

discussion by Soviet scholars of Bromlei's original article, "Etnos i etnografiia," and in general they give a pretty fair profile of the place of Soviet ethnography in the spectrum of Soviet social sciences.

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TO THE EDITOR:

Robert Thurston's review (*Slavic Review*, 41, no. 3 [Fall 1982]: 549–51) concludes that my book *The Cheka: Lenin's Political Police* "suffers from a narrow focus, and remains largely unsatisfactory"; yet his own narrow concern, concentrated exclusively on a single aspect of my extensive study, is to minimize Lenin's responsibility for the *start* of Bolshevik terror, disregarding the systematic terror practiced after mid-1918.

Thurston grotesquely distorts my presentation of events. From my statement (on p. 85) that, in summer 1918, District Chekas operated in only 75 districts, he deduces that "the overwhelming bulk of [Bolshevik] territory still had no local political police"; he inexplicably omits my mention (*ibid.*) of the existence of thirty-eight Provincial Chekas, the key regional network which covered all Soviet-controlled territory and continued to function effectively after the abolition of District Chekas in January 1919. Thurston considers this alleged "low-level of Cheka penetration of Russia" to be "incomprehensible . . . if the political police already had the great importance to the new regime and its efforts to govern that Leggett would have us believe." But I did not argue anything of the sort; indeed, I pointed out that "up to early July 1918 the Vechecha . . . was still in the process of construction and expansion . . . [possessing] limited resources" (p. 67). I stressed that Lenin, when he seized power, had no thought of resurrecting the political police; the Cheka evolved naturally as the indispensable instrument of coercion required by Lenin's single-party state in the face of socialist opposition, bourgeois hostility, and massive peasant rebellion.

The modest extent of Bolshevik terror and Cheka growth prior to Lenin's suppression, in July 1918, of the insurgent Left Socialist Revolutionaries (whose presence in the Cheka Collegium had hitherto restrained terror) does not, however, disprove either the political repression practiced by Lenin since October 1917 or his early advocacy of terror. Lenin's views in 1917 on the need for violence in the socialist revolution were by no means as "relatively mild" as Thurston suggests. In *The State and Revolution*, written in August–September 1917, Lenin characterized his envisaged proletarian state as "the centralized organisation of force, the organisation of violence, for the purpose of crushing the resistance of the exploiters," and in December 1917 he wrote: "We Marxists . . . always knew . . . that socialism cannot be 'introduced,' that it emerges in the course of the most tense, the most sharp — to the point of frenzy and despair — class struggle and civil war." Lenin's early absorption of French and Russian Jacobin influences, emphasizing terror as a means of consolidating revolution, must be well known to Thurston.

Terror became a way of life with Lenin. Those who extenuate and minimize his recourse to it should not forget that in May 1922 Lenin wrote to Kurskii, his commissar for justice: "The law should not abolish terror: to promise that would be self-delusion and deception; it should be substantiated and legalized in principle, clearly, without evasion or embellishment." Lenin, for his part, did not equivocate on this issue.

Unfortunately I lack the space to deal with all of Thurston's arguments. The several "difficult questions" which he raises and accuses me of avoiding are mostly misconceived or irrelevant; these "difficulties" are of his own devising.

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