Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War

How did peasants experience and help guide Russia’s war, revolution, and civil war? Why in the end did most agree to live as part of the Bolshevik regime? Taking the First World War to the end of the Civil War as a unified era of revolution, this book shows how peasant society and peasants’ conceptions of themselves as citizens in the nation evolved in a period of total war, mass revolutionary politics, and civil breakdown. Aaron Retish reveals that the fateful decision by individuals to join the Revolution or to accommodate their lifestyle within it gave the Bolsheviks the resources and philosophical foundation on which to build the Soviet experiment and reshape international politics. He argues that peasants wanted more than land from the Revolution; they wanted to be active citizens. This is an important contribution to our understanding of the nature of the Russian Revolution and peasant–state relations.

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Russia’s Peasants in Revolution and Civil War

Citizenship, Identity, and the Creation of the Soviet State, 1914–1922

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Note on terms and usage

Dates through January 1918 are given in Russia’s Julian calendar, which ran thirteen days behind the Gregorian calendar. Russia adopted the Gregorian calendar in February 1918 and dates from that point forward reflect the change. I use the Library of Congress system of transliteration for Russian, Udmurt, and Mari except for names commonly known in English (for example, Trotsky instead of Trotskii). I have eliminated the soft sign at the end of place names (Kazan instead of Kazan’) to make the text flow better. For style and readability, I have tried to keep foreign terms to a minimum and anglicise most plurals. This is a provincial history and I often refer to the province (губерния), the districts (uezdy) of the province, and the rural administrative townships (волости) within the districts. As volosts appear so often and an accurate English translation is clunky, I use the Russian term throughout the text without the soft sign (волост, instead of волость). In the revolutionary era, Russia’s peasants travelled in versts (approximately 1.07 kilometres), measured grain in puds (approximately 36 pounds or 16.4 kilograms) and funts (approximately .90 pounds or 0.41 kilograms) and marked off land in desiatinas (approximately 2.7 acres).

I use the following abbreviations when I refer to Russian archival materials: f. for collection (фонд), op. for inventory (опись), d. for file (дело), l. and ll. for folio and folios (лист and листы), and ob. for verso (оборот).
Glossary

artel
cooperative organization of peasants
Cheka
Extraordinary Commission for the Struggle against Counter-Revolution and Sabotage
derevnia
village
fel’dshe
paramedic
gubispolkom
provincial executive committee
ispolkom
executive committee of soviet or committee
kolkhoz
collective farm
kombed(y)
committee(s) of the poor peasantry
Komuch
Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. Anti-Bolshevik regime in the Lower Volga in 1918
kustar’
peasant handicraft
kumyshka
alcoholic home-brewed ritual drink associated with Udmurts and Maris
Narkomnats
People’s Commissariat of Nationalities
Narkomprod
People’s Commissariat of Food Supply
Narkompros
People’s Commissariat of Enlightenment
Narkomzem
People’s Commissariat of Agriculture
NKVD
People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs
obshchina
land commune
otkhodnichestvo
network of peasant out-migration to the factories or urban areas
otkhodnik
peasant migrant worker
prigovor(y)
resolution(s) passed by village, communal or volost assembly
Prikomuch
The Urals Region Committee of Members of the Constituent Assembly. Anti-Bolshevik regime centred in Viatka in 1918
razverstka
compulsory levy of grain and goods
Glossary

selo  village, usually a larger village that houses the main volost religious building
skhod  village, commune, or volost assembly
soldatka  soldier’s wife
SR  member of the Socialist Revolutionary Party
starosta  village elder
starshina  volost elder
zavod  factory or factory town
zemstvo  semi-autonomous local governmental body
Map of Viatka province in 1914
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