

Worger's book has a great deal to commend it and it deserves to be widely read. At the same time the serious student of South Africa in this period will want to read Turrell's volume alongside it. Both are far from perfect, both are good – and flawed – in different ways. Together they open up a crucial era and its processes in a most exciting fashion.

*Richard Rathbone*

ABRAHAM, RICHARD. *Alexander Kerensky. The First Love of the Revolution.* Columbia University Press, New York 1987. xv, 503 pp. Ill. \$ 29.95.

We have, at last, a biography of Alexander Kerensky, the absence of which has been one of the glaring omissions in the history of the Russian Revolution and the revolutionary movement. It is a good biography, but reading it helps to explain why we have had to wait so long for Kerensky's biography: he was a complex person difficult to portray; he aroused strong emotions which made writing objectively about him difficult; there was enough disagreeable about him that it has not been easy for historians to find sufficient empathy to want to, much less be able to, write his story. Fortunately, Abraham has managed to develop a feel for Kerensky which has eluded other writers. This is important not only because Kerensky's role in the pre-1917 period is significant and his position in 1917 pivotal, but because to understand Kerensky is to enrich our understanding of the Russian intelligentsia, of which he was so typical, faced with the revolution.

Abraham has done a good job of telling Kerensky's story. Especially valuable is the account of his career before 1917, where Abraham gives us for the first time a good picture of the development of Kerensky's political outlook and activism, which he insists remained remarkably consistent throughout his career and which is essential to evaluating Kerensky's activities – and inactivities – in 1917. This does help to produce a picture of a man acting, at least until August 1917, in a more consistent and principled manner than has been the usual evaluation. Abraham is especially good at pointing out the tensions Kerensky felt in 1917 between his older beliefs and the actions he was forced into by the exigencies of being in authority, tensions which often immobilized him.

Nevertheless, despite Abraham's efforts the reader comes away less than fully convinced that Kerensky had much in the way of developed political convictions (other than belief in himself and his own advancement). Kerensky undoubtedly showed great personal courage before and during 1917. No doubt he was deeply committed to "democracy", "the people", and other catchphrases of the radical intelligentsia. However, I find little evidence that he understood those beyond the level of vague utopianism and of useful if heartfelt slogans, that he had any real sense of what they meant or ever grappled with how to translate his emotional commitments into functioning political democracy. Indeed, Kerensky's actions in 1917 showed virtually no respect for the opinions

or rights of others, he repeatedly sabotaged and frustrated cabinet decisions which ran contrary to his own opinion or interests, and he demonstrated an intransigent personality which is the antithesis of any kind of democracy. When “the people” acted other than he wished, he vilified them; their function in Kerensky’s system seems to have been to shout their faith in the great leader.

The main weakness of the book is the shortage of analysis. The author seems reluctant to grapple with the meaning of Kerensky’s behavior and actions rather than just to describe them. By the time we reach June, 1917, the discrepancy between Abraham’s careful account of events and his efforts to portray a principled democratic policy conflicts painfully with what is revealed in the passages he is quoting from Kerensky and even in his own description. We are seeing a hysterical, self-aggrandizing, imperious (imperial?) poseur, showing signs of megalomania and authoritarianism. Abraham is slow to take this up, and only after July does he begin gingerly to touch on these problems, although as we approach October he begins to highlight these issues more. The book needs a concluding chapter where the author deals with the problems of assessing Kerensky’s complex, often contradictory, personality and actions, but instead it ends simply with Kerensky’s death. Left unfulfilled was the need for assessment and an effort to reconcile the pre-1917 radical lawyer with the 1917 politician (and either with the post-revolutionary exile), the darling of February with the isolated “dictator” of October, not to mention his public stances with his messy private life. The “tribune of the people” and courageous defender of political prisoners probably can be reconciled with the ineffective leader of 1917 who kept a mistress in Alexander III’s bedroom in the Winter Palace and who sacrificed supporters and family readily, but the author eschews doing so. Indeed, by bringing out more facets of Kerensky’s personality and career than have been generally known before, Abraham makes us the more eager to have these loose ends tied up; his success in research and narration heightens our expectations of and need for more analysis.

It is somewhat ironic that despite the author’s efforts at a sympathetic portrait, the reader’s distaste for Kerensky actually grows throughout the book. To his behavior in the Provisional Government – pomposity, hysterical speeches, use and betrayal of supporters, general ineffectiveness – is added his personal behavior. This is a man who can leave two sets of families – his wife and two young sons and his mistress and baby daughter (apparently conceived in 1917) – to the vicissitudes of civil war Russia, and even a sympathetic biographer cannot show that he made any effort to get them out or showed much concern for them while he pursued his ambitions. Nor is his post-war record much better. Kerensky comes across as a man capable of great personal charm, but also self-centered and manipulative. His high-minded dedication to the best ideals of the radical intelligentsia and to Russia strike a responsive cord in the reader, but this is offset by his vanity, self-aggrandizement, authoritarianism, and a sense that his own personal shortcoming contributed significantly to the failure of that democratic dream in 1917.

In Abraham’s portrayal of the events of the revolution there is little to fault and much to praise. He has helped us to understand better the man who stood at the center of the Provisional Government and through that to understand what

the government did and did not do, and why. His account of the Kornilov affair, certainly pivotal in any assessment of Kerensky, strikes me as fair and objective. I suspect that he overdoes the Masonic connection. The book sometimes reflects an uncritical use of the stereotypes which run through Kerensky's works (and those of his rivals), especially of social groups and broad developments of the Revolution. Missing is the finer texture of understanding the Revolution which has emerged from the many studies published in the first half of the 1980s, which would have helped him where he needs to portray the attitudes of the workers and soldier masses and how these interacted with Kerensky and the government. The omission of these works is a bit puzzling, but perhaps the manuscript was finished earlier than the publication date suggests.

This is a good and an important work. We are indebted to Richard Abraham for producing, if not a perfect biography or the final word on Kerensky, a solid and highly valuable account of the man who was not only the "first love" of the revolution, but also its perennial scapegoat.

*Rex A. Wade*

WETTE, WOLFRAM. *Gustav Noske. Eine politische Biographie.* Droste Verlag, Düsseldorf 1987. iv, 876 pp. Ill. DM 98.00.

It is no exaggeration to say that Gustav Noske, a prominent figure during the revolutionary upheavals in Germany in 1918-19 and the Weimar republic's first defence minister, is the most controversial politician in the history of German social democracy. Assessments of Noske give rise to a peculiar reversal of positions: Noske eventually became a heavy burden on his party, and today most Social Democrats were very critical of his policies; but the political right held, and still holds, him in high regard.

Given that Noske is a Social Democratic politician, who enjoys particular esteem with all German conservatives, it does not come as a surprise that Wolfram Wette's critical biography caused a stir even before its publication. The scientific advisory board attached to the Research Institute for Military History (Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt), Wette's employers, tried to obstruct the publication of the study, a fact which quickly became public knowledge within the profession. The board (appointed by the federal minister of defence) accused the author of bias and of lack of balance in his judgements, and recommended that the institute withhold its imprint and refuse to subsidize the printing costs. Further expert opinion was then sought, and on the basis of this the institute did finally decide to publish. But, unusually, the director of the institute made a number of critical observations in his introduction to the book, articulating the advisory board's reservations about Wette's appraisal of Noske the man and the policies he espoused.

On perusal of this lengthy study it becomes clear – abundantly clear – that the accusations by the advisory board are entirely without justification. Wette offers a fair representation of the development and political career of Gustav