

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

collectivization the peasant mutual-aid societies were replaced by corresponding kolkhoz offices. Communism itself, an early KKOv congress had been informed, was to be "a huge organization of mutual aid for all mankind."

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THE WHITE DEATH: THE EPIC OF THE SOVIET-FINNISH WINTER WAR. By *Allen F. Chew*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1971. x, 313 pp. \$12.50.

Professor Chew's work is primarily a study of military tactics. His sources are impressive: published documents, memoirs, and secondary works in English, Finnish, and Russian; archival materials in Washington and Helsinki; and personal interviews with a number of Finnish officers who participated in the battles he describes. The result is a far more detailed study of the fighting than has hitherto been available in any major Western language. (At times, indeed, the reader may wonder who needs or wants *all* the details he gives. For example: "While trying to hurl a grenade thru a window, Lt. Heinivaho was hit in the left arm and side, but he was able to crawl back to the aid station to begin the long trek by sleigh and bus to the hospital. Another officer of the Fifth Company, Lt. Lehtinen, was killed near the crest of the hill, his body rolling down the slope," p. 47.) The author's descriptions of all the principal battles of the war are precise and clear, and illustrated by admirable maps and diagrams. He spares neither side in his criticisms, but reserves his admiration for the Finns.

One might wish that more generalizations about the reasons for Finnish success and Russian weakness would emerge from Chew's somewhat disjointed individual studies of battles. To be sure, the explanations are there, scattered throughout the book: poor Soviet planning and preparation in the early stages of the war, which Moscow had expected to be a triumphant blitzkrieg; the unsuitability of mechanized Soviet forces to much of the wintry terrain, especially on the more northern fronts, and the corresponding advantages of what Chew calls "primitive tactics" on the part of the highly mobile Finnish infantrymen in the woods; the relative unimportance of air power during the dark winter; and, above all, the generally high quality of Finnish leadership and, until close to the end, the superb morale of the Finnish troops.

The White Death is more than a military study. It contains an admirable summary of Mannerheim's career and an evaluation of his complex personality (pp. 84-96 and 278-80). The book includes, perhaps unfortunately, a final chapter on the Continuation War (and the months preceding and years following it), which adds nothing to what is already available in English on the subject and oversimplifies such matters as Mannerheim's attitude toward attacking beyond Finland's boundaries of 1939. Some readers will certainly not agree with the author's pessimistic views about Finland's present and future and his remarks about "certain bourgeois politicians [who] court the Kremlin to advance their personal interests" (p. 247). Indeed, in many of his comments on the political background of military events from the 1920s on, Professor Chew is decidedly partisan.

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