The Russian Revolution, 1917

Rex A. Wade presents here a new account of one of the pivotal events of modern history, combining his own long study of the revolution with the best of contemporary scholarship. Within an overall narrative that provides a clear description of the 1917 revolution, he introduces several new approaches to its political history and clears away many of the myths and misconceptions that have clouded studies of the period. He also gives significant space to the social, economic, and cultural history of the revolution and incorporates people and places too often left out of the story, including women, national minority peoples, peasantry, and front soldiers, enabling a richer and more complete history to emerge. Now appearing in a third edition, this highly readable book has been thoroughly revised and expanded. It will prove invaluable reading to anyone interested in Russian history.

REX A. WADE is Professor of Russian History at George Mason University. He is the author of numerous books and articles on Russian history.

NEW APPROACHES TO EUROPEAN HISTORY

New Approaches to European History is an important textbook series, which provides concise but authoritative surveys of major themes and problems in European history since the Renaissance. Written at a level and length accessible to advanced school students and undergraduates, each book in the series addresses topics or themes that students of European history encounter daily: the series embraces both some of the more "traditional" subjects of study, and those cultural and social issues to which increasing numbers of school and college courses are devoted. A particular effort is made to consider the wider international implications of the subject under scrutiny.

To aid the student reader scholarly apparatus and annotation is light, but each work has full supplementary bibliographies and notes for further reading: where appropriate chronologies, maps, diagrams, and other illustrative material are also provided.

For a list of titles published in the series, please see end of book.

The Russian Revolution, 1917

Third Edition

Rex A. Wade
George Mason University, Virginia

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India

79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107130326

First published 2017

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Wade, Rex A., author.
Title: The Russian Revolution, 1917 / Rex A. Wade, George Mason University, Virginia.
Description: Third edition. | Cambridge ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2016. | Series: New approaches to European history ; 53 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016036249| ISBN 9781107130326 (hbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781107571259 (pbk. : alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Soviet Union – History – Revolution, 1917–1921.
Classification: LCC DK265 .W24 2016 | DDC 947.084 – dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016036249

ISBN 978-1-107-13032-6 Hardback
ISBN 978-1-107-57125-9 Paperback

Contents

Plates

Maps

Preface

The Russian Revolution remains without doubt one of the most important events of modern history. It has been central to the shaping of twentieth-century world history and its legacy continues to be influential to the present. The collapse of the Soviet Union made it easier to put the Russian Revolution into better historical perspective since writing about it no longer involves an implied judgment on an existing government and system, as it often did during the era of the Soviet Union's existence. At the same time, however, the renewed struggle over democracy and political forms, class and social-economic issues, the autonomy or independence of the non-Russian peoples, Russia's great-power status and other issues that have wracked the region since 1991 reaffirm the importance of the Russian Revolution of 1917, when these very issues were first fought out. The outcome was then, as it is now, important to the world as well as to Russia and its neighbors.

Despite its importance and the tremendous amount written about the revolution, reliable general histories, especially relatively brief ones, have been rare. This book attempts to provide such a history in a new account of the Russian Revolution that also reflects recent scholarship. It brings together both my own long study of the revolution and the fruit of the many recent specialized studies. While writing, both the original edition and the changes for this revision, I found myself rethinking our narrative and interpretation of several major features of the revolution. The result, I hope, is a book accessible and interesting to general readers while also introducing new perspectives that my colleagues in the field of Russian studies will find stimulating.

The approaching centenary of the Russian Revolution of 1917 seemed an appropriate time to step back and review the earlier editions of this book and the body of scholarship published since then. That plus encouragement from colleagues have resulted in the decision to do a third edition. The original book drew such favorable reviews that it seemed best to retain the basic structure and content, working new materials and understandings into the text as it goes along. Importantly, the Further

Reading section has been augmented by recent publications. At the same time, those who have read earlier editions and professors who have used it in classes or recommended it will find the basic features still there.

Within an overall narrative that seeks to provide a clear account of the revolution, several new approaches and interpretations are introduced. For one, this book recasts the political history of the revolution. It emphasizes the importance of the political realignments that accompanied the revolution and the significance of the new political blocs that were, in many ways, more important during the revolution than traditional party labels. This allows proper focus on the role of the Revolutionary Defensist, "moderate socialist" bloc in the leadership of the revolution during the early months. It similarly allows proper recognition of the importance of the radical left bloc – not just Bolsheviks – during the period of the October Revolution. This study also stresses the importance of the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" and the idea of "Soviet power" in paving the way for the October Revolution. It emphasizes the complexity of the October Revolution and the degree to which it was part of a genuinely popular struggle for "All Power to the Soviets" and only later a "Bolshevik revolution." This allows the clearing away of many myths and misconceptions that have long clouded that important upheaval. It was neither a simple manipulation by cynical Bolsheviks of ignorant masses nor the carefully planned and executed seizure of power under Lenin's omniscient direction that the traditional myth of October has so often portrayed. This new edition strengthens the discussions of political developments on the eves of the February and October Revolutions, and augments the sections on the role of the Constituent Assembly, cross-party political co-operation, and Lenin.

At the same time the book gives due space to the social-economic and cultural history of the revolution, stressing the importance of popular activism and of social and economic issues in shaping the course and outcome of the revolution. The aspirations of various segments of the population and the many organizations they created to advance their interests are central to the story. Historians have debated the social versus the political history of the revolution – this work suggests that the two are inseparable. No understanding of the revolution is complete without a consideration of popular aspirations and activism and how they interacted with political parties and leadership. Closely related, this edition expands treatment of the role of language, symbols, and festivals, which so obviously were an important part of the revolution and which gave the reader a better sense of the texture of life during these stirring days.

This history also incorporates people and places all too often left out of the story of the revolution. It explores the impact of the revolution on

women, on the former upper classes, and on religion. It moves beyond the capital, Petrograd, and without ignoring the centrality of events there it treats the revolution in the provinces as important and integral parts of the revolution. In particular it includes the national minorities and the importance of the revolution to them and of them to the revolution. It gives attention to the peasantry, to front soldiers, to women and to events in provincial Russia, groups and places that are often given cursory treatment or omitted from histories of the revolution. The result, I believe, is a richer as well as more complete history.

This book is directed at the general reader as well as the specialist and that has determined many stylistic features. It assumes that readers do not know Russian. I have therefore sought to use the English counterparts of Russian terms where possible. Thus, for example, city *duma* is rendered city council, which is what they were in effect. Similarly, after much internal debate and conflicting external advice, I have used the English version of first names of major figures and persons well known to readers in that form – Nicholas and Alexandra, Alexander Kerensky, Leon Trotsky, and even Paul Miliukov – rather than strict transliteration of the Russian spelling (Nikolai, Aleksandr, Lev, Pavel), but the Russian form for people less well known and for names less common in English. In many instances I have used the Russian convention of two initials instead of a first name. Similarly, cities and places are given in the manner most familiar to contemporary readers. Thus they are usually given in their Russian variant rather than in the various nationality language forms (Kharkov rather than Kharkiv). I use the name familiar today rather than the official Russian names of 1917 for some cities (Tallinn rather than Revel, Helsinki instead of Helsingfors). While producing some inconsistencies in usage, I think that this commonsense approach to names and terms will make it easier for the reader unfamiliar with Russian and already confronted by numerous new names. Those who read Russian will not find any difficulty with understanding these and, where desired, transposing them to the Russian original. Family names and Russian words are in the standard Library of Congress transliteration with the common slight modifications such as omission of the soft sign (Lvov rather than L'vov) and the ending "sky" rather than "skii" (Kerensky rather than Kerenskii). Strict transliteration is used for notes and the further reading section, and for some titles in the text (such as the newspapers *Den'* and *Rech'*).

The same considerations dictated certain other features. Where possible I have drawn illustrative quotations from English-language sources, including secondary works, rather than the Russian originals on the assumption that this provides some guidance as to where interested

readers can expect to find more information on that subject. The work is lightly footnoted, primarily for direct quotations, to acknowledge specific borrowing of data or to guide readers to especially important works on a topic. In contrast to the limited footnoting, the further reading list is extensive and intended to give readers a wide-ranging reference to the literature available in English. I have included most of the secondary literature and documentary collections. The memoir literature, especially of foreign observers, is less thoroughly represented; for those and other works readers should consult the bibliographic guides by Murray Frame and Jonathan Smele, both given in the Further Reading section. Both the informational footnotes and the Further Reading section are limited to English-language works, for the reasons already given. Those interested in the voluminous Russian-language literature (and skilled in the problems of its use, especially for Soviet-era publications) can find extensive guidance in the bibliographies of the specialized studies given in the Further Reading section and a fine recent short review by Boris Kolonitskii, also in the Further Reading section.

A word should be said about the use of "Russia" and "Russian." The population of the Russian Empire in 1917 (and Russians today) used two different words to distinguish between "Russian" (*russkii*) meaning that language, nationality, and culture, and "Russian" (*rossiiskii*) when referring to the state or territory and the people within it regardless of ethnicity. English and most other languages do not make that distinction. This can create confusion for those unfamiliar with the dual meaning of "Russian." In this book, as in almost all writing on the history of Russia, the term "Russian" is used in both meanings and sometimes fuses them. Thus references to the aspirations of "Russian society" or that "Russians felt" something, unless otherwise indicated, usually means the population as a whole, but especially the ethnically Russian or the Orthodox Slavic (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians). Such usages are impossible to avoid in writing about the history of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union, but have also become more problematic since the breakup of that state and the rise of newly assertive nationalisms in its former territories. Indeed, this issue arose in 1917, as we will see in Chapter 6 especially. This double meaning of "Russian," coupled with my greater attention to nationality and provincial issues, has led me to use "All-Russia" rather than the more traditional "All-Russian" in the names of congresses and assemblies such as the "All-Russia Congress of Soviets." "All-Russia" provides a clearer reference to something pertaining to the state (*rossiiskii*) and all the peoples of the state, in contrast to Russians (*russkii*) as a specific nationality or linguistic group. It makes more comprehensible the demands of some groups, Ukrainians or Estonians, for example, for

autonomy and self-determination, but within the authority of an "All-Russia" Constituent Assembly.

All dates are in the Russian calendar of that time, which was thirteen days behind the Western and modern Russian calendar. Thus the February Revolution and the October Revolution (Russian calendar in use in 1917) are used here but are called the "March Revolution" and the "November Revolution" (Western calendar) in some books.

My narrative and interpretations have taken form over many years of reading, listening, conversing, and teaching. I owe intellectual debts to many more people than can be named and in more ways than I could possibly recall. I have had the good fortune to participate in academic conferences with most of the leading scholars in the field; their presentations, comments, and conversations (and publications) have certainly, and in more ways than I could ever identify, influenced my knowledge of and thinking about the revolution. If I have inadvertently borrowed, unconsciously and without acknowledgment, too directly from any of those I have interacted with, I do apologize and hope they accept it as testimony to their own scholarship and persuasiveness.

Several colleagues have read all or parts of the book at one stage or another and offered especially good advice, and to them I owe an enormous debt of gratitude: Olavi Arens, Barbara Engel, Daniel Graf, Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, Michael Hickey, Lars Lih, Semion Lyandres, Michael Melancon, Daniel Orlovsky, Donald Raleigh, Scott Seregny, Philip Skaggs, Ian Thatcher, and Ronald Suny. My thanks to Jonathan Sanders for advice and help on photos. Mollie Fletcher-Klocek ably prepared the maps. Nathan Hamilton helped track down materials and also read the original manuscript. In addition I owe thanks to some of my students at George Mason University, who read and critiqued early versions of the manuscript from a student perspective. An enormous debt of gratitude is owed to Vyta Baselice for her help with editing the text and keyboarding the changes into this new edition. Michael Watson of Cambridge University Press has been a friendly advisor and a great help throughout all editions. Cassi Roberts has been a friendly great help in putting this edition through the press and with the cover image selection. My wife, Beryl, has been a rock of support throughout, amiably tolerating a frequently distracted writer-husband. This book is lovingly dedicated to her.

REX A. WADE

Chronology

Feb. 9–22	Rising tide of strikes in Petrograd.
Feb. 23	Women's Day demonstrations.
Feb. 24–25	Demonstrations in Petrograd grow in size daily; troops show reluctance to act against demonstrators; political parties become more involved.
Feb. 26	Demonstrations continue; government barricades streets and orders troops to fire on demonstrators.
Feb. 27	Garrison mutiny; Petrograd Soviet formed; Temporary Committee of the State Duma formed and announces assumption of authority.
Mar. 1	Order No. 1.
Mar. 2	Provisional Government formed; abdication of Nicholas II; spread of revolution to other cities.
Mar. 14	Soviet "Appeal to the People of the World" for a "peace without annexations or indemnities."
Mar. 20	Tsereteli arrives in Petrograd from Siberian exile.
Mar. 21–22	Tsereteli and Revolutionary Defensists establish leadership of Petrograd Soviet.
Mar. 20	Provisional Government abolishes all discriminations based on nationality or religion.
Apr. 3	Lenin arrives in Petrograd from Switzerland.
Apr. 4	Lenin issues "April Theses."
Apr. 18–21	April Crisis.
May 2–5	Government crisis and reorganization to include Soviet leaders in the government: "coalition government."
June 3–5	First All-Russia Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.
June 10	Ukrainian Central Rada issues First Universal.
June 18	Russian military offensive begins.

June 18	Soviet-sponsored demonstration in Petrograd turns into massive antiwar and antigovernment demonstration.
July 1	Provisional Government delegation and Central Rada reach agreement on limited self-government for Ukraine.
July 2	Kadet ministers resign over Ukrainian issue – new government crisis begins.
July 3–5	July Days: street demonstrations demand that the Soviet take power; Soviet leaders refuse; Bolsheviks belatedly assume leadership; Lenin and others forced to flee.
July 5	German counteroffensive and collapse of Russian offensive.
July 5	Second Universal of Ukrainian Central Rada; Finnish parliament votes to assume governing authority in Finland.
July 8	Kerensky becomes minister-president.
July 17	Tsereteli, as acting minister of the interior, orders measures against land seizures by peasants.
July 18	General Kornilov appointed supreme commander of army.
July 20	Provisional Government extends right to vote to women.
July 21–23	New government crisis, leading to second coalition government.
Aug. 12–15	Moscow State Conference
Aug. 21	New German offensive takes key city of Riga.
Aug. 27–31	Kornilov Affair.
Aug. 31	Bolshevik resolution passes in Petrograd Soviet for first time.
Sep. 1	"Directory," a five-man government headed by Kerensky, established.
Sep. 5	Bolshevik resolution passes in Moscow Soviet.
Sep. 9	Petrograd Soviet confirms Bolshevik resolution and the old Revolutionary Defensist leadership resigns.
Sep. 14–22	Democratic Conference to find a new base of support for Provisional Government; debates forming an all-socialist government but fails to reach agreement.
Sep. 25	Trotsky elected chairman of Petrograd Soviet as Bolshevik-led radical bloc takes control.

Sep. 25	Third coalition government formed under Kerensky.
Oct. 7	"Preparliament" opens; Bolsheviks walk out.
Oct. 10–16	Bolshevik leadership debates seizing power.
Oct. 11–13	Congress of Soviets of the Northern Region.
Oct. 22	"Day of the Petrograd Soviet" with rallies for Soviet power.
Oct. 21–23	Military Revolutionary Committee challenges military authorities over control of garrison.
Oct. 24	Kerensky moves to close Bolshevik newspapers, sparking the October Revolution.
Oct. 24–25	Struggle for control of key points in Petrograd between pro-Soviet and pro-government forces; the former prevail.
Oct. 25	Provisional Government declared deposed; Kerensky flees to front seeking troops; Second Congress of Soviets opens in evening.
Oct. 26	Provisional Government members arrested early morning.
Oct. 26	Second session of Second Congress of Soviets passes decrees on land, on peace and on formation of a new government – Council of People's Commissars.
Oct. 27	Decree establishing censorship of press.
Oct. 27–30	Kerensky–Krasnov attack; it and armed Petrograd opponents defeated.
Oct. 29	Vikzhel appeals for broad socialist government and forces negotiations.
Oct. 26–Nov. 2	First wave of spread of Soviet power across country, culminating in victory in Moscow on Nov. 2.
Nov. 2	Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia.
Nov. 7	Third Universal proclaims Rada the government of Ukraine.
Nov. 10	Abolition of ranks and titles.
Nov. 12	Elections to Constituent Assembly begin.
Nov. 19	Formal armistice negotiations with Germany and Austria-Hungary, but informal armistices already begun between troops.
Nov. 20	Bolsheviks take over army general staff headquarters.
Nov. 28	Arrest of Kadet Party leaders ordered.

Dec. 2	Formal armistice with Germany and Austria-Hungary.
Dec. 7	Cheka established.
Dec. 11–12	Lenin's theses against the Constituent Assembly.
Mid-Dec.	Further spread of Soviet power in south and at front.
Dec. 12	Left SRs join the government.
Dec. 16, 18	Decrees on divorce, marriage, civil registration.
Jan. 4	Soviet government officially accepts Finnish independence.
Jan. 5	Constituent Assembly opens.
Jan. 6	Constituent Assembly closed by force.