitably makes his account somewhat patchy. This book is likely to remain for many years as the standard, authoritative work on the revolutionary year, not least because of its awareness of the complexity of the situation and its lack of dogmatism. It deserves to be reissued in paperback form to attract a wider readership.

Gerald Surh's *1905 in St. Petersburg. Labor, Society and Revolution* complements Professor Ascher's book well. It is a detailed and specialized monograph, a study in depth of the labour movement in the capital. A number of excellent studies have recently been published on related themes, but Professor Surh has much research of his own to add, even on the Gapon movement which has attracted so much attention. He has succeeded in using Soviet archival sources, including police reports and collections on a number of factories. He states that his aim is to be self-consciously revisionist by asking questions overlooked by Soviet scholars who

have generally failed to evaluate the political development of the labour movement apart from its relationship to the Social Democratic party, and in particular the Bolsheviks. He rightly points out that Soviet scholarship has tended to avoid complexity, to ignore contradictory evidence and to exclude the Mensheviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries. By contrast, he tries to bring out the mentality of the individual worker and to examine autonomous activity and initiatives within the factory. He shows how self awareness developed in 1905 and how the workers' movement had come closer to the revolutionary parties by the end of the year without being totally dominated by them. Another main theme of his book is the interplay of the workers' movement with members of the liberal and democratic intelligentsia.

He begins his story by demonstrating how and why the workers of St. Petersburg's factories were the most highly politicized group of workers in the country. Nevertheless, they had no proper notion of their collective strength before 1905. The events of that year produced a giant leap forward in their self awareness, their political consciousness and their realisation of their power as an independent force in society. Feeling deserted by the liberals, the workers became more and more influenced by the rhetoric and intransigence of the revolutionaries.

Serious labour disorders began with the textile workers' strike of 1896, with an important leadership role being played by revolutionary agitators, even if Professor Surh grants the Union of Struggle only a support role. Although spinners' assistants played a key role in organizing walk-outs, they were too young and lowly in status to exercise any strong leadership. Government support for the employers was already beginning to educate the workers politically and to divert some of their wrath against the state authority. The more advanced metalworkers were to be quiescent until 1901. Proud of their craft, organized in separate shops and with a clear hierarchy dominated by the foremen, they initially saw no need for strike action. The situation changed dramatically after 1899 as a result of the slump, the chaotic expansion of the factories and consequent overcrowding, and the efforts of revolutionaries. The huge influx of skilled new recruits, more literate than those already in employment, created tensions as the newcomers challenged old ways in the workshops as well as the management. There now were potential strike and protest leaders from the ranks of the workers. This was already evident in the strike at the Obukhov plant in 1901, when politically committed workers were fully engaged in the preparatory work, for the first time ensuring that leaders and demands were in place before the start of the action.

In his detailed account of the activities of Father Gapon and his Assembly of Russian Workers, Professor Surh is particularly interesting in his discussion of the role of the self-educated political activist, Karelin, and his group, which came to play a leading role in the Assembly whilst retaining a separate political identity. The influence of this group dragged Gapon leftwards and persuaded him to adopt the radical position which was to lead to the Bloody Sunday clash and to initiate the revolution. In Professor Surh's words, "a kind of holy madness had taken hold of proletarian Petersburg" as the marching workers expected the tsar to respond favourably to their pleas for justice. Martial law had not actually been declared and no specific warning had been issued to Gapon. The massacre unleashed raw anger which led to the breakdown of social order and strikes which developed into political

protest as the regime blocked moves to ameliorate working conditions. Professor Surh shows how the Putilov works' strike demands formed a model for other factories, with the eight-hour day and the election of deputies to represent workers' interests becoming key themes for the year.

The government continued to mishandle the situation in its attempts to restore order by adopting policies towards the labour movement which promoted rather than prevented disorder. The condescension of the tsar's pardon to workers for their "misdemeanours", the vagueness of his promises of reform, and the appointment of Trepov as governor-general of the city did not reassure the populace. The Shidlovskii Commission of enquiry into the causes of worker unrest aroused great hopes which were soon to be dashed, and enflamed the atmosphere as socialist agitators descended on the factories in the election campaign for the Shidlovskii deputies. Workers became responsive to the message brought by socialist and liberal members of the intelligentsia in an unprecedented manner. The liberals soon lost ground as they failed to devote sufficient energy to oratory and agitation among the workers, in marked contrast to the socialists who gained ground rapidly. Whilst they actively recruited to their ranks only a small proportion of the workers exposed to their ideas, their influence spread outwards to a much greater number, through the mass meetings which had now become commonplace. Professor Surh argues convincingly that the factory movement had become broadly politicized by the summer, although still lacking a single coherent programme, strategy, leadership or organisation. The unionisation of the professional classes proceeded apace during the summer, but the Union of Unions was to stay aloof from the workers' movement, and only one of its unions was to go on strike during the summer. They were radical in rhetoric alone. By contrast, St. Petersburg workers were, the printers excepted, less interested in organizing unions. Their organizational forms tended to focus on the factory, and they were influenced by the Social Democrats' distrust of unions as potential revisionist rivals. The legal barriers to organization convinced a large cross section of the workers that fundamental political reform was necessary before lasting improvements in their working conditions could be achieved, and that a general strike would be their best weapon. It was workers' militancy, particularly from the railwaymen, which forced the mass strike onto the agenda: the revolutionary parties initially regarded it as premature. The workers were not the passive followers of outside leaders: later, for instance, they were to reject Bolshevik calls to turn the October strike into an armed uprising. The party-neutral status to be achieved by the St. Petersburg Soviet reflected the wishes of the worker deputies themselves. The Soviet gave greater cohesion and organization to the October general strike than it would otherwise have had, even if the basic decisions were made on the shop floor. The elected deputies were to gain a moral authority which was to enhance their leadership role.

The October Manifesto and the ensuing "Days of Liberty" did not stop the labour unrest. The programs by right-wing groups galvanized workers into arming themselves and aroused justified fears that the government would move against the Soviet as soon as it dared. But economic demands still provided the basic fuel for the unsuccessful November strike. The campaign moved back to the shop floor as workers began unilaterally to impose an eight-hour day, provoking lock-outs and mass dismissals by the employers. The energy and revolutionary enthusiasm of the

Petrograd workers began to wane and in December they failed to follow their Moscow colleagues into an armed uprising. The strength provided by shop-floor leadership in the early months became a weakness when things began to go badly.

Professor Surh's book is impressive in its scholarship and level of presentation. It advances our knowledge in important areas, in particular in his detailed account of the independent nature of the workers' movement, its relationship with the revolutionaries and liberals, and the interaction between factory and occupational loyalties. He examines the complexities of the concept of spontaneity even more deeply than Professor Ascher. This is a long book, and does intersperse its original analysis with passages of well-known material. This may annoy the specialist reader, but will be helpful to others in providing the background and context. Perhaps the greatest virtue of the book is its honesty. At many points, Professor Surh takes pains to stress the limitations of his knowledge of what was going on in particular plants. There is still a great deal to be found out about the workers' movement in 1905.

*John Morison*

**KURZ, THOMAS.** "Blutmai". Sozialdemokraten und Kommunisten im Brennpunkt der Berliner Ereignisse von 1929. Mit einem Geleitwort von Heinrich August Winkler. Verlag J. H. W. Dietz Nachf., Berlin [etc.] 1988. 177 pp. Ill. Maps. DM 24.00.

May Day, Berlin, 1929. In order to curb the political violence between Nazis and Communists, the social democratic police chief Zörgiebel has banned all demonstrations, including the traditional May Day celebrations of the left-wing parties. The communist party, the KPD, attempts to defy the ban, and its efforts start several days of riots; the police use armoured cars and machine gun fire in working-class areas of the city. The final result: 33 dead, 198 wounded, 1,288 arrests. The police suffer no serious casualties.

*Blutmai*, as the fighting came to be called, came at a crucial time. The relative stability of the middle years of the Weimar Republic was ending, the slide into mass unemployment was just beginning. The KPD had followed the Comintern's behest and adopted its strategy of "class against class": the SPD was now enemy rather than reluctant ally. *Blutmai* both symbolized and furthered the mutual hostility of KPD and SPD at the end of the Weimar Republic. And the conflict between the two left-wing parties is usually seen as one major reason why they were unable to hinder the growth of Nazism before 1933.

Yet for all this, the events of the first week of May 1929 in Berlin have not been studied in their own right, nor has their broader political context been dissected. Kurz's book attempts both these objectives – the first more successfully than the second.

According to Kurz, the immediate blame for the events of May 1929 must be taken by the Berlin police. On April 30 groups of KPD members had attacked traffic police on point duty, on the morning of May 1st groups of demonstrators had cut tram cables and tried to block traffic in the middle of the city. At the same time however, KPD functionaries at party meetings before May Day had also routinely