

BOOK REVIEW



Peter Reddaway, *The Dissidents: A Memoir of Working with the Resistance in Russia, 1960-1990*. Washington, DC: The Brookings Institution, 2020. ISBN: 9780815737735. Hardcover, 338 pp., \$29.99

Dr. Samuel B. Hoff

George Washington Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science, Delaware State University, Dover, DE, USA

Reviewed by: **Dr. Samuel B. Hoff**, George Washington Distinguished Professor Emeritus of History and Political Science, Delaware State University, Dover, DE, USA

The author, professor emeritus of political science and international affairs at George Washington University, has written his fourth book about recent Soviet Russian history. However, unlike the previous three, he approaches this work from a personal perspective. The objective of the current book is to relay his experience with the dissident movement in the aforementioned nation and to assess the reasons why reforms have been largely stymied. Reddaway's examination of the topic coincides with contemporary events both domestic and worldwide.

The book contains seventeen chapters along with an Introduction, a list of Reddaway's publications which are cited in the text, notes, and indexes by subject and name. The chapters themselves can be divided into four parts, although the author does not do so.

Part I encompasses the personal background of the author. Part II includes a series of topics associated with the dissident movement. Part III offers a governmental history from 1968 through 1991. Lastly, the final chapter presents conclusions and observations.

In Part I, Reddaway outlines his educational background along with his early interactions with dis-

sidents in the Soviet Union. In 1962, he earned his undergraduate degree from Cambridge University in Britain in modern languages, with a special emphasis on Russian. In 1963, he completed a Masters degree in advanced Soviet area studies at Harvard University. Beginning in 1964, he pursued a Ph.D. at the London School of Economics, where he subsequently taught and conducted research on Soviet dissident activities until he moved to George Washington University in 1989. He spent sabbatical years at Columbia University in New York and at the Kennen Institute for Advanced Russian Studies in Washington, DC; he later served as director of the latter institution for three years. From 1960 to 1964, Reddaway made three trips to the Soviet Union, the last of which was as a graduate student at Moscow University for eight months. However, after meeting with Soviet dissidents, he was expelled from the latter institution and forced to leave the Soviet Union, from which he did not return again for twenty-four years.

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Part II of the book covers Chapters 6 through 11 along with Chapters 13 and 15. Various subjects are presented together with the author's observations of and participation in Soviet dissident activities. For instance, Reddaway examines the impact of *Khronika*, a samizdat publication which chronicled dissident activities in a series of issues over time. Further, he highlights the lives of Anatoly Marchenko and Pyotr Grigorenko, whom were leaders in human rights advancement. Additionally, he discusses the effort to change the views of those who minimized Soviet abuses. He also describes how the Soviet government discriminated against religious groups and others. Two chapters in this section analyze the abuse of psychiatry for political reasons. Whereas Chapter 9 comprehensively details the history of opposition to Soviet psychiatric policies, Chapter 15 depicts the author's 1989 trip to the Soviet Union as part of an assemblage of American psychiatrists who were granted access to records in that area.

Part III, including Chapters 12, 14, and 16, review the record of Soviet government policy across several leaders from 1968 through 1991.

This span encompasses the leadership of Leonid Brezhnev— who succeeded Nikita Khrushchev as General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and ruled until November 1982—along with successors Yuri Andropov (1982-1984), Konstantin Chernenko (1984-85), and Mikhail Gorbachev (1985-1991). Chapter 12 reviews the activities of Radio Liberty and the process by which the Soviets were forced to leave the World Psychiatric Association in 1983. Chapter 14 describes the reforms undertaken by Mikhail Gorbachev as well as Reddaway's two return trips to Russia in 1988. Finally, Chapter 16 provides an account of the period from December 1990 until the dissolution of the Soviet Union a year later, including Gorbachev's efforts at reform, the August 1991 failed coup against him, the rise of Boris Yeltsin, and the creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

In the concluding chapter, Reddaway furnishes several factors which he holds are responsible for stalled and incomplete reforms in Russia, particularly those affecting dissidents. Among these reasons are the

legacy of empire, the inability to run the economy efficiently, and a confused political landscape. He asserts that "after eighteen years under [Vladimir] Putin, Russia is far from being pregnant with a new order that will prove stable and conducive to lasting reform" (p.293).

During the current century, two tracts of studies have emerged about Soviet and Russian Federation treatment of political dissidents. The first tract includes five books which cover the conditions in Soviet gulags along with government-supported poisoning and assassination of recent dissidents (Applebaum, 2004; Goldfarb; 2010, Volodarsky, 2013; Knight, 2017; Volodarsky, 2020). The second tract contains ten books which convey policies and treatment from the dissident perspective, including those which describe discrimination against religious groups and artists (Gilligan, 2004; Van Voren, 2009; De Wolf, 2013; Isajiw, 2014; Paul, 2014; Golomstock, 2018; Pouschine, 2019; Martin, 2019; Shatravka, 2019; Polishchuk, 2020).

Although none of these tomes mix academics and activism in the specific manner that Reddaway does, a similar approach can be found in a 1987

book by Allan Wynn.

The present book has several strengths: the quality of the chapters on Soviet psychiatric abuses and the fall of the Soviet communist system, which are superior to other contemporary studies on those topics; the persistence of dissidents and Reddaway alike in fighting the atrocities committed by the Russian government; and the humanizing of certain Soviet officials who began to doubt the wisdom of policies targeting ordinary citizens. Conversely, as seen from the division of chapters presented above, the organization of the book could have been improved and a few chapters could have been combined. Further, Reddaway skips from Brezhnev to Gorbachev with little attention paid to those Soviet leaders in between.

Finally, Reddaway's concluding observations, while addressing the reasons for continuing suppression of dissidents, do not furnish any prescriptions for improvement. Still, this book provides a powerful rejoinder to the premise that domestic and international advocacy against human rights violations in Russia

has been ineffective.

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