

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. **Tina Nikolaeva Georgieva**

Faculty of History of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Department of Modern and Contemporary History

on the dissertation of **Stefan Petrov Petrov**

for obtaining the educational degree of Doctor,

Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

entitled:

### **The Russian Empire and Anti-war Movements in the Years of the First World War**

The topic chosen by Stefan Petrov for his dissertation has gained additional relevance against the background of the war in Ukraine that started a few months ago. Unfortunately, the military conflict has made it impossible to use Russian archives, which would have shed additional light on anti-war activity in the Russian Empire during the First World War. On a positive note, the PhD student sought to compensate for this forced absence with data from Bulgarian archives on the subject.

The thesis consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography (111 titles in Bulgarian, Russian and English), totalling 348 pages.

The structure of the thesis is logical and well justified by Stefan Petrov. The first chapter presents the factors that contributed to the emergence of anti-war sentiment among Russian society in the years of the big war. The second chapter analyses the roots of Russian pacifism and the various social circles that shared its ideas. Particular attention is paid here to the anti-war views of the left-wing movements in the Russian Empire (social-revolutionaries, Mensheviks, Bolsheviks, anarchists), to the evolution that their positions underwent after the

outbreak of the war, and to the internal contradictions that tore apart the so-called "radical opposition." Stefan Petrov thoroughly and comparatively exposes the different approaches to the war of the various left parties; his thesis that there is a direct link between the positions stated during the war and the change in popularity of the various radical movements in the empire sounds well argued. The involvement of Russian socialists in attempts to consolidate the European left is also explored. Here Stefan Petrov demonstrates both a good knowledge of the issues under study and an ability to analyse the processes taking place in Russian society during the period.

The third chapter is devoted to the various anti-war efforts that took place in the rear and on the front. It traces the dynamics in the development of anti-war attitudes; the reasons that provoked the sharp increase in resistance amidst the war. The work concludes with the outbreak of the February Revolution in 1917, which the author regards as the culmination of the anti-war movement in the Russian Empire.

Stefan Petrov's research is in-depth and with good historiographical knowledge of the subject; it outlines the development of the anti-war movement in Russia, which he sees as a step towards the enormous transformation that society was about to undergo. He succeeds in painting a convincing picture of the Russian state in the years of the world war; in presenting the rapidly changing social attitudes and problems that made anti-war activity an essential element of the looming catastrophe.

### **Critical comments**

Some of the assessments made by Stefan Petrov sound too extreme: such, in my opinion, is the definition of the defence movement among the SRs as a "betrayal" of ideas - especially considering that the same change is taking place among many European left parties. It is an exaggeration to suggest that Russian liberal pacifism is going politically bankrupt (p. 246), just as it is arguable that the Bolsheviks are emerging as "the most brilliant organization on the European level as well" (p. 245).

### **Conclusion.**

In spite of the remarks made, I believe that the dissertation is professionally written, with a good knowledge of the problems studied. The importance of the topic allows work on it to continue in the future, which is my recommendation to the author.

The professional activity of the PhD student is at a good level. Stefan Petrov has participated in eight national and international scholarly forums on the topics of his dissertation, and has publications analysing various aspects of the issues he has studied.

The doctoral candidate Stefan Petrov has the necessary professional qualifications; his dissertation meets the requirements for a research doctoral thesis with the relevant contributions and authorial insight into the research problem. All this gives me a reason to recommend to the esteemed academic jury to confer the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" on Stefan Petrov.

21 January 2023

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Tina Georgieva