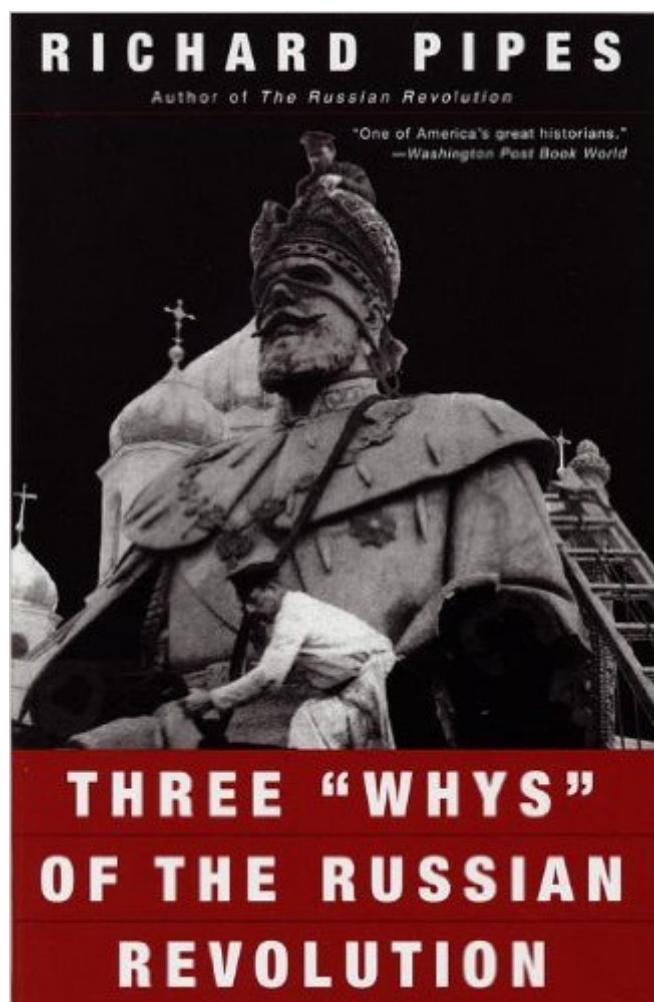


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Three "Whys" Of The Russian Revolution



Synopsis

America's foremost authority on Russian communism--the author of the definitive studies *The Russian Revolution* and *Russia Under the Bolshevik Regime*--now addresses the enigmas of that country's 70-year enthrallment with communism. Succinct, lucidly argued, and lively in its detail, this book offers a brilliant summation of the life's work of a master historian.

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Customer Reviews

As well as completely changing the political and geographical structure of Europe, the demise of the Soviet Union has significantly altered the approach of historical scholarship about the Russian Revolution. In *Three Whys of the Russian Revolution*, the eminent scholar of Russian history, Richard Pipes, confronts the challenge of assessing the causes and course of the Russian Revolutions from a post-Cold War perspective. Pipes explains that for 70 years prior to the 1990's, historians in the West adopted a "revisionist" perspective of the Russian Revolutions that was largely influenced by Communist scholarship. The events of 1917, these Communist scholars concluded, were nothing but revolutionary activity. Western scholarship's acceptance of this conclusion stems, Pipes explains, from a lack of source material, much of which was deemed classified by the Soviet regime. But access to this information is now open, and Pipes, among others, has utilized this opportunity in an attempt to re-evaluate the Revolutions, with the product being two extensive works (on which these essays are based). Not surprisingly, his understanding

of the events of 1917 has changed somewhat, and thus the three essays in the book are a continued attempt to debunk much of the "revisionist" perspective with less radical conclusions. Among the notions that Pipes challenges is the very insistence by the "revisionists" that the Revolutions were in fact revolutions. As the author clearly outlines, the events of 1917 were actually the work of a small group of intellectuals headed by the idealist Lenin. His overthrow of the Czarist regime is argued by Pipes as being a coup d'etat which involved the people as a whole in only a small degree.

When was the Russian Revolution? The conventional answer would be October 1917. After all, people associate Lenin with the October Revolution, don't they? Well, Mr. Pipes (amongst an increasing group of others) would stop you right there. Upon the tsar's abdication Russia's first free elections (promised since that February) were held November 12, 1917. This was but days after Lenin's Bolsheviks supposedly "rode to power on a wave of popular support," yet Lenin's ilk only received enough votes to garner 175 seats out of 707! The Bolshevik takeover was more akin to a putsch, consequently. Trotsky himself wrote (in his memoirs) "that 25,000 or 30,000 people, at most, took part in the events of October in Petrograd"; this in a city of 2 million. It was largely bloodless and basically upended the hopelessly incompetent Provisional Government in the dead of one night in favor of the Petersburg Council--or "Soviet," to utilize the Russian word for council. And it was through this organ of competing power that Lenin was able to forestall Russian military units from marching in to St. Petersburg to resist him. In January when Russia's first Constituent Assembly opened Lenin immediately proposed a motion that would have prevented the duly elected Assembly from wielding any real power over the Petersburg Soviet, or any of the other Soviets in other cities. Lenin's Bolsheviks were handily defeated in this, however; which marked the end of democracy in Russia. The next day Bolshevik Red Guards closed down the Assembly and it was never permitted to sit again. How Lenin was able to engineer this is the subject of the second part of this tri-part (extremely concise & worthy) mini-book of 84 pages. Pipes shows, in addition, how nothing of this was at all inevitable.

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