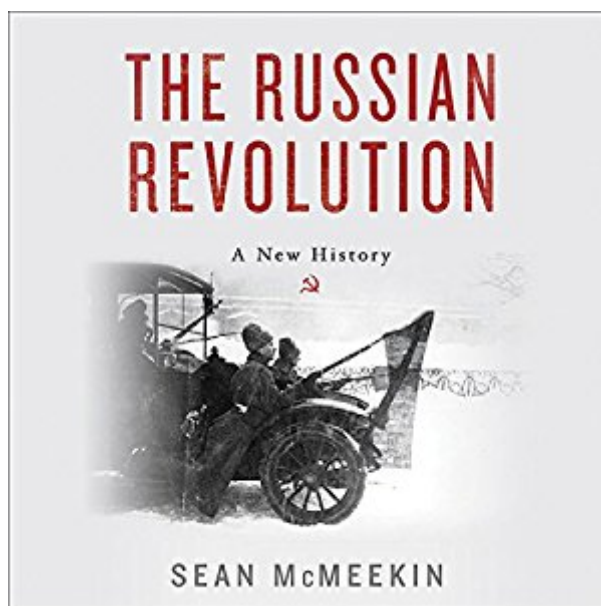


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The Russian Revolution: A New History



Synopsis

In *The Russian Revolution*, acclaimed historian Sean McMeekin traces the events that ended Romanov rule, ushered the Bolsheviks into power, and introduced communism to the world. Between 1917 and 1922, Russia underwent a complete and irreversible transformation. Taking advantage of the collapse of the Tsarist regime in the middle of World War I, the Bolsheviks staged a hostile takeover of the Russian Imperial Army, promoting mutinies and mass desertions of men in order to fulfill Lenin's program of turning the "imperialist war" into civil war. By the time the Bolsheviks had snuffed out the last resistance five years later, over 20 million people had died, and the Russian economy had collapsed so completely that communism had to be temporarily abandoned. Still, Bolshevik rule was secure, owing to the new regime's monopoly on force, enabled by illicit arms deals signed with capitalist neighbors such as Germany and Sweden, who sought to benefit - politically and economically - from the revolutionary chaos in Russia. Drawing on scores of previously untapped files from Russian archives and a range of other repositories in Europe, Turkey, and the United States, McMeekin delivers exciting, groundbreaking research about this turbulent era. The first comprehensive history of these momentous events in two decades, *The Russian Revolution* combines cutting-edge scholarship and a fast-paced narrative to shed new light on one of the most significant turning points of the 20th century.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Historian Sean McMeekin has written a very readable revisionist history of the Russian Revolution. The perspective of the book is to look at the revolution from outside in. Hence we learn more about the opposition to Lenin rather than an inside out view which would focus more on the Bolshevik

leadership. According to his archival sources McMeekin clearly portrays Lenin as a German agent who brought the financial resources of Hohenzollern Germany with him to overwhelm both his critics on the left and the forces of the provisional government. In McMeekin's view both the Tsar and the Russian army were in far better shape than what other historians have argued. I think he stretches here, because if it were that strong the army would not have collapsed as fast as it did under the weight of the Leninist policy of turning an imperialist war into a civil war by subverting the Russian draftees. He argues, I think correctly, that Lenin was blessed by his opponents. The liberals who brought on the February/March Revolution were inept and the Socialist Revolutionary government under Kerensky was perhaps even more inept. When the time came for Lenin to strike in October/November, the provisional government was a mere shell. Thus the revolution was more a coup d'état than a real revolution. The revolution would come with the bloody civil war that followed the coup. During the civil war period McMeekin highlights how split the opposition was and how unified the newly formed Red Army was under the leadership of Trotsky. Trotsky wisely utilized the officer corps of the defeated Tsarist army to build his new army and utilizing Russian gold reserves, Lenin was able to keep the army in the field. Nevertheless millions of lives were lost in the three year civil war as the country nearly starved to death and was saved by Herbert Hoover's relief mission. One last note McMeekin tells us that the Cheka, the predecessor to the KGB, was founded to break the strike of banking, railroad and communication workers, so much for proletarian solidarity. Therefore I highly recommend the book •The Russian Revolution• for history buffs like myself.

What makes •The Russian Revolution• a good history was Sean McMeekin's access to, and use of, archives that only became available after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Because of this McMeekin is able to present a more complete history of the revolution rather than the sanitized version presented by the Russians in the last century, or those that had, by necessity, were based on supposition or third person sources and documents. Because of this many of the Bolsheviks' violent excesses against the Russian people and their own supporters have been confirmed using official and personal documents of leaders such as Lenin and Trotsky. The bottom line is that Lenin and the Bolsheviks, later the Communist Party, came to power through a coup, not a popular uprising, against Kerensky's Provisional Government. And it was German gold that gave him the means to buy people, propaganda, and everything else he needed to take the power he craved. Using the archives McMeekin points out that, contrary to the official Russian narrative, the country's economy and military situation was much better than

believed. In fact, the Russian army was even better fed than the Germans. However, one big issue that led to the revolution was war weariness, a common attribute in many of Great War's belligerents by 1917. At the same time the Communists excelled at the divide and conquer and bait and switch. The Communists played the divided opposition against each other, supported various groups against each other (workers against peasants, and then peasants against workers), outright lied to their own supporters, and then brutally suppressed those who opposed them, and some who did not. They also made a variety of promises that they did not keep and never intended to; all that mattered was Lenin's and the Communist Party's desire to stay in power. According to McMeekin, supported by the Soviet's own archives, Lenin and the Communist Party came to power with German gold, an incompetent and divided opposition, and not a little luck, driven by Lenin's desire for power and an amount of violence (the Red Terror), against everyone, all while trying to undermine the nations of Europe. Needless to say, those who grew up with the Soviet narrative will have a hard time with this book as will Soviet apologists, but McMeekin's archival research, presents more depth and detail to a key event that shook Europe and the world throughout the 1900s.

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