

Allan K. Wildman — *The End of the Imperial Army. The Road to Soviet Power and Peace*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987. Pp. xv, 443.

This book is testimony to the great interest that the Russian Revolution continues to arouse among scholars in the West. Unlike other historians who have produced local studies or concentrated on to the policies and appeal of non-Bolshevik parties, Allan K. Wildman focusses on what observers, in 1917, considered to be the most important phenomenon in Russia: the gradual disintegration of the Imperial army. The failure of its commanders to maintain discipline, let alone inspire the rank-and-file with the will to fight until victory, were paralleled by Bolshevik inroads among peasant soldiers and Lenin's resolve to seize power.

Although the main outline of the story has been known since the 1920s, Wildman has put together a great deal of valuable data to illustrate these developments. He has had access to the State Military Historical Archives in Moscow and he has made good use of unpublished documents at Columbia University and the Hoover Institution Archives. He has also combed through diaries, newspapers, reminiscences and historical articles in Russian and others languages. Little seems to have escaped him although the reviewer wishes Wildman had taken the trouble to peruse the reports that British and French officers, attached to the Russian army, sent to their superiors in London and Paris.

The evidence that Wildman has assembled supports his view "that the peace aspirations were but a part of the way the soldiers looked at the world in general as scions of a peasant culture with its indigenous parochial concerns. The war was simply one more intrusion into the private world of the demands of the holders of political and social power, robbing them of their lives and substance" (404).

The ability of the Bolsheviks to exploit widespread war weariness in spite of the handicaps under which Lenin's followers operated through much of 1917, comes through on many a page. Wildman's account is all the more convincing as he quotes Bolshevik activists and sympathisers when they confronted officers and moderate socialists in army soviets and on the parade ground. The very detailed account of the steady erosion of traditional military values and of the popularity of the provisional government places all students of the Russian Revolution in his debt. The range of Wildman's documentation and his willingness to allow the protagonists to present their views without embellishment and without blaming them for what they did or failed to do are bound to impress the reader and make historians think twice before they will tackle the same topic again.

Yvan Avakoumovitch
University of British Columbia

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