

THE AGRARIAN QUESTION IN RUSSIA 1905–1907: THE INCEPTION OF THE STOLYPIN REFORM. By *Richard Hennessy*. Osteuropastudien der Hochschulen des Landes Hessen, series 2, Marburger Abhandlungen zur Geschichte und Kultur Osteuropas, vol. 16. Giessen: Wilhelm Schmitz Verlag, 1977. x, 202 pp. DM 38, paper.

Hennessy's study offers some interesting considerations about the role of the peasant land bank in agrarian reform in Russia during 1905–6. I am not aware of any other work that gives as much space to the bank as Hennessy's, and this in itself is not without value. The presentation, however, suffers from a multitude of flaws. The author may be pardoned for not using Soviet archives, but he has missed a rather large quantity of material accessible in the West—Gurko's memoirs, for example, which he lists but apparently did not read. Hennessy has used some printed documents regarding government activities, but all too often he relies uncritically on newspapers for statements that cannot be taken at face value without some support from more reliable materials (for example, p. 119, n. 24).

Hennessy's main conclusion is that the landed gentry dominated the government's rural policy making in 1905–6. In my opinion, it is unfortunate that he tied his account to this old Soviet hymn, because in a number of places his own account transcends its limitations and offers fascinating glimpses of the complexity involved in legislating and implementing even the simplest agrarian reforms. Time and again, however, his insistence on viewing the gentry as a powerful force drags him down. He continually treats them as if they were a single, homogeneous group, though he must know they were not. Moreover, he ignores the contests that were going on within the government administration (plus all the work done by the ministry of internal affairs) in order to set up an absurdly oversimplified account, in which Witte, of all people, struggled against greedy speculators and gentry landholders on behalf of poor peasants.

One should compliment Hennessy for venturing into a study of the financing of land purchases. I myself have never dared to do it, and I hope that Hennessy will someday finish the job and spare the rest of us the pain, for it is certainly an important subject that is not well understood. When he does, however, he should take a closer look at details (without losing sight of the broad area one must cover when explaining rising and falling security prices). Loans to *peasants* were never made at a given interest rate, as he suggests on page 14; mortgage terms prescribed the amount of each payment, not the rate of interest being paid. Moreover, it should also be pointed out that peasants (or anyone) who received mortgage loans secured by land they were buying never even saw the money. Consequently, Hennessy does not need to worry as much as he does about whether the peasants received debentures or cash (p. 94): peasant land purchasers received nothing but land.

To sum up, Hennessy has managed to ask a few interesting questions, despite the constraints of his rigid class interpretation, but he has not yet studied them enough to warrant publishing the results.

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LEON TROTSKY. By *Robert D. Warth*. Twayne's World Leaders Series, 72. Boston: Twayne Publishers, G. K. Hall & Co., 1977. 215 pp. \$8.95.

A biography of so gifted, versatile, important, and controversial a person as L. D. Trotsky, in which the text occupies barely one hundred eighty brief pages, is bound to be sketchy and is likely not to please any scholar. This does not mean, however, that such books might not serve as useful introductions to the general reader, including undergraduate students.