

H-Net Reviews

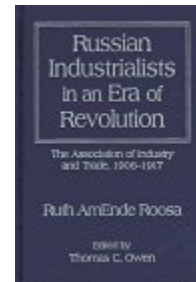
in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Ruth Amende Roosa. *Russian Industrialists in an Era of Revolution: The Association of Industry and Trade, 1906-1917*. Armonk, N.Y. and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1997. 274 pp. \$70.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7656-0154-4.

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The Association of Industry and Trade was an organization devoted to promoting the unification of commercial and industrial interests and to articulating a program of industrial development for Russia. Ruth Amende Roosa's study of this organization is welcome in an area of study that still remains underdeveloped in Russian history: the pre-revolutionary business community. Roosa expands our knowledge of pre-revolutionary business organizations and the leaders who participated in public debate about Russia's future through an exhaustive study of its publications, particularly the journal, *Promyshlennost' i torgovlia*, and the proceedings of its Congresses.

The conflicted nature of the Association dominates Roosa's interpretation. She depicts the group as a circle of businessmen imbued with a faith in Russia's future, but keenly aware of the country's economic handicaps. Roosa is especially attentive to the ambiguities that characterized the Association's proposals and to the alternating far-sightedness and parochialism of its members. While these industrial and commercial leaders showed at times an astute grasp of the problems facing Russia, they also displayed a lack of vision and inattentiveness to their own role in economic expansion. Still, even though the Association did not succeed in articulating a comprehensive program that provided for the scheduled and coordinated growth of all sectors of the economy, Roosa argues that its members identified economic priorities crucial to the development of the national economy.

Ambiguity also distinguished the Association's position vis-a-vis the state. Roosa reveals not so much a world of tsarist and bourgeois collaboration as frustrated impotence and resentment of a bureaucratic, lethargic, and sometimes hostile apparatus that impeded eco-

omic growth through its policies of taxation, interference, favoring of agricultural interests, and red tape. Yet, although members frequently fulminated against the state's too-close tutelage of business and disliked what they called "state socialism," neither would they have advocated a system of free market relations.

The majority of the book is occupied with an explanation of the Association's economic program. Through *Promyshlennost' i torgovlia* and its periodic Congresses, the organization discussed problems associated with financing economic expansion, improving agricultural efficiency, government intervention in industry, the need for legal regularity in the conduct of business, the development of international markets, and the need for a broad system of education in Russia. In the course of these discussions, members came to view the development of trade and industry from many perspectives, seeing it as a matter of culture, well-being, and progress, as well as a matter of state security.

At the same time that their proposals revealed an awareness of the problems of economic underdevelopment and the unwieldy nature of the political system that hampered growth, however, Roosa demonstrates that these industrialists often failed to act or to grasp the import of political events. They did not recognize their own obligation to increase productivity through technological improvements. Neither did they place much importance on the imperatives of consumer goods and the demands of the domestic market, judging heavy industry and industrial consumption more essential to the well-being of the Empire. Members were also too concerned with organization. In the days prior to the Bolshevik revolution, their primary preoccupation was whether or not existing

commercial-industrial organizations sufficed to confront the tasks that they faced.

Roosa traces the philosophical stances and proposals of the Association primarily through an examination of its published statements and documents. Her mastery of the subject and sources is evident in her detailing of the intricacies of the Association's membership, protocol, agenda, and the shifts in its priorities throughout the term of existence. However, many of the quotes from the journals and proceedings of Congresses are too lengthy and appear too frequently throughout the text. At times the interpretive themes become obscured by too many official statements. More synthesis and interpretation and fewer quotes would have given the book a more conceptual framework.

Roosa's exclusive focus on the Association's points of view often also makes it appear isolated from the rest of society. Other organizations and persons prominent in business seem disconnected from the activities and ideas of the Association or even from discussions about the economy. It is difficult to assess the role and influence of the Association within a larger public. As a result, a one-sided discourse emerges and larger issues receive

short shrift. The changing relationship between the Association and the state in such crucial years as 1905 and throughout World War I deserve more attention. Competing commercial and industrial interests within the organization also merit analysis. Although Roosa addresses this issue in an appendix on the structure of the Association, a more detailed inquiry within the text would have added an important dimension to her work.

These criticisms aside, Roosa's book points to issues that have received little consideration elsewhere. The philosophical viewpoints related to the development (or lack of development) of a domestic consumer market, the relationship between commercial and industrial interests, and the continuities between pre-revolutionary and Soviet economic policies and practices all warrant further treatment. Her book also contains an excellent discussion of sources and a comprehensive bibliography, both extremely valuable to students of commerce and industry.

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