

perhaps too critical of Denikin's stiff anti-German stance, failing to take sufficient account of the emotion and experience which lay behind it. Like others, Kenez believes that the White Russian forces were doomed to fail for two basic reasons: first, because their leaders, basically apolitical men, were unable to develop a program that might appeal to the masses; second, because their Russian nationalism blinded them to the reality of imperial disintegration, thus making them unable to cooperate with the other major non-Bolshevik force, the national minorities. The virtues of the book make one impatient for the author to try his skills on a larger theme.

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THE DIARY OF A DIPLOMAT IN RUSSIA, 1917-1918. By *Louis de Robien*.
Translated from the French by *Camilla Sykes*. New York and Washington:
Praeger Publishers, 1970. 319 pp. \$8.50.

Count Louis de Robien was appointed a minor official in the French embassy in St. Petersburg in 1914 at the age of twenty-six. His diary, first published in French in 1967, is an entertaining, highly personal record of his opinions about and experiences in revolutionary Russia, beginning with the March days and ending with his transfer to Prague in November 1918.

Unabashedly aristocratic, and overwhelmingly disdainful of Russians in general and the bourgeoisie in particular, Robien viewed the overthrow of the Romanov dynasty and its replacement by a liberal-democratic regime as an unmitigated disaster. A few quotations best convey the spirit and flavor of his lively commentaries. "One thing alone can still save the cause of the war and the allies, drastic repression, and we are hoping for it wholeheartedly," he noted during the peak of the insurrection which led to the abdication of Nicholas II. "Now one can see why the Tsars always had to govern with Balts and Germans," he observed in late April as the revolutionary crisis in the Russian Empire deepened. "The real Russians, they only know how to destroy." Speculating about the qualities to be desired in a new French ambassador after Paléologue's recall in May, Robien wrote: "What is needed here, unless they want to send a general with a dog whip (which would be best in a country where all backs are still waiting for the knout), is a very shrewd and very crafty career diplomat, who would know how to compromise the Russian leaders." After an especially enjoyable dinner party at Tsarskoe Selo, he wrote wistfully, "The whole thing was delightful, and that evening spent so far away from the revolution did me good. . . . How pleasant life could still be if only men were sensible."

In his official capacity Robien came into occasional contact with leaders of the Provisional Government and Soviet. Following a visit with Kerensky in mid-April he complained, "Kerensky was dressed in a kind of coat buttoned up to the neck, without hard collar or tie: neither bourgeois, nor workman, nor soldier . . . he noticeably makes an exhibition of himself . . . his emaciated face, his glance, his sickly aspect give him the appearance of a hysteric." So great was Robien's contempt for the liberals and moderate socialists that for some time the Bolsheviks appeared more attractive to him. "Met Kerensky again today . . . installed like the Emperor in the Imperial Rolls Royce," he noted in a diary entry of late July. "I don't call these people revolutionaries, but just 'you clear out and make room for me' people, and I much prefer Lenin . . . at least he is an honest and sincere man."

Robien had an eye for colorful detail; his illuminating descriptions of the events at which he was present are of genuine interest. Moreover, at times he was remarkably discerning. In the spring of 1917 he was justly skeptical of the possibility for a successful Russian offensive, and unlike many of his contemporaries he was not taken in by the apparent victories of early July. After the October Revolution, when many were predicting the quick collapse of the Bolshevik regime, Robien concluded that "peace is what the Russian people long for. . . . It is the men who end the war who will be masters of Russia for a long time." However, Robien was also highly impressionable and capable of incredible misjudgment. Much of what he passed on about the Revolution was picked up at an embassy reception or an intimate after-theater tête-à-tête, usually over a rare wine in a royal palace or fashionable restaurant, always with someone equally well-born. In part because of this, his diary contains innumerable errors of fact, and many of the most important developments shaping the course of the Revolution escaped his purview entirely. Thus the value of his book for readers seeking a deeper understanding of the Russian Revolution is very limited.

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V BOR'BE ZA SOTSIALISTICHESKOE PEREUSTROISTVO DEREVNI
(KREST'IANSKAIA VZAIMOPOMOSHCH', 1921–1932 GG.). By P. A.
Aleksanov. Moscow: "Mysl'," 1971. 271 pp. 1.01 rubles.

Aleksanov's study is the first to trace the history of the officially sponsored peasant mutual-aid organization throughout the decade of its existence in the 1920s. With the adoption of the New Economic Policy and the end of grain requisitioning in March 1921 the Soviet government faced the loss of supplies for rural welfare assistance. Social need and its political implications (expressly acknowledged here) combined to create an urgent problem. Prompted by the spontaneous appearance of peasant mutual-aid committees, the government began in May to promote the establishment of a broad network of such groups (Krest'ianskie Komitety Obshchestvennoi Vzaimopomoshchi) under the Commissariat of Social Security. From resources acquired through self-taxation and state contributions, the *krestkomy* were to provide assistance to soldiers' families and victims of natural or social misfortune. Later (as Krest'ianskie Obshchestva Vzaimopomoshchi), they were also to help peasants join cooperatives and collectives.

Drawing on commissariat publications, party records, and the surviving scattered data (an archival fund exists for the initial year only), the author has assembled a considerable amount of information. Unfortunately, because the source materials are often incomplete or inconsecutive, the assemblage fails to produce a clear picture of the extent and dynamics of the mutual-aid movement. An estimate that some 65–70 percent of the peasantry had been drawn into the *krestkomy* by the end of the twenties (p. 248) is vitiated by the acknowledgment that a "significant percent" of the committees existed only on paper. The relation of mutual aid to the communal system of peasant social interdependence is unexplored, and few clues are provided to explain the successes or failures reported.

Such limitations, however, are compensated by the book's incidental reflections of a convoluting agricultural policy, and by its oblique illumination of the problem of rural administrative control through uncoordinated, replicate agencies. Under