

Oleg Budnitskii. *Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917–1920 (Jewish Culture and Contexts)*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-8122-4364-2.

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## O. Budnitskii: Russian Jews Between the Reds and the Whites, 1917-1920

This is a major study of the position of Jews during the Russian Civil War. Because of its breadth, it supersedes other studies, including I. Cherkover's *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine 1917–1918 gg.* Il'ya Cherkover, *Antisemitizm i pogromy na Ukraine 1917–1918 gg.*, Berlin 1923. and I. Schechtman's *Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii na Ukraine. Iosif Schechtman, Pogromy Dobrovol'cheskoi armii na Ukraine. K istorii antisemitizma na Ukraine v 1919–1920 gg.*, Berlin 1932. Professor Budnitskii, Professor of History and Director for the Center for the Study of the History and Sociology of World War II at the National Research University Higher Research School of Economics in Moscow, gives us a great deal more than just the numbers of victims and their experiences: he provides a multifaceted and panoramic perspective of the entire period thanks to the use of a wide variety of sources, including newspapers, memoirs, diaries, letters, fiction, poetry, and secondary literature.

The achievement of the book lies in its comprehensiveness. Budnitskii does a fine job by joining the history of Jewish suffering to a narrative about Russian politics on Jews. The major groups are well represented: White officers and soldiers, peasants, Cossacks, liberal politicians, and Jews. Among the Jews, Budnitskii differentiates the views of liberals, Bundists, Zionists, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Poale Tzionists, and others.

The Volunteer Army (as opposed to the Ukrainian National Army) fielded soldiers who had the goal of removing the Bolsheviks from control over all of Russia.

From 1917–1920, they fought on the Western border in areas with large Jewish populations. There were over two thousand pogroms committed against Jews during the Civil War and estimates of huge number of casualties range from 50,000 to 300,000. These numbers, appalling as they are, cannot convey the horrors experienced by individuals. Thousands of Jews were raped, had body parts cut off, many were burnt to death or hanged. Professor Budnitskii presents documentary evidence of the atrocities.

The strongest parts of the book treat the history of the Volunteer Army under General Denikin and the difference between official claims and the violence on the ground. A large part of the book deals with anti-Semitism. Budnitskii describes how the Whites attempted to exploit anti-Semitism to mobilize energies to fight the Bolsheviks. Polemicizing with, among others, Yochanon Petrovsky-Shtern and Richard Pipes, he quotes Peter Kenez more than once to articulate the view that anti-Semitism was more than merely a tool, but composed a central credo of the White forces. His own view is that “the reasons behind pogroms of 1919–20 are to be found not only in the events of the revolutions and Civil War. They are instead a culmination of anti-Jewish violence that had begun in 1914. Moreover, they began before they were officially sanctioned by the authorities. The mobilization period, which saw large numbers of troops gathered together at major railway hubs, was accompanied by attacks on the local Jewish population.” (p. 225)

Professor Budnitskii presents fascinating discussions from the time. One bizarre polemic was between the conservative politician, Vasily Shulgin, the author of “Torture by Fear,” a manifesto for “the ideology of anti-Semitism,” and Ilya Ehrenburg, the Jewish writer, who answered him in an article, “What the Zhid Thinks.” Ehrenburg confesses that in response to pogroms he “has learned to love Russia even more tormentingly, and even more strongly. What a difficult and beautiful science it is” (p. 208). Many Jews responded to Ehrenburg with anger. It is telling that ultimately Ehrenburg switched to support the Bolsheviks.

In a review of this size it is impossible to give a true impression of the broad scale of the study. There is a great deal in it about the Whites’ foreign policy and relations with the Western powers. There is also quite a bit about Jewish politics in the zone controlled by the Volunteer Army. But a few questions remain with me. How could Ehrenburg justify writing what he did? And what about the Jewish liberals among the Whites? I would have expected more ambivalence from them. They wanted to fight Bolshevism, but apparently did not realize the dangers of lending their energies to pogrom-makers. On an-

other topic, I wonder how much of the White defeat can be attributed to anti-Semitic policies.

Although the author denies any relationship between this early genocide and the more massive one twenty or so years later, I for one would have wished for more discussion. Furthermore, I don’t know if I would identify 1914 as the cause for the violence of the Civil War. It’s true that the army learned to commit genocide during World War I, but the level of discipline was not high before the war. Moreover, I would concentrate – as Budnitskii does in the first chapter – on the ideological preparations for genocide that have their origins in Russia as far back as the middle of the nineteenth century, if not further.

I have to give kudos to the translator, Timothy J. Portice, his English is idiomatic and smooth. One should give the author his due; this is a well researched and interesting book that raises serious questions about Jew-hatred and Jewish violence at the start of the twentieth century in that part of the world which some call “blood lands” (Timothy Snyder). In any case, the book deserves to be fully debated by experts in the field, and this English-language edition makes such a debate possible.

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