

# The Bolsheviks in Power? The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd: Guest lecture by Prof. Alexander Rabinowitch in Vienna

28 April 2011

The American historian Alexander Rabinowitch will present his book *The Bolsheviks in Power—The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* in Vienna on June 6. The lecture is being organised by the Institute of Contemporary History and the Historical and Cultural Studies School at the University of Vienna together with Mehring Verlag, which published a German edition of his book.

Rabinowitch is one of the world's leading experts on the history of the Russian Revolution. Growing up in a Russian immigrant family, he became acquainted in his parents' home with such historical figures as the last prime minister of the Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, and the leader of the Mensheviks, Irakli Tsereteli—both of whom were hostile to the Bolshevik Party. Since then, Rabinowitch has pursued the question: What was the real nature of the Russian revolution—a coup or a victorious mass uprising? To date he has produced three major scientific works dedicated to this issue. His classic, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power* (1976), is recognized by historians as a standard work on the subject.

*The Bolsheviks in Power—The First Year of Soviet Rule in Petrograd* is the result of more than three decades of extensive research, including, since 1991, research in the archives of the former Soviet party and government and, since 1993, in the archives of the KGB.

Four themes are central:

- The debate over the composition of the revolutionary government
- The conflicts over the Constituent Assembly
- The negotiation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and the passionate political debates between supporters and opponents of this oppressive agreement with Russia's

main opponent in the war—Germany

- The assassinations and conspiracies against the new government by both domestic and foreign opponents, the causes and extent of the Red Terror

As is the case in all of his books, this latest work by Rabinowitch is characterised by a wealth of archival material and his painstaking analysis of a wide range of historical sources. This constitutes the basis for its outstanding scientific value. In addition Rabinowitch belongs to the school of narrative history—unfortunately now almost extinct—and presents his findings in a very clear and readable style.

His extensive documentary presentation and the ensuing conclusions he draws undermine those interpretations that reduce the October Revolution to the efforts of a small band of revolutionary conspirators led by Lenin and Trotsky. In the preface to his latest book, Rabinowitch writes, “The October Revolution in Petrograd, I concluded, was less a military operation than a gradual process 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 grassroots democracy exercised through 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 decentralised 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 centralised and authoritarian political organisations in modern history?”

## **Lecture and discussion**

Monday, 6 June 2011, 18:00 to 21:00

Campus Auditorium, Spitalgasse 2-4, Hof 1, entrance 1.11, 1090 Vienna

The lecture will be followed by a discussion with Professor Rabinowitch answering questions from the audience chaired by university lecturer Dr. Finbarr McLoughlin from the Institute of History.

Dr. McLoughlin is an acknowledged expert on the history of the Soviet Union, in particular the Stalinist terror of the 1930s and its victims among the members of the Communist and Social Democratic parties of Austria and other European countries.

Following the presentation there will be a small buffet with beverages.

## **Book presentation and discussion**

Tuesday, 7 June 2011, 19:00 to 22:00

Lhotzky's Literary Buffet, Taborstraße 28, Vienna.  
Entrance Rotensterngasse

Lhotzky's Literary Buffet and book signing provides an opportunity for those interested to discuss personally with Alexander Rabinowitch and elaborate important questions with him in a smaller circle. Lhotzky's Literary Buffet is the main distributor for Mehring Verlag and the works of Trotsky in Austria.



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