the situations that faced the protagonists in the Revolution and the Civil War, and the means by which they tackled them.

In a very instructive conclusion Smith reflects on the reasons that brought down the autocracy and enabled the Bolsheviks to come to power. In his opinion, war played a major part. The strains caused by the First World War brought the Provisional Government to power, but its insistence on continuing hostilities cost it the popularity it had initially enjoyed. In this situation, the Bolsheviks, who promised peace, were able to respond to the popular mood. Smith is of the opinion that although ideology played some part in Bolshevik decision-making, it was not the only factor. He is surely right when he says that the Marxism of the Bolsheviks was a bundle of very diverse ideas and values.

Of course the wide scope and time-framework of this book means that in many areas detail has had to be sacrificed. The 1917 revolution, for example, is covered in fifty pages, so that the treatment is on a rather general level. The scale of the narrative also necessarily makes the book heavily dependent on secondary sources. On the other hand, the endnotes to the text constitute a valuable bibliography of scholarly writing on all aspects of the subject area.

Smith’s book is an ideal introduction to the history of the Russian Revolution, but it is more than that. A century after the events it describes, it is an indication that scholarship on the subject has matured, and that the Russian Revolution can be studied as objectively as any other episode in modern European history. The significance of Smith’s work ought to be that it sets the tone for all future writing on the subject.

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Vladimir L’vovich Burtsev (1862–1942) is today best remembered as the ‘Sherlock Holmes of the Russian Revolution’ — the self-styled detective whose investigations led to the exposure of Evno Azef and numerous other police spies — and for his 1898 trial and conviction for incitement to regicide, a watershed moment in nineteenth-century Anglo-Russian relations. As Robert Henderson’s fine new biography reveals, however, such dramatic episodes were the norm throughout Burtsev’s remarkable life. In a revolutionary career spanning more than half a century, he was exiled to Siberia twice, found himself the most wanted man in Europe during his lengthy spells in emigration and
associated with almost all the parties of the left while joining none. After 1914, he embarked upon on the familiar path leading from revolutionary socialism via defencism to compromise with the White movement, all the while applying himself with utmost dedication to numerous literary, journalistic and scholarly enterprises.

One of the most attractive features of this book is that it combines the readability of a popular historical page-turner with the fruits of the author’s meticulous scholarship. Henderson has marshalled a vast array of Russian, British, French and American archival documents (with particular weight given to secret intelligence files), and makes extensive use of contemporary memoirs and press sources. Divided into three parts, Vladimir Burtsev and the Struggle for a Free Russia is structured chronologically. Part One examines Burtsev’s life from the early 1880s up to 1905, including his conversion to radicalism, his first emigration, the numerous attempts made by both the Okhrana and European police forces to capture him and the events leading up to the 1898 trial. Part Two documents his activities between the revolutions of 1905 and 1917, focusing especially on the counter-espionage work of his Paris-based ‘revolutionary detective agency’ (pp. 138–40 and passim), the Azef affair, his return to Russia following the outbreak of war in 1914 and role in the revolutionary events of 1917. Part Three details Burtsev’s opposition to the Bolsheviks after 1917 and the part of his career probably least familiar to historians: his work as a roving emissary for the Whites during the Civil War and his final years in emigration in Paris.

From a scholarly point of view the highlights of this book are to be found in part one, with several remarkable chapters (pp. 35–69) revealing in unprecedented detail the extreme (and not infrequently criminal) lengths to which the Russian government and its European partners were prepared to go in order to apprehend Burtsev in the 1890s. Here and elsewhere Henderson adds greatly to our knowledge of the bourgeoning security state in late-imperial Russia. Nonetheless, the merits of this book are by no means limited to its treatment of the shadowy face-off between revolutionaries and police agents in pre-war Europe. Some of the most engrossing chapters are indeed those dealing with Burtsev’s literary and scholarly activities, such as his revolutionary-historical journal Byloe (pp. 121–29) — a publication that ultimately ran to some sixty-five volumes over three decades and which to this day remains an invaluable source for historians of modern Russia — or his unexpected turn in the 1920s to Shakespearean studies and the history of Anglo-Russian relations (pp. 227–30). Other bits of the book, inevitably, contain fewer surprises. Yet even when covering relatively familiar ground, Henderson is able to find new angles and shed new light on the matters at hand. Thus the chapter on the prelude to Burtsev’s prosecution (pp. 88–90) reveals crucial new information on the role played by Chief Inspector William Melville in bringing the revolutionary to trial, while the treatment of the Azef affair (pp. 129–51) lays bare the degree to
which Burtsev cultivated and traded off his image as a spycatcher. Elsewhere still it is the questions the author pointedly leaves unanswered — for instance, what Burtsev’s relationship in the early 1900s with the fledging SR Combat Organization really was (pp. 114–15) — that are most intriguing.

The picture that emerges of Burtsev himself is a complex one. For one who stressed so often his own vnepartiinost’, he seems in many ways a typical representative of his generation. All the classic narodnik character flaws are there: an almost emotional attachment to terrorist tactics, the instinctive distaste for political and theoretical questions, and the desire for a unified opposition to tsarism without any clear idea of how that unity could be achieved — an objective Burtsev continued to pursue in his later years, even when it bought him into alliance with White generals who, as the émigré writer Aleksei Tolstoi noted, would happily have hanged him given half a chance (p. 218). Henderson is at pains throughout to stress Burtsev’s courage and selfless devotion to the revolutionary cause. Of these traits there can be little doubt, but at times Sergei Mel’gunov’s view of him as a ‘grown-up political child’ (p. 161) can seem closer to the mark. In any event, Burtsev provides us with a compelling portrait of centre-right Russian socialism around the turn of the century, a political tendency which remains rather neglected in English-language historiography.

This is a superb and wide-ranging book that deserves an equally wide readership. There is something for everyone in it, since it can be read both as a conventional historical biography and in terms of the various discreet topics upon which it touches. It should be read by all those interested in the history of late-imperial Russia, but will be especially valuable for students of the revolutionary movement and emigration.

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This story of the Russian Revolution in the far north, especially around Arkhangelsk, focuses on the anti-Bolsheviks who controlled the area for a while and established a ‘White’ regime. In many ways it is not so much a history of the revolution in the north as a study of the anti-Bolsheviks. In this she makes a good case for recognizing the political diversity of people, from moderate socialists to liberals to conservatives. She notes that the Northern