

# 1917. La Revolución Rusa Cien Años Después

Jorge Saborido, 2017

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The Centennial of the Russian Revolution in 2017, as it so often happens with such anniversaries, saw a renewed interest on the subject by both the academic and non-academic public. It was accompanied by updated editions or reprints of classics on the subject as well as the publication of new works on the Revolution. The one under review here falls into the latter category and is notable for its place of origin, for Argentina does not have too strong a tradition in Slavic studies. Its author, Jorge Saborido, is a veteran historian at the University of Buenos Aires, and while he is not a Russian history specialist, this is not his first foray into the region, with his prior publications including *Historia de la Unión Soviética* and *Rusia, Veinte Años Sin Comunismo*. This, along with a distinguished career in twentieth-century social and political history, put him in a privileged position among Argentine historians to undertake his intended task of providing a general review of the events of 1917 and beyond, as well as interpreting them.

While Saborido's introduction mentions the research possibilities brought about by the opening of the Soviet archives after the fall of the USSR and the subsequent availability of new sources, there does not appear to have been any archival work involved. In fact, all the sources mentioned are published materials, most of which are available in Western languages. As a result, the book could be more aptly considered a work of synthesis (something the author himself notes) of mostly Western scholarship on the subject rather than a piece of original research. Aside from the brief introduction and the conclusion, the book is divided into four chapters. The first two deal with Russia in the years before the coming to power of Nicholas II, and his reign, respectively, and are considerably shorter than the last two, which in turn deal with the revolutionary process and the first few years of Bolshevik rule.

A wide range of topics are covered. Issues of autocracy, modernisation, the contrast between the rural and urban populations, as well as the development of political life in Russia, are

explored quite thoroughly. Saborido strives throughout the text to present contrasting views on contested topics in as fair a manner as possible, to the point of even drawing attention (if only to criticise them) to some of the more outlandish claims on the Revolution, such as George Katkov's insistence on the involvement of a Russian Freemason conspiracy in the overthrowal of the monarchy. The fact that footnotes are not overabundant, mainly aiming to introduce the reader to classic works on specific facets of the revolutionary process, makes the book approachable for a general audience. Some of the more important *dramatis personae* and concepts mentioned are accompanied by long, detailed descriptions. The end product is a balanced and well-grounded overview of the Russian Revolution suitable for use in undergraduate courses, or as an introduction for the non-specialist.

The book is not without its flaws, however. Cultural aspects are all but absent, and Saborido's treatment of the National Question is weaker than his approach to social, political and economic affairs, which results in a mostly cursory treatment of the issue and some curious omissions. For instance, when mentioning the peoples of Russia on the eve of Revolution, he omits the peoples of Central Asia altogether. In the Caucasus, while noting that Azeri and Georgian nobility had been integrated into the Empire, he ignores the Armenian nobility. He is also strangely categorical in ascribing a Mongol origin to the Cossacks, which will undoubtedly raise eyebrows. Aside from issues of ethnicity, he also makes a questionable claim by laying blame squarely on Yudenich for the Whites' non-recognition of Finland's independence and subsequent failure to enlist Finnish support for his offensive — a question that was beyond the general's power. A shortage of maps is also particularly noticeable when discussing national issues and territorial changes brought about by the Revolution.

Editorial problems are also present throughout the book. Transliteration is inconsistent, even when dealing with relatively common words (*трудовику* are transliterated as both *trudovikes* and *trudoviques*), while proper nouns are translated in an equally inconsistent fashion — the same person will on some occasions have their name translated, and on others merely transliterated. Furthermore, the English version of the name will sometimes be used instead of either the Spanish version or the original Russian. Regrettably, an abundance of typographical errors should also be noted. It can only be hoped for that these points will be addressed in a future edition of Saborido's work.

The highlighted issues notwithstanding, the book is an accessible introduction to a complex topic, in a language in which scholarship on the Russian Revolution, and on Eastern Europe in general, is not as abundant as in English. By providing a succinct yet wide-ranging synthesis

of works on the topic, Saborido helps to introduce Spanish speakers to major works in other languages.