

argues that with opportunities for public engagement eliminated, civically-minded young Russians responded by fashioning an alternative space in which the counter-culture of youth flourished.

In Ely's description of the historical process that forged a revolutionary underground, we first encounter the nihilists, whom the author contends flourished amid the "theater of urban life." The reader's journey through St. Petersburg and its underground continues with an examination of the so-called "underground pioneers," including, most significantly, the Chaikovtsy. As he charts the continued development of the urban revolutionary underground, Ely takes his reader away from St. Petersburg with the "Go to the People Movement." In moving the perspective outside of the urban sphere and into the village, Ely's argument becomes especially convincing as he depicts this seemingly quintessentially rural movement as "less an anomalous detour away from the city" and more "a formative stage in the urban rebellion that had been developing throughout the reform era" (118). By describing the Go to the People campaign as an enterprise conceived of and planned for in an urban setting, Ely makes a persuasive case that the removal of the constitutive urban elements from this particular populist crusade doomed it to failure and required a fresh relocation back to an urban setting.

With the populists' return to the capital, Ely presents the revolutionary underground reaching a crescendo that not-surprisingly built to a climax with the assassination of Alexander II and the retributive state's ensuing evisceration of the radical threat and its underground. Along the way, the author deconstructs St. Petersburg's urban space and the subversive heterotopia it created to give insight into the radical tactics that relied upon the populists' earlier history and the city itself. *Underground Petersburg* beautifully examines not only the familiar revolutionary devices of political trials, illegal literature, and false passports but also the "armor of invisibility" that urban space bestowed through its theaters, restaurants, taverns, streets, and courtyards.

The works of Michel Foucault and Jürgen Habermas loom large in *Underground Petersburg* as do studies of urban history, city planning, and modernization. Christopher Ely's intimate familiarity with the historical context beyond Russia greatly enriches his study. It is his extraordinary use of memoir literature and revolutionaries' testimonies at police inquiries, however, that allows the reader to grasp the rationale for and appeal of the subversive underground for Russia's radical youth. In presenting urban space as fundamental to the revolutionary drama that defined Alexander II's reign, Ely prioritizes the tactics of the populist crusade over any ideological aims its participants imagined. In what is essential and fascinating reading for any student of the revolutionary movement in Russia, Christopher Ely convincingly demonstrates that the best historical perspective of this time might be found not in a view from above, but instead from underground.

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Was Revolution Inevitable?: Turning Points of the Russian Revolution. Ed. Tony Brenton. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. xviii, 364 pp. Notes. Chronology. Index. Maps. \$27.95, paper.
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This is a work of counterfactual history, a mode of studying the past—often referred to as the "what if" school of writing history—that many scholars dismiss as pointless.

One of its sharpest critics, the distinguished historian Richard J. Evans, devoted an entire book, *Altered Pasts: Counterfactuals in History*, to demolishing its legitimacy. He contended that the claim that the history of a country would have developed differently if specific events had taken a different turn is speculative and does not contribute to understanding the past. Such an approach, in his view, often amounted to little more than “right-wing wishful thinking” (9).

Tony Brenton, a former British ambassador to Russia and the editor of the book under review, rejects that argument, however. He finds it “very hard to understand how the inevitability, or not, of a historical event can be assessed except on the basis of a close look at moments where the road might have taken another direction, and where it might have then led” (9). Put differently, whenever historians seek to explain a course of events they cannot avoid weighing various plausible outcomes as windows to a deeper understanding of what did happen.

Dominic Lieven, who has published widely on Russian history and is the author in this book of a thoughtful article on the diplomatic background to the outbreak of World War I, presents another argument in favor of counterfactual history: “Nothing is more fatal than the belief that history’s course was inevitable. Not only is this untrue, it is also an invitation to moral abdication and political inaction” (28).

In addition to Brenton’s two articles, the book contains contributions from thirteen scholars, each one of whom analyzes a major cause or series of events of the Russian Revolution of 1917 with the aim of determining whether the outcome could have been different. Interestingly, not all the authors conclude that the events they examined could have taken a different turn, although none believe that the exercise was pointless.

In the second article, Simon Dixon considers the question whether the assassination in 1911 of Prime Minister Petr Arkad’evich Stolypin paved the way for the collapse of the old regime in 1917 and for the eventual Bolshevik seizure of power. Although politically conservative, Stolypin introduced far-reaching reforms designed to make it easier for peasants to leave the communes and become independent landowners who would shun radical politics. Stolypin estimated that it would take twenty years for his agrarian reforms to take full effect. During the First World War, his reform program ended, and with it, the peasants’ turn to moderate politics.

Historians have also speculated whether Stolypin, who firmly believed that Russia should avoid foreign entanglements that could involve the country in a military conflict, might have succeeded in persuading the tsar to refrain from an aggressive stance during the international crisis of 1914 that led to a world war with catastrophic consequences for Russia.

Dixon dismisses both speculations. He points to the general agreement that by 1911 Nicholas II had lost confidence in Stolypin, who would have been forced out of office before the outbreak of hostilities. “The crucial question” for Dixon is “not what might have happened between 1911 and 1914, but what *did* happen between 1906 and 1911” (40). For one thing, Stolypin’s agrarian reform did not appeal to most peasants. Two years after the onset of World War I, “61 per cent of all households still held their land in communal tenure and, given a choice in 1917, over 95 per cent of peasants opted to return to it—clear testimony to the resilience of the small-scale collectivist ideal in Russian peasant culture” (41). Still, Dixon ends his article with an acknowledgment that counterfactual history can be helpful in deepening our understanding of a country’s history, and he grants that “there are many points in Russia’s past at which history might have turned in a different direction. Stolypin’s assassination is not one of them” (47).

Space limitations make it impossible to pay adequate attention to all fifteen contributions, each one of which advances interesting speculations on how the events

of 1917 might have turned out differently. Douglas Smith points out that Grigorii Rasputin, not a thoughtful or admirable commentator on political issues, had an “innate antipathy to bloodshed” (53) and urged the tsar to avoid war, but despite his popularity at court his advice was rejected. Sean McMeekin describes how crucial Lenin’s leadership turned out to be in 1917. Shortly before the political turbulence erupted in Petrograd, Lenin had indicated that he did not expect to live long enough to witness the proletarian revolution in Russia, but once the unrest broke out he managed to pass from Switzerland through Europe to Petrograd, and within weeks succeeded in persuading skeptical colleagues in the Bolshevik party to accept his analysis that a proletarian revolution was feasible in the immediate future. Richard Pipes argues cogently that during the Kornilov Affair, when Prime Minister Aleksandr Kerenskii needlessly clashed with commander-in-chief General Lavr Kornilov, the opposition to the Bolsheviks became so weak that the resistance to them turned out to be pitiful; as a consequence, the seizure of power by the Leninists became “all but inevitable” (122).

Orlando Figes points out that Lenin, who persuaded the Bolsheviks to launch the insurrection in October, was lucky not to have been stopped by police in Petrograd on his return there from Finland, so as to be on hand for the final discussions of party leaders on whether to attempt a seizure of power: “Kerensky’s policemen mistook Lenin for a harmless drunk and let him proceed” (141). Had he been arrested, his Bolshevik colleagues might have lacked the backbone to vote for so daring an undertaking.

The essays in this book are thoughtful and provocative. A word of caution is in order, however. Only readers familiar with Russia’s history in the early twentieth century will grasp the significance of most of the arguments in the fifteen articles.

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Living the Revolution: Urban Communes and Soviet Socialism, 1917–1932. By Andy Willimott. Oxford Studies in Modern European History. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. xl, 203 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. \$90.00, hard bound.

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How state and society made everyday life socialist and transformed the meaning of socialism in doing so has been a central question of Soviet history. Recently, scholars interested in these questions have focused on the post-Stalin decades when massive growth in housing and consumption created new opportunities to revive socialism and give it concrete form, but not without unintended changes to what socialism meant. The vexing question of how to bring socialist ideas into life did not first appear in the late Soviet era when people acquired separate apartments, purchased automobiles, and went shopping for household goods. There were much deeper roots, which Andy Willimott’s engaging study of urban communes demonstrates by refocusing our attention on the first decade of the socialist experiment.

Released on the centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917, *Living the Revolution* is a timely contribution to our understanding of how urban dwellers struggled to make living spaces and the workplace socialist. Scholars have traditionally seen the urban communes as utopian communities that embodied a pure revolutionary spirit but were crushed by Stalinism. Whereas historians have privileged the impact of avant-garde architects and their house communes (*doma-kommuny*) on housing of