

Book Review

Russia: Revolution and Civil War 1917–1921

Anthony Beevor

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One of the most important historical moments in modern history, the Russian Revolution and the subsequent civil war from 1917 to 1921, had a profound effect on how the twentieth century developed. Anthony Beevor, an acclaimed British military historian, gives a thorough and in-depth overview of this turbulent time in Russian history in his book *Russia: Revolution and Civil War 1917–1921*. Beevor looks at the fall of the Tsarist state, the formation of several political groups, the ascent of Lenin and the Bolsheviks, the participation of foreign powers, and the ensuing war that led to the founding of the Soviet Union. In this review, we discuss Beevor's analysis of these important occasions, people, and elements.

Beevor begins by providing valuable insights into the historical context and events that led to the Russian Revolution. He examines the complex interplay of economic, political, and social factors, which created a volatile environment in Russia during this time. For example, he notes that the failure of the First World War had a profound influence on Russia, and exacerbated pre-existing issues, such as severe poverty, food shortages, and political unrest. As a result, peasants and the working class became increasingly dissatisfied with the Tsarist regime, giving rise to unrest and social movements. Beevor also analyses the various political and social groups that emerged during this time, such as the Bolsheviks, the Mensheviks, and the Socialist Revolutionaries. He explores the ideologies and beliefs that drove these groups, as well as the influential members of these parties, namely Lenin, Trotsky, and Kerensky.

The book then moves on to a detailed account of the events and policies implemented by the Bolshevik government after the October Revolution. Initially, the Bolsheviks faced numerous obstacles as they tried to seize control and consolidate power. They implemented several policies to solve these obstacles, such as the forcible requisition of food and other supplies from the peasantry, the formation of the Red Army to combat the counter-revolutionaries, and the introduction of a new economic policy known as War Communism. However, these policies had unintended consequences. For example, millions of people died of severe starvation and illness as a result of the forcible requisition of food, and the Red Army struggled to maintain control of the country, facing fierce resistance from anti-Bolshevik forces and suffering from desertion and low morale among

its troops. Despite these internal struggles, the Bolsheviks also faced external challenges from foreign powers, such as Britain, France, and the United States, who supported the White Army. The rising civil war and the continuous fight for control in Russia are covered in the chapters that follow.

The adversaries of the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, increased when they took control in October 1917. They comprised nationalist movements in the former empire that aimed for further autonomy or independence, in addition to the White Army, which were made up of anti-Bolshevik troops. The Bolsheviks established the Cheka, a new secret police organisation that engaged in ruthless repression and violence against alleged state enemies, in order to bolster their power and crush resistance.

Throughout 1919, both sides gained and lost ground during a series of key military offensives and counteroffensives. In the east, Admiral Kolchak's White Army launched an offensive in Siberia, capturing important cities and regions. However, this initial success was short-lived, and the Red Army, under the leadership of Mikhail Tukhachevsky, launched a counteroffensive that pushed the Whites back and recaptured lost ground. However, the Red Army, bolstered by reinforcements and improved organisation, was able to halt the advance, and push the Whites back in a series of battles along the Volga River.

Ultimately, Beevor explores the aftermath of the Russian Revolution and the ensuing civil war, which left the country in a state of disarray. The economy was in ruins, with hyperinflation and food shortages plaguing the population. Beevor explains the government's response to the crisis, which included setting up a system for distributing food and taking grain from peasants. In addition, Beevor's examination of the Bolsheviks' international strategy sheds light on their larger goals and ambitions. He describes the government's attempts to spread the revolution to other countries, including the establishment of the Communist International. He also discusses the various conflicts that arose between the Soviet Union and its neighbours, namely Poland and the newly formed Baltic states.

In conclusion, Anthony Beevor's *Russia, Revolution and Civil War 1917–1921* is a masterful work that offers a thorough and insightful overview of one of the most significant eras in Russian history. His analysis of the Russian Revolution and the subsequent Civil War provides important insights into the key events, actors, and factors that shaped the creation of the Soviet Union. Additionally, the book has relevance not only for historians and scholars but also for anyone interested in the role of political revolutions in shaping the modern world. This book is therefore a must-read for anybody interested in Russian history, political revolutions, or international relations.

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