

REVIEW

on the the dissertation of Stefan Petrov Petrov on the subject

"The Russian Empire and the Anti-War Movements in the Years of the First World War"

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in scientific specialty 2.2. History and Archaeology, "New and Contemporary World History - History of Russia) with academic supervisor Assoc. Prof. Alexander Sivilov ",
by Prof. Iskra Baeva PhD, Lecturer in Contemporary History at the Faculty of History, Sofia University „Kliment Ohridski"

1. Information about the applicant

Stefan Petrov has a basic Bachelor's degree in Journalism from the UNWE, after which he chose to enroll in the Master's degree "Crises, Conflicts and Diplomacy in World Politics, XVI - XXI centuries" at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History of the Faculty of History of Sofia University. Kliment Ohridski", which she graduated with honours in 2018. It is also worth mentioning here his master's thesis, the subject of which was "Anti-war movements in the Central Powers during the years of the First World War" and which I know well, as it was written under my supervision. The topic of the master's thesis shows that Stefan Petrov had a lasting interest in both pacifism and the first global conflict, the Great War, later called World War I.

Stefan Petrov's dissertation was discussed at a meeting of the Department of Modern and Contemporary History of the Faculty of History of Sofia University. Kliment Ohridski" on November 10, 2022 and was approved for defense by Protocol № 2/2022.

2. A review of the dissertation

Stefan Petrov's dissertation is 348 pages long and has the classical structure of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography. Unlike most historical dissertations, however, the material in Stefan Petrov's dissertation is subordinated not so much to the chronological principle as to the problem principle. This is only natural, since the dissertation

deals with a social movement, such as the anti-war movement, in one country, the Russian Empire, for a small period, the First World War (1914-1918), which is even shorter since it is limited to the February Revolution (1917) that ended the existence of the Romanov Empire.

We should not forget the reality that has made it very difficult for PhD students to prepare - the Kovid pandemic, the closure of the main archives and libraries, and made it impossible to access foreign archives and book repositories. In these circumstances, the Bulgarian diplomatic documents from the period before and during the First World War are of particular importance. And since Bulgaria and the Russian Empire were in different warring coalitions and broke off their relations, diplomatic information about Russia also came from Bulgarian diplomats in other European countries. The documents used in this dissertation come from three holdings of the Central State Archives and provide the important national perspective for a dissertation by a Bulgarian scholar. But, of course, for a dissertation devoted to Russian history, of greatest importance are the published Russian documents, as well as the collections of documents of the various political and social movements that, in one way or another, were active in the anti-war movement, or took such positions, but evolved in the war years to support their country. The 46 publications (diaries, political articles and memoirs) of the main actors play an indispensable role for the thesis. For the writing of the dissertation, Stefan Petrov has also used a solid scientific literature of 111 items mostly by Soviet, Russian, a few Bulgarian historians and a dozen English-language (mostly British).

Stefan Petrov has formulated in the introduction several objectives of his work, namely: to trace "*the development of anti-war movements in the Russian Empire and their impact on society in the period of the First World War*", to examine "*the significance of anti-war movements for the collapse of the Russian Empire and the end of the Romanov dynasty*", to trace "*the dynamics of the development of anti-war organizations*" and to assess "*the significance of the actions of the authorities for the development of anti-war movements*" (p. 5). To these are added the tasks of examining "*the objective factors which led to the emergence and development of the anti-war movement in the Russian Empire in the years of the First World War*", examining "*the positions and activities of the main leftist and anti-establishment parties and movements and their significance for the development of anti-war movements*", and the development of "*spontaneously arising movements directed against the country's participation in the war*" (p. 6).

In the first chapter of his dissertation, "Ruling as a Factor in the Emergence of Antiwar Sentiments," Stefan Petrov focuses his analysis on the specific political system of the Russian Empire - the autocracy and its slow and difficult transformation to limited parliamentarism after the first Russian Revolution (1905-1907) and how this system was perceived by the socially and ethnically diverse Russian society. It presents the difficulties of the Russian authorities to formulate sufficiently convincingly the aims of the war into which Russia entered in the summer of 1914. These problems are examined through the prism of ideology (national and imperial), of autocracy (the rather progressive decline of Russia's strong central government) and of the state of the army (the major problems it faced as a result of the corrosive effects of the other two factors).

In presenting the topic of national ideology, the doctoral student has rightly paid special attention to three of the hundred ethno-national communities: the Poles, the Jews and the Germans (defined by him as Russians with German surnames). According to Stefan Petrov, one of the main problems of the Russian Empire was the personality of Emperor Nicholas II. His negative assessment of the Emperor, however, did not prevent him from pointing to his long-standing pacifist stance, which made him the initiator of the Disarmament and World Peace Appeal and the establishment of the Court of Arbitration in The Hague. The author has devoted special attention to the mores of the last royal family, and has strongly condemned its negative influence on the state of the country and of the army, which began the war in a state of profound unpreparedness.

Among the conclusions of the first chapter are noteworthy statements such as that "*Aggressive internal nationalism is proving destructive to the Russian Empire*" (p. 47), that the influence of "prophets" such as Rasputin is "*a demonstration of the decline of this elite and this social system*" (p. 84), and "*The Russian Empire is in a state of decay, and the state of the army is part of this process*" (p. 113). Stefan Petrov's negative attitude towards Tsar Nicholas II is clear, and I would extend his conclusion by adding that the reason lies not so much in the personality of Russia's last tsar, but in the system that the influential pre-revolutionary Russian historian and proponent of monarchy, Vasily Klyuchevsky, described thus, "*Of course, absolute monarchy is the most perfect form of government... if there were no accident of birth.*"

While in the first chapter Stefan Petrov introduces the leadership of the state, in the second, "The Russian Radical Opposition - Between Support for the Fatherland and Internationalism", he turns to the society and the ideas that excited it in the last decades before the fatal First World War. This chapter is the essence of the dissertation, as it traces the main anti-war organizations, their evolution in the face of the war, which presented them with a difficult choice between loyalty to ideas on the one hand and patriotism to the homeland on the other. This dilemma is particularly well presented in the text devoted to Plekhanov's positions and through his words, "*We cannot enter into negotiations with the enemy who tramples our land*" (p. 187).

The second chapter traces first the dilemmas of the pacifist movement in Russia as a whole (Mennonites, Dukhoborites, Refuseniks, Monokans, Tolstoists), then successively the different positions on the war taken by the whole movements or the leading representatives of: the Socialist-Revolutionaries (SS), Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, anarchists. As is evident from the text, Stefan Petrov's sympathies are on the side of the radical anti-war movement, which from the beginning of the war preferred to remain faithful to internationalism and its struggle against tsarism instead of supporting their country in the great armed conflict, as many radical activists did. In this chapter, the PhD student has focused on the now little-known development of Russia's numerous left and non-establishment movements, parties and their leaders, often in the context of European politics. The narrative begins in the nineteenth century, passes through the first check during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 to reach the watershed for the pacifists of the Russian Empire, World War I. The emphasis of the narrative of the evolution of pacifist movements in the war years is on the framing of the revolutionary denial of participation in the war, expressed in the slogan of transforming the imperialist war into a civil war. In his conclusions, the doctoral student specifically emphasizes the role of the Bolsheviks: "*The Bolsheviks are emerging as the main anti-system and anti-war political force in Russia. They are becoming the 'vanguard' of the disaffected grassroots in the country. The leaders of the party managed to navigate the situation as best they could so as to make the most of the situation*" (p. 218).

The third chapter, "Spontaneous Resistance to War," grounds the narrative in the world of ideas to that of actual action. It traces the various forms of resistance to the war and to the

Russian Empire that waged it. Reversing the ordering of events in the chapter, I will begin with the protests on the home front - some of these were peaceful and took the form of protest rallies and strikes, while others were accompanied by violence such as workers' and peasants' riots and disturbances. But in both cases the state often uses violence to quell them, which only intensifies discontent and deepens feelings of state illegitimacy. The various forms of anti-war resistance at the front are also represented, and in this case some are passive - protests and mutinies against mobilization, escapes from the army (desertion), retreats, surrenders into captivity, twinning with enemy soldiers. With the unfavourable course of the war and its prolongation in time, armed acts also appeared: revolts that were not overcome with the increasing repression and whose culmination was undoubtedly the February Revolution of 1917. The revolution united anti-war actions from the rear and the front.

3. Evaluation of the scientific results obtained

The dissertation is well structured, sufficiently convincing in terms of source and analytical material. The doctoral candidate has also proved his claims by using a wide range of contemporary to the events statements, articles, publications.

My overall assessment of the results achieved by Stefan Petrov in his dissertation is that he has successfully met the set goals and objectives. He has managed to cover a very wide range of anti-war attitudes, manifestations and organized movements, to examine them in development from the late nineteenth century to the February Revolution of 1917 through the prism of their attitude to Russia's participation in the First World War. The dissertation has a contributory character, especially within Bulgarian historiography. Innovative is the placing of the anti-war movements within the official position of the government, in whose actions the author searches and finds the main reasons for the collapse of the Russian Empire and with the help of the actions of anti-war movements, parties and attitudes.

4. Evaluation of the dissertation publications

In the documentation of the dissertation defense procedure there is information about the participation of the PhD student Stefan Petrov in scientific forums, as well as a list of his publications. There are 10 publications listed, but the first of them is incorrectly listed in a

collection in which only the publication No. 3 is in print. The nature of the publications and the publications in which they appear show that seven of them are the result of Stefan Petrov's participation in scientific forums. This is a good testimonial for his scientific activity and for the promulgation of his theses in scientific forums.

Stefan Petrov's publications are on the following topics: "Problems in the Russian Imperial Army in the Years of the First World War and its Underdevelopment in Relation to its Opponents", "The First World War and the Role of the Imperial Family as Factors in the Collapse of the Russian Empire", "Mysticism, Superstitions and Prophets - the Decline of the Russian Empire's Elite under Nicholas II", "The Officer Corps in the Russian Empire's Army in the Years of the First World War", "Anti-Semitism in the Russian Empire during the Reign of Nicholas II", "Military Enthusiasm and Apathy - Sentiments in the Russian Empire in the Years of World War I", "The SS Party and the Russian Empire's Participation in World War I", "Russian Anarchists in the Years of World War I", "Why Are We Fighting? - The Problem of Understanding Military Objectives in the First World War in the Russian Empire". All of them touch in one way or another on the topic of this dissertation.

5. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract is 24 typewritten pages and outlines the main parameters of the thesis. The first part formulates the relevance, the subject of the research, the aims, the objectives, the methodology and the source base on which Stefan Petrov has created his dissertation. The second part adequately traces the structure and content of the three chapters of the study. This is followed by the self-evaluation of the contributions of the dissertation and a list of the doctoral candidate's publications on the topic.

The content and layout of the abstract fully meet the academic requirements.

6. Evaluation of the scientific indicators

The total score for Stefan Petrov's dissertation (50 pts.), his publications out of print (30 pts.) show a total of 80 points. This means that the PhD student Stefan Petrov meets the scientific-metric requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". And we have to take into account his other publications whose delayed publication is not his fault.

7. Critical comments and recommendations

My positive evaluation of the thesis does not mean that I have no disagreements, critical remarks or recommendations for improving the text, especially if Stefan Petrov prepares it for publication as a book.

My more general remarks concern some of the theses in the dissertation, such as the one about the emperor taking a firm stance for war to a victorious end (p. 66), as it contradicts everything Stefan Petrov has rightly described about his weak and indecisive character - in my opinion, this position of the emperor is more about a traditional linguistic device. Or of the heavy dependence of Russian military strategy on Rasputin's dreams (p. 70), a thesis which the author himself refutes a little later. Nor do I think that the Russian general mobilization played a leading role in starting the war (p. 86), since it was in fact Germany that was looking for any occasion to enter a war for which it was fully prepared. I also think that the Protocols of the Elders of Zion is not just a hoax (p. 31), but a deliberate forgery used by the Tsarist Okhrana during the 1905 Revolution. I also find it hard to agree that the Russians' lack of motivation to take part in the war is due to their low educational level (p. 251), since it was hardly higher in 1812, and because education was more important for the impact of propaganda than patriotism.

I also have minor concerto remarks such as the fact that there are repetitions of the same events in the text, probably also due to the thematic structure, about the fact that the Polish lands in the Russian Empire were called the Polish Kingdom, not the Tsardom (p. 25), Darina Grigorova's publication *Время русофильства*... .. is from the VIA EVRASIA website and from the collection *«Российская и болгарская государственность: проблемы взаимодействия. XIX-XXI вв.»* Москва, 2014, с. 150-161, and not from the collection *„Първата световна война – 100 години по-късно“*. The terms "обрусени" and "порусчени" instead of "русифициране" seem to me unfortunate, and Furmanov's little name is Дмитрий, not Димитрий, the French president's is Реймон Поанкаре, not Рамон Пуанкаре (p. 313), and Латвинов (Максимович) (p. 232) is obviously Литвинов.

I would also make two recommendations. The first concerns the possibility of a deeper analysis of the contradiction that pacifists face: between their loyalty to the anti-war struggle and their patriotic sense of defending the homeland. As we can see, this contradiction is still valid

today. And the second is to present the Bulgarian position in parallel with the topic of the Russian and other European anti-war movements, since the Bulgarian narrow socialists are among the most consistent, and not as individuals, but as a party-wide decision. Data on this can be found in the collection of documents „БРП (к) в резолюции и решения на конгресите, конференциите и пленумите на ЦК” (т. 1, 1891-1918. С., 1947).

8. Conclusion

Stefan Petrov's dissertation "The Russian Empire and the Anti-War Movements in the Years of the First World War" shows the doctoral student's ability to search for primary and secondary documentary material, to effectively use the historiography on the topic, to independently develop important issues in the historical development of a large and important for the development of the twentieth century country as the Russian Empire in the turning years of the First World War, to draw historical conclusions and thus to contribute to the development of Bulgarian historiography.

All this gives me grounds, in spite of the remarks I have formulated, to state my conviction that Stefan Petrov has fulfilled all the academic requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", for which I will vote.

February 11, 2023.

Reviewer: prof. Iskra Baeva PhD