

Zenovia A. Sochor, *Revolution and Culture: The Bogdanov–Lenin Controversy*, Cornell University Press, 1988, \$32.95 (\$29.95 USA and Canada).

THERE has been over the past few years a growing interest in Bogdanov's life and thought, and a number of books and articles have appeared on the subject. Sochor concentrates on the central issue: Bogdanov's conflict with Lenin. This was the thing which expunged Bogdanov's name from the historical record, and in a way so thorough that the exact nature of the conflict has remained obscure.

Although Sochor touches on the differences between Bogdanov and Lenin in the years before the revolution, the main focus of her study is in the post-1917 period, when the point at issue was the kind of transformations which had to be carried out in the young Soviet state, and the way in which these changes ought to be made. Whereas Lenin held that the Bolshevik party ought to be the sole guiding organisation, Bogdanov believed that the workers themselves ought to be schooled in taking the necessary decisions affecting their lives. Bogdanov saw the 'cultural revolution' as the essential means of removing the authoritarian attitudes of the past, and constructing a truly democratic society.

Lenin was understandably suspicious of Bogdanov's ideas, since they were the antithesis of his own, and took prompt measures to render Proletkult harmless, and to declare Bogdanov's conceptions a deviation from Marxism. He saw to it that it was his own version of the 'cultural revolution' which dominated, one which was more 'an ideology of development', and had more limited and practical objectives.

Sochor's study is quite successful in bringing out the differences between Lenin and Bogdanov, and is a valuable addition to the growing literature in English on Bogdanov. But there are two, related, criticisms which must be made.

The first is that the author's exposition of Bogdanov's views is invariably spoilt by introducing comparisons with such authors as Marcuse, Bahro, Dahrendorf, Gramsci, Geertz, and many others, none of whom Bogdanov could have read, and they assuredly did not read him. One infers that the author must believe that these comparisons somehow elucidate Bogdanov's ideas to the reader.

But even a readership thoroughly versed in the works mentioned by the author will find that the comparisons raise more problems than they solve. If the similarities the author notes did not arise from direct or indirect influence, then how are they to be explained? Do ideas have an existence independent of the people who think them, and every now and then give themselves a concrete manifestation? That would clearly be absurd, and in the absence of any argument to the contrary by the author, one is forced to the conclusion that the similarities are fortuitous.

The disservice done by the comparisons is that they imply that Bogdanov's system of thought can be reduced to the stock of conceptions with which modern scholars are already familiar. They suggest that there is nothing in Bogdanov that cannot be found in the works of authors who are already commonly read. But the great attraction of Bogdanov as a subject for study is that this is emphatically not the case. Certainly, one should make comparisons, but these should be between Bogdanov and other writers who influenced Bogdanov and on whose work Bogdanov built. It is no easy matter following Bogdanov's tracks through Kant, Fichte, Hegel, Avenarius and Mach; but if that is what the subject requires, then that is what must be done.

The second criticism concerns a misconception which is not Sochor's alone, but applies to much recent writing on Bogdanov. Because comparisons have been made between Bogdanov's thought and modern general systems theory, it has become something of a commonplace to say that Bogdanov was an exponent of systems thinking. The author refers to Bogdanov in this way.

It takes very little reflection to realise that this is an anachronism. Cybernetics and systems theory did not develop until after Bogdanov's death, and Bogdanov was in no position to know anything about them. It was impossible for him to look on his ideas in a way that would require him to see into the future.

What the author seems to have missed is the far-reaching possibilities of Bogdanov as a subject. He was an important figure in modern Russian history, yet most of the standard works on the period do not mention him, refer to him fleetingly, or accept Lenin's verdict on him. Therefore any substantive study of Bogdanov ought to present the history of Bolshevism in an entirely new light. The author, on the other hand, has tried to reconcile her research with what other people have already written. Sochor has been too deferential to 'authorities' to get the best out of a major subject.

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Robert Edelman, *Proletarian Peasants. The Revolution of 1905 in Russia's Southwest*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987, xv + 195 pp., no price.

PROLETARIAN Peasants is a welcome addition to the literature on the pre-revolutionary Russian peasantry. Its strength is that it focuses upon a single region of Imperial Russia, presenting peasant behaviour during the first Russian revolution as the product of a locally specific agrarian structure. The book is thus one of a growing number of detailed regional studies which are beginning to counterbalance the hitherto dominant macro-level approach to Russian history. The region Edelman has chosen to study is right-bank Ukraine, comprising the three provinces of Volynia, Podolia and Kiev. By the 20th century private estates in these provinces had become centres of sugar beet production. Unlike elsewhere in Russia, landowners in the southwest invested in their land, took an active personal interest in it and were intent upon profit maximisation. The commercial orientation of estate agriculture in turn affected the relationship of lord with peasant, transforming the former into 'employers' and the latter into wage-workers. However, according to Edelman, the workers on the estates were not 'fully proletarian' since the majority were members of landholding households, and they continued to derive at least part of their subsistence from the land and to owe allegiance to their village community. The situation he describes recalls the latifundia/minifundia dualism found in parts of the Third World today. Edelman's purpose is to show how the political responses of the workers on the sugar estates were affected by their ambiguous status as both 'proletarians' and 'peasants'. Using accounts of agrarian disturbances he found in local archives, he shows that the revolutionary activities of peasants in the southwest imitated the actions of urban workers in some important respects; rather than resorting to 'typical' peasant forms of protest such as illegal grazing, arson and violence, the sugar plantation workers used the strike weapon to make a series of realisable demands upon their employers. These included demands for increases in wages and for limiting the hiring of labourers to local populations. Despite their 'modern' content, such protests were planned at village meetings and tended to express solidarity among members of local communities rather than a consciousness of shared grievances with others outside the immediate geographic sphere. It was only towards the end of the movement that some of the initiative in the organisation of protest passed from village assemblies to strike committees, which, as Edelman shows, came about as a result of pressure from non-voting commune members such as women and from increased police attention to communal gatherings. The gradual undermining of traditional village institutions did not, however,