

Toward a Social History of the October Revolution



As it is clear from its title, the article "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution" presented on the first pages of Suny's book "Structure of Soviet History" deals with the events, which took place in the former Soviet Union in 1917, and those, which accompanied it, namely the social reasons of the October Revolution, which has brought to power such outstanding political figures as Lenin, Trotsky, Kerensky (Suny, 1983). Till nowadays there exist numerous disputes about the reasons, methods and consequences of the revolution itself and the reasons of the quick rise of Bolsheviks to power. Ronald Grigor Suny (1983) claims that one of the greatest difficulties about making sense of these years and of the Soviet history is a deep division between the views of European and American historians. For more than fifty years the scientists were unable to come to the consensus and formulate its reasons. However, in his article, Suny refers to the times of tsar overthrow as the period, when the political and social forces of the revolution were originated, and, finally, shows that the deep conflict between the upper and lower classes became one of the most serious problems, which needed solutions. Consequently, in his article, Suny regarded the views of such Russian scientists as Melgunov and Daniels, who offered one the most stimulating in 1970s "conservative-accidental" interpretation of the October Revolution, social democracy specialist John Keep, who emphasized the mass organizations of people, Alexander Rabinowitch, who emphasized the role of Lenin as the dominant one; and such Western representatives as Leopold Haimson, David Mandel, Stephen Smith, Diane Koenker, Ziva Galili y Garcia, William G. Rosenberg (Suny, 1983). To sum it up, Suny has pointed out that his socio-political interpretation is focused on several influential works about the Soviet history; and in order to analyze the victory of Bolsheviks, both, political and social, aspects of the revolution should be taken into account. Therefore, one should consider not only the struggle of the classes, but also the political ideology and manipulations in the government.

Suny emphasized that numerous conflicts and disagreements of the scholars about

the October Revolution are connected with its manipulated, accidental and artificial quality, and the "legitimacy" of the Soviet system (Suny, 1983). The most common disagreements are connected with the roots of the new political order, and the attitude towards the socialistic political order itself. Although most Western historians connected the revolution studies to the political values, namely governmental forms and ideas, Suny (1983) supported this view, but at the same time highlighted that social development was not less influential. The main mistakes of the Russian scholars, to his mind, was avoiding and neglecting some methodological and theoretical issues as they were more concentrated on the movements and mass organizations of the social groups such as workers, soldiers, peasants, sailors (Suny, 1983). Consequently, Suny points out that in order to trace all the basic issues, which have brought the Soviet society to radical necessity of terror and violence and the October Revolution, one should take into account the sociopolitical development since the late tsarist period (Suny, 1983). Regarding the views of the scholars mentioned in the article, Suny considered the views of young Abramowitch to be too Lenin-centered while the views of Keep were close to him. Suny supported the ideas of Haimson and believed that increasing the workers radicalization and class unity the ideological preconditioning, which caused the social polarization, was of great importance. However, the ideological solutions of these social and political problems were not effective and doomed to failure. Therefore, Suny analyzed four possible solutions to the question of power. The first was continuation of the coalition government, a policy of class collaboration and social unity, which would prevent the civil war. However, Suny believed that such a solution would not satisfy the peasants and would deepen the social crisis. The second solution was the dictatorship of the upper class alone, which was not successful because of disagreements between Kerensky and Kornilov. The third was the all-socialist regime, but it was not implemented because of the serious division between Bolsheviks and moderate socialists. The last one was the ruling government of the Bolsheviks, which consequently became a dictatorship. Therefore, investigation of the social

background of Bolsheviks's rapid rise to power and highlighting the main points of the politicized debates over socialism and revolution progress is the main aim of the article "Toward a Social History of the October Revolution" (Suny, 1983).

As Suny has mentioned, social and political development of the country are important for the adequate perception and explanation of the events, which took place in the beginning of the twentieth century in the Soviet Union. The inaccessibility and hindrance of the Soviet archives really was one of the serious obstacles to finding out the reasons for Bolsheviks' rapid rise to power. However, it is important to take into consideration the fact that Ronald Grigor Suny wrote his article in 1983, and afterwards thirty years have passed. During these years more information and archives have become accessible for the wide public and historians. Therefore, the ideas of Suny and the scholars of other schools are based on the dated information and need further studies and modifications. To my mind, Suny's idea about basing his studies and reflection on the previous outstanding works is quite wise and deserves attention. Moreover, I support his thoughts on the incompleteness of the Russian studies and the fact that they are not "objective" (Suny, 1983). However, I believe so not only because they lived in the same country, which they described, but also because of peculiarities of the period, when they lived and worked. The obligatory study of Marxism-Leninism in all educational institutions of the Soviet Union has necessarily left a print on the world and government politics comprehension. In general, the October Revolution has brought many positive and negative consequences for the country's development. To my mind, although the revolution was obviously the struggle between classes, the role of Lenin's strategies and manipulations can not be ignored. The deepening of social polarization, which meant connecting the upper and middle classes against the lower ones is the key notion defining the nature of the revolution.

