

BOOK REVIEW

Rethinking Revolutions from 1905 to 1934. Democracy, Social Justice and National Liberation Around the World. Ed. by Stefan Berger [and] Klaus Weinbauer. [Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements.] Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2023. xx, 372 pp. € 130.79. (E-book: € 96.29.)

Stefan Berger and Klaus Weinbauer's book comprises twelve essays on revolutions, along with a perceptive introduction that explores the historiography of revolutions. The essays go beyond Europe and North America to China, Latin America, the Middle East, and South Africa. The book focuses on the three decades between the 1905 Russian Revolution and the 1934 uprising in the Asturias. The long timeframe places individual revolutions in context and addresses questions such as whether the revolutionary unrest of the 1920s marked the end of one era or the beginning of another. The book also discusses the challenges to the Left by nationalist and other counter-revolutionary forces. A helpful feature of the essays is their survey of recent writing, in English and other languages, as seen in Pertti Haapala's study of Finland.

The European coverage includes Russia 1897–1921 and the German Revolution, with chapters written by leading authorities in their fields. Geoffrey Swain, emeritus professor at the University of Glasgow, is internationally renowned for his work on Russia and Eastern Europe. In his essay, "Leading the Workers, Leading the Peasants 1897–1921", Swain develops the argument set out in his centennial book of the 1917 revolutions (*A Short History of the Russian Revolution*, London, 2017) that most workers backed the revolutionaries rather than reformers from 1905 until 1921 when the Bolsheviks crushed the Workers' Opposition. He argues that the stern measures introduced under war communism to save the revolution "were not temporary expedients but essential features of the new regime" (p. 38). However, the Allied turning of the German army on the Eastern Front into an attacking force against Bolshevik Russia, the White Armies invasions, intervention by British, Japanese and other forces from the north and east, and the near-successful assassination attempt on Lenin made the continuation of key features of War Communism understandable for at least a few years. Whether those authoritarian measures were an inevitable feature of the Bolshevik regime is a matter of judgement. Many historians would agree with Swain. Less debatable is Swain's emphasis that, during the civil war, the Bolsheviks came to recognize the peasantry's importance in sustaining the revolution. This role of the peasants would prove vital in other parts of the world, including China and Latin America.

The study of the German revolution by the editors, both professors of German history in Germany, is an excellent survey of the revolution and of recent writing on it. Stefan Berger's publications are wide-ranging (as indicated in the "Notes on Contributors") but he has also been a major academic entrepreneur, organizing themed conferences and books. An earlier collection of essays, co-edited with Professor Holger

Nehring, *The History of Social Movements in Global Perspective: A Survey* (London, 2017) complements *Rethinking Revolutions from 1905 to 1934*. The authors of the essay place the revolution in wider contexts and assess competing interpretations. The most important context was the shock of defeat and the discrediting of the imperial system. The Kaiserreich had failed to ensure food and fuel for its urban citizens. The Left aspired to a “German October”. The relatively moderate SPD was ready to utilize the new democratic system of the Weimar Republic. For most German working people, its housing, social-welfare, and industrial-relations policies were preferable to the pre-1914 arrangements and offered respite from the stress of 1916–1918. In contrast, a minority favoured continuing revolution and risking further Allied intervention in Germany.

Professor Pertti Haapala, a distinguished and prolific writer on modern Finnish history, contributes an essay on known and unknown revolutions in Finland between 1899 and 1932. He analyses the complicated divisions in Finnish society and the influences of Russia and Sweden. The January 1918 revolution was crushed by April. The scale of death and devastation caused by civil wars in Finland was comparable to that caused by the civil war in Russia. The divisions in Finland included language; the majority of people spoke Finnish but the “better folk” spoke Swedish. In 1917, 40–50 per cent of voters supported the socialists. During the war, about half of Finnish combatants fought for Russia and the other half for Germany. Lenin backed the socialists, while the opponents of the January 1918 revolution set up the “White Finland” government in Vaasa, along with its White army. The White forces in Finland were backed by battle-hardened German troops and 1,000 Swedish volunteers. By late April 1918, some 10,000 men had died in action, some 12,000 socialists had been executed, and a further 13,500 had died in prison camps. Such high levels of slaughter bear comparison with deaths caused by the overthrow of elected governments in Spain by General Franco and in Chile by General Pinochet.

Marica Tolomelli, an associate professor at Bologna University, in “Global Versus National Revolutionaries: Trajectories from the ‘Great Migration’ to the ‘Fascist Revolution’”, discusses transnational socialism, tracing links between Italian radicals and large expatriate communities in Argentina, Brazil, and elsewhere. She also discusses the involvement of the Catholic Church in supporting White leagues of anti-socialist and anti-liberal political activists. Her essay provides a careful account of the transition from the flourishing of anarchism, the radicalism of factory workers during the Biennio Rosso (1919–1920) to the rise of fascist power. Tolomelli is a reliable guide to the social and political complexities of this major turning point in Italian history.

The theme of anti-labour responses to the Russian Revolution of 1905 is examined in an impressively wide-ranging essay by Romain Bonnet, Amerigo Caruso, and Alessandro Saluppo, “The First Revolution of the Twentieth Century: Fears of Socialism and Anti-Labour Mobilisation in Europe After the Russian Revolution of 1905”. In addition to tracing the development of international opposition to the labour movement, the essay is particularly strong on the fears of the propertied classes and the growth of the “yellow” movement (anti-union workers) in France, Germany, Russia, and Britain. It is effective in providing transnational analysis of anti-labour mobilisation in France, Germany, and Britain. The authors are correct in thinking that most studies are national. There has been much published, especially in the fifty years since

Kenneth Brown's *Essays in Anti-Labour History* (London, 1974) on Britain. Brown's volume includes a wide range of studies of late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. Alan Sykes offers a later survey of right-wing anti-Labour politics in his *The Radical Right in Britain: Social Imperialism to the BNP* (London, 2004). Bonnet and his colleagues achieve a major new approach to European responses to the labour movement.

Matthew Kerry examines the Asturian rising of October 1934 in his "The Last Echo of 1917? The Asturian October Between Revolution and Antifascism". The revolutionaries of 1934 drew on the Russian revolution of October 1917 as well as other radical encounters. The Spanish militants also drew on their experiences of local government, rather than creating soviets, and trade unionism was not brushed aside. Kerry argues convincingly that "[T]he Asturian October did not emerge from a vacuum of power or a fragile legitimacy of political authority, as occurred in the wake of the First World War, but was a planned, full-frontal insurrection on a state which was not in crisis" (p. 267).

Outside of Europe, the early-twentieth-century revolutions were in Mexico, in 1910, and in China, in 1911. Both revolutions depended on peasants rather than the industrial proletariat. Olaf Kaltmeier and León Enrique Ávila Romero discuss the 1910 Mexican revolution in a context of anarchist activity in "Land and Freedom: Anarchists and Indians in the Crossfire of Colonial Expansion and Social Revolution in Latin America from 1848 to 1917", retrieving the links between the anarcho-sindicalism movement and the indigenous people.

The *Xinhai* revolution of 1911 made a major break with China's past. Laura De Giorgi explains the complexities of China's path to the nationalist overthrow of the Qing Dynasty, founded in 1644 by the Manchu, a militarily strong ethnic minority. Nationalists such as Sun Yat-sen were influenced by the British, French, and American revolutions as well as by the spread of ideas by Japan. De Giorgi points to the effectiveness of the nationalists' discourse on saving China from weakness caused by backwardness and driving the country towards modernity. She also points to the subsequent disillusionment when compromises were made to avoid civil war.

In his elegant essay "Frontiers of Revolution and Empire in the Middle East", Alp Yenen uses Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis to analyse Western grabbing of resources and territory. He discusses revolutionary struggles against empires in Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

The final three essays are on the US, Australia, and South Africa in the revolutionary era. Shelton Stromquist discusses the frequent violent strikes in the US. Liam Byrne and Sean Scalmer supply a well-researched study of violent labour activity in Australia. Tom Lodge examines the links between the Communist Party, black workers, and white trade unionists in South Africa.

Overall, this is an impressive collection. The editors have done well to secure a wide range of essays with shrewd comments on recent writing.

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