

THE SPREAD OF THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION: ESSAYS ON 1917. By Roger Pethybridge. London: Macmillan. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972. xiii, 238 pp. \$11.95.

The title of this useful collection of essays is somewhat misleading: Pethybridge has provided a brief and illuminating description of Russia in 1917 as a basically static society in which the means of mass communication, transportation, and distribution were inadequately developed. His is one of the few works available in English where nonspecialist students and scholars who are curious about the status of the Russian railways, the postal and telegraph system, and the press in 1917, as well as the political role played by railwaymen, postal and telegraph workers, printers and journalists, may be easily provided with material that will stimulate their interest. (In relation to the postal and telegraph workers, however, one might cavil at the unsupported assertion that the high percentage of women employees added "a natural apolitical or even conservative element," p. 65.) But in general, Pethybridge has so clearly emphasized the material factors which limited those who attempted to shape the opinions and actions of the ordinary Russian citizen living outside of Petrograd and Moscow, that his essays sometimes make the Revolution's spread more difficult, rather than easier, to understand.

The problem is that Pethybridge has discussed the significance of mechanisms for communication, distribution, and transportation in 1917, while avoiding (1) any real discussion of the issues and policies which affected the way that these mechanisms might work, or (2) any extended treatment of the peasants whose behavior embodied the Revolution's "spread." (A recent, regrettably still unpublished doctoral thesis by D. G. Atkinson, entitled "The Russian Land Commune and the Revolution," Stanford, 1970, and Teodor Shanin's *The Awkward Class*, Oxford, 1972, provide valuable discussions of some aspects of this problem.) In the essays under review, technological backwardness and widespread illiteracy are rather simply connected with what is seen as the low level of political sophistication and intelligence of the majority of the Russian people. It is recognized that peasants who came to support the Bolsheviks cared less about theory, personality, or political rights than they did about the attainment of practical economic goals. With this recognition goes the implication that it was backward of Russian peasants and soldiers to be obsessed with such goals. The Provisional Government's inability to enact land reform and its failure to change what was essentially Miliukov's war policy (this was Miliukov's own view) are not mentioned as factors in the spread of peasant action against Provisional Government policies. Lack of political sophistication, inadequate means of mass communication, transportation, and distribution, and the not very precisely informative "peasant anarchy" are seen as paramount.

The book contains the traditional, incorrect assumption that the peasant "came as an afterthought" for Lenin (p. 126). Recognition of the fact that before 1917 Lenin had written hundreds of articles and pamphlets which dealt with the peasant as a potentially revolutionary force is long overdue.

In general, the problems created by Russia's technological backwardness and widespread illiteracy are particularly well treated in essays on "Supplies," "The Press," and "Propaganda and Political Rumours." Greater attention to issues, especially as they concretely affected the peasantry, might provide further insight into the spread of the Russian Revolution in 1917.

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