

An important series of meetings in Berlin

American historian Alexander Rabinowitch to speak in Berlin

Ulrich Rippert
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Professor Alexander Rabinowitch, the renowned American historian, will hold a public lecture at the Humboldt University in Berlin in mid-October. The lecture will be devoted to Rabinowitch's latest book, *The Bolsheviks in Power – The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd*, which has just been published in German by Mehring Publishing. Rabinowitch will also report on the results of his most recent research work in the Petrograd archives.

Rabinowitch is one of world's leading experts in the history of the Russian Revolution and an outstanding proponent of the school of narrative historiography. As is the case in reading his books, his lecture and the subsequent discussion in Berlin will undoubtedly lead to a profounder understanding of vital historical developments and a lively scientific debate.

Rabinowitch stands out amongst those historians who have concentrated on the history of Russia and, in particular, the two years following the revolution of 1917. As the child of a Russian emigrant family, he had made the acquaintance in his parents' house of significant historical figures such as Alexander Kerensky and Irakli Tsereteli—both opponents of the Bolshevik Party. Rabinowitch has since concentrated his work on the question: Was the Russian Revolution a military putsch by a small, conspiratorial band of revolutionary fanatics, or rather the result of the efforts of the Bolshevik Party, which had developed into a mass party in Petrograd in 1917? He has devoted no less than three extensive scientific works to this issue. His classic volume *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* (1976) has since been recognized as a standard work by his professional colleagues.

Rabinowitch is an avowed advocate of the school of

historiography which relies on documentary evidence. For decades he has worked systematically and untiringly in archives. Every detail in his work is based on the findings of documents, minutes of meetings and factual reports. His passion as an historian is to recreate the dramatic events in revolutionary Petrograd between 1917-18 as assiduously and realistically as possible. His credo is: "To uncover how it really was."

This is precisely why the publication of his latest book *The Bolsheviks in Power – The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* is so significant. Rabinowitch had already undertaken extensive work in preparation for this book when he suddenly and unexpectedly had the opportunity to inspect hitherto restricted party, state and secret service archives in the former Soviet Union. He then undertook many years of intensive research aimed at concretizing and expanding upon his existing factual base and analysis.

The newly accessible documentary material supplies the reader with a much more detailed evaluation of the events at that time, providing a deeper historical understanding of the Russian Revolution and the dramatic developments which took place in subsequent years.

This is of especial importance for Germany—a country where, during the postwar period, a serious investigation of what took place in Russia was hampered by the ideological ballast of the Cold War. In East Germany, historians distorted and falsified the revolutionary events of 1917 in order to justify the rule of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow and East Berlin, while in West Germany, historians, motivated by anticommunist prejudices, simply equated Bolshevism and Stalinism. These views and conclusions continue to

prevail today, with some historians going so far as to proclaim that it is completely impossible to establish any objective and truthful consensus over the history of Russia.

The opening up of Soviet archives and the associated flood of new documents has brought a fresh breeze into Russian historical research and intensified the activities of many historians. In the course of a meeting held two years ago in Philadelphia, at the 40th National Convention of the AAASS (American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies), in honor of Professor Rabinowitch, his colleague Professor Stephen F. Cohen paid tribute to his outstanding achievements, describing his latest book as a break-through in Russian historical research. Cohen, a leading expert on Russian history and author of a widely praised biography of Bukharin, noted: "Rabinowitch has culled an astonishing amount of new information from long closed archives ... (and produced) a compelling narrative accessible to specialists and general readers alike."

Rabinowitch's book deals with four basic themes:

- the conflicts surrounding the setting up of a revolutionary government at the All-Russian Congress of Soviets,

- the disputes over the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly,

- the diplomatic negotiations leading to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk and the passionate political debates between the supporters and opponents of this oppressive treaty forced on the Soviet government by the German side

- the beginnings of the White terror, the assassinations motivated by forces both inside and outside the country and the conspiracies mounted against the new government, which in turn provoked the Red terror.

The book's wealth of documentary evidence and the conclusions drawn refute the widespread distortions which reduce the October Revolution to simply a putsch by a small revolutionary band led by Lenin and Trotsky. In the preface of his book Rabinowitch states:

"The October revolution in Petrograd, I concluded, was less a military operation than a gradual process deeply rooted in popular political culture, widespread disenchantment with the results of the February revolution, and, in that context, the magnetic attraction

of the Bolsheviks' promises of immediate peace, bread, land for the peasantry, and grass-roots democracy exercised by multiparty Soviets.

"This interpretation, however, raised as many questions as it answered. For if the success of the Bolshevik party in 1917 was at least partly attributable to its open, relatively democratic, and decentralized character and operational style, as seemed clear, how was one to explain the fact that it was so quickly transformed into one of the most highly centralized, authoritarian, political organizations in modern history?"

These theses and the questions they raise were no doubt one reason why it is so difficult for those interested in such themes in Germany to gain access to the work of Professor Rabinowitch. None of his books has been translated by a German publisher, and even reviews of his work in specialist historical circles are hard to come by.

Mehring Publishers is pleased to be able to break this taboo and give the German public an opportunity to personally hear and discuss with Professor Alexander Rabinowitch. He will be speaking at several meetings in Berlin, presenting the results of his latest research and answering questions from the public on his work.

Meetings with Professor Alexander Rabinowitch

Professor Rabinowitch will address the following meetings in Berlin:

14. October 2010, 19:00

Lecture at the Humboldt University in Berlin

Lecture-room 7,

Invalidenstr a e 42

15. October 2010, 20:00

Book presentation

Unibuch Mitte,

Spandauer Str. 2

16. October 2010, 14:00

Seminar at the Technical University in Berlin

(Registration necessary)

Stra e des 17 Juni 135



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