



Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 – A World on the Edge

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Between the first revolution in February 1917 and Lenin's Bolshevik coup in October, Petrograd (the former St Petersburg) was in turmoil – felt nowhere more keenly than on the fashionable Nevsky Prospekt where the foreign visitors and diplomats who filled hotels, clubs, bars and embassies were acutely aware of the chaos breaking out on their doorsteps and beneath their windows.

Among this disparate group were journalists, businessmen, bankers, governesses, volunteer nurses and expatriate socialites. Many kept diaries and wrote letters home: from an English nurse who had already survived the sinking of the Titanic; to the black valet of the US Ambassador, far from his native Deep South; to suffragette leader Emmeline Pankhurst, who had come to Petrograd to inspect the indomitable Women's Death Battalion led by Maria Bochkareva.

Helen Rappaport draws upon this rich trove of material, much of it previously unpublished, to carry us right up to the action – to see, feel and hear the Revolution as it happened to a diverse group of individuals who suddenly felt themselves trapped in a 'red madhouse.'

Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 – A World on the Edge Details

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From Reader Review Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 – A World on the Edge for online ebook

Adelein says

Helen Rappaportin *Pietari 1917* on mielenkiintoinen katsaus vuosisadan takaiseen elämään Venäjällä. Rappaportin valitsema tutkimusaihe on tavallisuudesta poikkeava, sillä vallankumousta seurataan tuona aikana Pietarissa oleskelleiden ulkomaalaisten näkökulmasta.

Mukaan mahtuu diplomaatteja, toimittajia ja valokuvaajia. Tarinat ovat kiehtovia. Pientä miinusta siitä, että välillä unohdin, kuka kukin on. Teosta olisi mielestäni selkeyttänyt, jos jokainen luku olisi keskittynyt tiettyyn henkilöön, vaikka toisaalta kronologinenkin järjestys on toimiva.

Amy Yingling says

Russian history has always been a favorite subject of mine and many of the non-fiction books that I read are either about Russia or WWII so I was excited to spot this title on my local libraries shelves. The last book I read by Helen Rappaport was *The Romanov Sisters* in 2016 and I found it dreadfully boring, I think I gave it 2 stars, but anyway so I didn't go into this book with too much expectation. I was relieved though when I realized that this book was so much better in every sense of the word. I think the different point of views expressed by the many in the diplomatic corps along with the other foreigners living in Petrograd (St. Petersburg, was changed during WWI, because it was deemed to be too German sounding) as they lived through the Revolution along with the flashbacks to how it was in Tsarist Russia compared to the Revolution and the setting up of a new government was a wonderful way to present all these experiences and in their very own words pulled from diaries and correspondences. The subject matter held my attention, so it was an informative and entertaining read. If you love Russian history and would like to read a different perspective of the Russian Revolution instead of through the eyes of the Russians I would highly recommend this book to you!

Gill says

'Caught in the Revolution' by Helen Rappaport

4 stars/ 8 out of 10

In 'Caught in the Revolution', Helen Rappaport provides a detailed account of the 1917 Russian Revolution, as seen through foreign eyewitness accounts.

Many years ago, I read 'Ten Days that Shook the World' by John Reed, and hence was interested to see whether this account based on many eyewitnesses would provide a more rounded picture. I was especially interested in reading the sections relating to the journalists, Donald Thompson and Florence Harper.

This is a very detailed book, with much that I found interesting. The first thing that struck me was the

affluent lifestyle of the diplomatic community, compared to that of the majority of the Russian people. I was very moved reading about the release of political prisoners. Other sections that were of great interest to me related to the role of the Cossacks, the storming of the Astoria Hotel, the events of 23rd March, the return of Lenin, and the women of Petrograd. The most fascinating section for me was that relating to the visit made by Mrs Pankhurst, which I knew nothing about.

I found this an informative and gripping read. At no stage was I bored by it.

Thank you to St Martin's Press and to NetGalley for an ARC.

Patricia says

I learned a good bit about Russia through reading this quite interesting book. Did you know Russia had the first women's battalion? The book is told by comments, diaries and letters from non-Russians who were there at the time. I felt badly for the hungry population, but it never got any better. I'm glad photos are included. It ends with Lenin in power surrounded by the Bolsheviks.

Ren says

Helen Rappaport, author of 2014's popular history *The Romanov Sisters*, among other titles on history and royals both Russian and otherwise, explains in her acknowledgments for *Caught in the Revolution* that while working as a historian she was struck by "...how much seemed to have been written about the revolution by Russians, but how relatively little I had come across that was said by those many non-Russians who, for various reasons, were stranded in the city that year. I knew there had to be more to the story than just the over-hyped account of the one man, John Reed, who had always seemed to dominate, with his *Ten Days that Shook the World*."

In order to give a platform to other accounts, she's written a compelling, engaging history of the 1917 Russian Revolution from the point of view of these outsider perspectives, letting those who lived through the events contribute their own words and writings to enliven what's already known from history's narrative. This period of time requires a good deal of context to thoroughly understand it, and sometimes with so much political background, the reading can be somewhat dry or plodding. That's not the case here, as Rappaport changes up the topics and perspectives frequently, although several of the same figures reappear across chapters. They tell the stories in their own words, imbuing opinions and feeling into Rappaport's weaving of the historical context around the events. This is what any student wishes a boring history text would be – life breathed into the words of the past.

A significant number of the eyewitnesses are diplomats stationed in so-called Petrograd, then the capital city of Tsarist Russia, from countries including United States, Great Britain, and France. Their understanding of the culture and climate of pre-Revolutionary Russia coupled with diplomatic perspective from their own lands makes for enlightening reading. Other eyewitnesses include authors, journalists, and foreign revolutionaries and activists drawn to this epicenter of action, like the aging Emmeline Pankhurst and her assistant Jessie Kenney, who were in Petrograd attempting to work with Kerensky and other Provisional Government leaders on the country's involvement in the ongoing war.

Some background and understanding of Russian Revolutionary history is certainly helpful in enjoying the book but not necessary. Rappaport fills in most of the details, mainly those relating to its underlying issue of Tsar Nicholas II being considered weak and ineffective as a ruler. His inaction and inadequate response to the people's needs created an opening that charismatic revolutionaries like Vladimir Lenin and Leon Trotsky were all too eager to fill. As Grand Duchess Vladimir tells French diplomat Maurice Paleologue regarding Nicholas, it was a now-or-never moment and as we know, he didn't make a move in time: "If salvation does not come from above, there will be revolution from below."

The trouble with sudden revolution was what the people were actually supposed to do with this new relative freedom, once they actually threw off the oppressive Tsarist yoke. They were faced with the dangerous combination of being both victorious and directionless. As James Stinton Jones, a South African engineer working on the electrification of the Petrograd tramways describes it, "There is no cohesion, no common ideal to inspire her people. She is conscious of having killed a dragon; that is all." This often results in outbursts of unimaginable, senseless violence, shocking to foreigners trying to navigate day by day in the uncertain, constantly changing atmosphere of the capital. The book's greatest strength is this picture of daily life in the midst of unease, revolution, and the aftermath; violence and all.

Throughout the narrative is a sense of the shift and development of the national identity, as it begins to emerge under the provisional government. There are hints at how this historical uncertainty became a legacy, contributing to Russia's still-shaky identity even today. "There are two things that people only appreciate when they have lost them, and these are their health and their country." Those are the words of the ailing Georgiy Plekhanov, a former colleague of Lenin's returned to Tsarskoe Selo after decades in Swiss exile, spoken to Pankhurst and Kenney. They have an echoing impact among these powerful vignettes.

If you read only one of the many books coming out in time to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution in 2017, let it be this one.

I received an advance copy courtesy of the publisher for review.

Chrissie says

I just realized, reading this at the end of February 2017, that I am reading this exactly one century after the event.

After five chapters:

Just a word of warning, this is not an easy read.

In the prologue we are introduced to a number of prominent figures that will in the following be eye-witnesses of the February and October Revolutions in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) 1917. This gives you a background so you know who is speaking. Americans, British and French among others. Ambassadors, newspaper correspondents, photographers, businessmen - a wide expat community. This part is a bit difficult because so many people are thrown at you at one time. (These turn out to be only a small portion of the many foreigners who witnessed the events and who are quoted in the remaining pages.)

Then follow five chapters that in minute detail describe the five days of the February Revolution. By Tuesday February 28, 1917 the February Revolution was over. Of course that is not to say that all was

solved, far from it! Five chapters for five days and four hours of audiobook listening that describe in minute detail pandemonium, mutilations and killings. We are seeing the February Revolution based on what the expat community saw and recorded. We look at the actions of the expats, the masses, the army and the police. Looting, burglary, sexual assaults and violence mount. Some say the mob was amicable, well it didn't sound so amicable to me! Random shootings and physical assaults and killings. Burning buildings, prisoners released from prison, horrific decapitations and mutilation of bodies. Just know what you are getting yourself into when you pick up this book.

We are served a multitude of eye-witness accounts, **but that doesn't make each individual statement necessarily correct**. Some accounts are actually contradictory. The author presents them all. At times I ask myself if I really needed to know **that**! I do acknowledge though that all that is depicted does draw a very good picture of the built up hatred and desperation of the starving masses and the subsequent pandemonium that ensued during the five days of the February Revolution.

Ahead lies the October Revolution. (It is much less violent.)

I continue.....even if this is no easy read.

Having now completed the entire book, my skepticism toward the many, many quotes that form the basis for this book remains. I do not regret having reading the book, but I think the author has used an excessive number of quotes. While these quotes do reflect the sentiments of the expat community and do conjure the atmosphere of the place, there are just too many. I would have preferred that the author had made a thorough study of source material, synthesized and evaluated the material, drawn conclusions and then presented the conclusions with just a number of the quotes on which this book is based.

The quotes are predominantly from American and British expats. The views of those from other nations and from the Russians themselves should have been included to a larger extent. Similarly, more information on what was going on outside of Petrograd would have widened the scope of the book.

The book ends with a postscript which tells what happens to the many expat individuals cited, in the years after 1917 and until their death. This fills them out, and I appreciated the added information. I would have preferred more of a focus on a few central characters. I would have liked more about Lenin and more about Alexander Kerensky; I am a person interested in biographical details. There is a bit about Emmeline Pankhurst and Maria Bochkareva, but I wanted more here too. The latter particularly drew my attention. She was a Russian peasant woman who led Petrograd's Women's Death Battalion. Books work better for me when I get close to a few individuals; here we meet many, many people and learn just a bit about each.

The audiobook narrator (Mark Meadows) dramatizes a lot! Many like this. I don't! Americans sound very American. British sound very British. With all the quotes, the narration flips back and forth between numerous dialects. But tell me, why should a French person's quote, when it has been translated into English, be spoken with a faulty English accent? No, I did **not** like the narration, but that doesn't mean others will dislike it too. The narration was nevertheless clear, and that is most important.

The book is interesting and I appreciated learning about how the two Russian revolutions of 1917 brought Lenin to power.

I have before read by Rappaport these:

1. No Place for Ladies: The Untold Story of Women in the Crimean War
 2. The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra
- Both I gave four stars.

Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 – A World on the Edge I am giving three.

Jerome says

A colorful, well-researched and very readable look at how foreign nationals in Petrograd experienced the 1917 revolution.

Rappaport doesn't dwell much on the more well-known experience of the revolutionaries (and their "bayonetocracy," as the Dutch ambassador put it), the government, or the Romanovs, and instead covers the experience of the city's communities of foreign diplomats, intelligence officers, journalists, celebrities, expatriates, and entrepreneurs. Many these were not fluent in Russian since Russian officials were already fluent in their languages, and some were fairly ignorant of the country; the US ambassador "did not know a Left Social Revolutionary from a potato," according to Bruce Lockhart. Rappaport also describes the refugee influx into the city, the violence and chaos that broke out, how many Russians initially quit their jobs, how some diplomats were harassed, how clueless some of them were about the revolutionaries, and how the inhabitants struggled with losses in food, electricity, peace and order. She also covers the Russians soldiers fearful of being sent to the front and the Russian workers disaffected about their conditions. She also speculates that alcohol prohibitions prevented the Revolution from being more violent than it was.

The narrative is engaging, fast-paced and well-written. However, there is little analysis or context. The accounts she uses are vivid, but the perspective can shift abruptly, the people she follows are a bit hard to differentiate at times, and the Russians come off as a bit faceless. At one point the Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich is called the tsar's "uncle." Also, the occasional use of people's first names is annoying.

A clear, riveting and well-written work.

Holly says

Going to bail out at the halfway point. I was listening to the audiobook, and though there were a lot of fascinating storylines, I struggled to stay focused on the disparate threads and personages, and found myself zoning out a lot. Xe Sands's narration of the American edition of the audiobook is great (and I'd like to hear her read more nonfiction), but I may need to just read Orlando Figes on the Russian Revolution.

The Irregular Reader says

Caught in the Revolution is a meticulously researched account of the months surrounding the 1917 Russian Revolution. The book focuses on the experiences of foreign nationals in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) who were caught up in the violence of the revolution. Rappaport carries the reader from the first conflict of February 1917, through to the final revolutionary spasm in October of 1917.

Rappaport has delved into the diaries and correspondence of ambassadors, nurses, reporters, bankers, anarchists, and expats. Her long fascination with the topic shines through in the breadth of detail she brings to bear. Rappaport also provides a detailed history of the Revolution itself, so even those who have never studied the October Revolution will be able to follow the book. Coming out for the centennial anniversary of the event, and considering the state of current affairs, the release of this book is exquisitely well-timed.

The book is intended more for the serious history reader/scholar. My major complaint with the book is that Rappaport has provided almost too much information. The book would have made a wonderful narrative (in the vein of Erik Larson's *In the Garden of Beasts*) if she had chosen to focus on the experiences of a few key players. As it stands, we are able to learn a little bit about quite a number of foreign expats, to the point where it is hard to remember who everyone is. The lack of background for the same people also makes it difficult to connect with them as real people, rather than just words in a diary.

In all though, Russian scholars and lovers of history will likely find this book informative and intriguing. And, with everything else that is going on in the world right now, the more casual reader might be interested in picking up this book for a valuable perspective on revolution.

An advance copy of this book was provided by the publisher via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. *Caught in the Revolution* will be available for purchase on February 7th, 2017.

Meg - A Bookish Affair says

In 1917, 100 years ago this year, revolution broke out across Russia. In "*Caught in the Revolution*," Helen Rappaport looks at the effects of the revolution on one city: Petrograd (a.k.a. St. Petersburg). It was amazing to see how quickly things changed as well as to have a reminder of the course of events that took Russia from the fall of the Tsar to the new government.

Sure, there are a lot of history books that cover Russia during this time period. What makes this book really a great history is the first hand narratives that Rappaport draws from to write the book. By drawing on letters, diaries, and a variety of other narratives, Rappaport is able to not only pinpoint exactly where people were when they witnessed this shift in history but what they were witnessing and what they were feeling. It really made the history feel more personal while still being incredibly informative. You get such a good sense of place and can really picture what is happening throughout the book.

I love history books even if it just a run down of events but having the first hand narratives make the history so much more real. This book would be great for those that don't have a familiarity with the history of this revolution as well as those that already have a familiarity with the Russian Revolution but are looking for a different and more intimate look at the events that changed the world.

Joseph says

Caught in the Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 – A World on the Edge by Helen Rappaport is a first-hand account of the revolutions in Russia. Rappaport attended Leeds University with the intention of joining the Foreign Office. She changed her mind and became an actress. She, later, became a full-time writer in 1998 and has written several books on Russian history and Victorian history. Her work on Lenin caused a

stir when she proposed that he died of syphilis rather than a stroke.

Rappaport wrote the very successful *The Romanov Sisters: The Lost Lives of the Daughters of Nicholas and Alexandra* in 2014. Her clear and narrative style writing makes for good reading and she is not hesitant to document her work. *Caught in the Revolution* is composed of first-hand accounts from the British and American diplomatic communities as well as the business community. The foreign communities present their personal experiences of the revolution in the streets of Petrograd (formerly St. Petersburg but changed to lose the German name). Since 1914 the German community had left with the outbreak of war and Russian alliance with France.

Life in Petrograd had declined since the start of the war. The lines for bread had grown to five hour waits in the sub-zero temperatures. White bread had steadily been turning grayer as additives started replacing the flour. The Russian government tried to assure the population that there was no shortage of flour and that any shortage was a result of hoarding. The people were losing faith in the government. Prices were rising and shortages in other goods were growing. Despite the shortages seen on the streets and citizens in rags, the elites, however, still lived well and had the opera and other upper-class entertainment including champagne.

Violence in the streets came and grew almost by accident. It was slow in escalating, but the bread shortage was the major reason for the unrest. The First World War was taking its toll on the front and at home. The people's bread was being used to feed horses at the front. There was no talk of revolution at the start of the protests. The cossacks were called out to put down the unrest in the streets, however, they did not act against the crowds. Normally, the cossacks would have brutally put down the unrest. When they didn't, a woman asked why weren't they attacking. A cossack replied, "We are hungry too." The military slowly started to defect. It was the police that attacked the crowds viciously, even resorting to indiscriminate machine gunning of the crowds from rooftops. The police even resorted to dressing in cossack and military uniforms to give the illusion of military support for the Czar.

The Nicholas abdicated and the Kerensky faction moved to join the various factions in forming a provisional government that took over governing the nation. Kerensky served as Minister of Justice (ended the death penalty) and Minister of War. He didn't follow the will of the people and continued to fight the disastrous war on the Eastern Front. Lenin and Trotsky took most of Kerensky's early popular support and the second revolution that year began.

Rappaport first-hand accounts of what was happening in the streets of Petrograd add much to the history of the Russian revolutions. Personal descriptions of the fighting in the streets and even the speeches of Lenin add an important feel to the revolution. Most of the first-hand accounts came from US and British citizens who were not fighting for one side or another. They offer an unbiased look at the fall of one of the great powers of Europe. Excellent reading.

Anna says

absolutely riveting!

**Read by Xe Sands
app. 10.5 hrs.

David says

A aged apple-seller is shot in the head and left to die on the street after she tries to bargain with revolutionary “soldiers”. People huddle in their darkened freezing rooms as chaos reigns outside, praying that a stray bullet will not find them.

All the knucklehead trolls, left and right, who are currently baying for revolution, should be forced to read this book and get a load of what revolution is really like. You can bet your bottom dollar that they are the ones who will be whining the loudest when they start missing meals, that is, if they can avoid getting senselessly slaughtered by roving bands of inebriated thugs.

The senseless slaughter and the missed meals are all in evidence in this fine book. It is simply an exciting read and a great evocation of an important time and place. I hope that 2017's 100th anniversary of the events portrayed will drive some people to look into this book and consider what happens if you insist to the point of violence, and beyond, that the world be re-organized exactly to your liking.

I received an free unfinished galley of the ebook for review. Thank you to Netgalley and St. Martin's Press for their generosity.

There is an obvious error of fact in the galley copy at Kindle location 5499, in footnote 12 of chapter 13. The footnote says American diplomat and historian George F. Kennan “was a friend” of John Reed, author of *Ten Days that Shook the World*, “and was interviewed for Warren Beatty's 1981 film *Reds*.” At the time Reed died in 1920, Kennan was 16 years old and studying at a military academy in Wisconsin. There is no evidence, as far as I know, that they ever met, and they certainly were not friends. In addition, the claim that Kennan was interviewed for Beatty's movie implies that he was one of the film's on-screen “Witnesses” (i.e., non-actors who appeared in interviews). He was not. However, it is possible, even likely, that Beatty talked to Kennan while making the movie.

Speaking of Hollywood, this book also contains a real-life African-American character who is just yelling out for a script treatment. He is Phil Jordan, who rose from the hardscrabble streets of St. Louis to personal servant of the good-hearted but somewhat clueless US Ambassador to Russia. The final words of this book's main narrative are: “His glorious letters, written in his vivid vernacular style, and reflecting an enduring sense of being 'a stranger in a strange land', remain the only known published account of the revolution by an African American. They provide us with an unforgettable sense of exactly what it was like to be caught, in Petrograd, in the Russian Revolution of 1917” (Kindle location 4956).

Steve says

Helen Rappaport's *Caught in the Revolution* unusual approach to the first days of the Russian Revolution is to tell the story, almost exclusively, through the eyes of foreigners (via diaries, letters, etc.). Given the sea of books on the topic, you would think such a thing has been done before, but I'm not aware of any such book. In my experience, such accounts are usually sprinkled throughout larger histories of those tumultuous days. Rappaport herself says the various eye-witness accounts by non-Russians have been largely ignored, and that her own book only scratches the surface of what is available. Maybe, but given the virtual shut-down of

Russian society to the outside world after the Revolution, I question just how much of value is really there. But, that said, what Rappaport has unearthed related to the Revolution in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) is gold. There were several large foreign communities and businesses within Petrograd at the time of the Revolution. Her primary sources are varied, ranging from the British and American ambassadors, to nurses, journalists, bank clerks, suffragettes, valets, etc. All in all, Rappaport has a list of close to a hundred witnesses to front the book, though I found as the book went on that Rappaport returned to the usual 20 (or less) witnesses to tell the story. That's not a complaint, since Rappaport is very skillful in stitching these accounts together, while keeping an eye on the larger events that are unfolding.

And it is a far bloodier story than I had read previously. Shootings, beheadings, burnings, hangings, beatings, and more came quickly when the rotten center no longer held. The street battles between competing factions are often confusing, but the power of the witnesses' observations are undeniable. Due to the compressed area of Petrograd where much of the street fighting occurred, the reader is probably left with a magnified impression of the violence (though violent days for the entire country were coming). No one knows how many died in Petrograd (especially in the February Revolution), but the numbers range from two to ten thousand, with five thousand being the most agreed upon number. This is a disturbing book, not so much for the sad history it recounts, but for the cautionary message imparted regarding the fragility of the day to day things all societies take for granted. One incident in particular sticks with me, involving an old woman selling apples, trying to haggle over the price with two Bolshevik soldiers. They ended the bargaining by shooting and bayonetting her, and walked away munching apples.

Becky says

From the prologue: Petrograd was a brooding, beleaguered city that last desperate winter before the revolution broke; a snowbound city of ice-locked canals and looming squares.

Premise/plot: Caught in the Revolution by Helen Rappaport uses primary sources--first-hand accounts of men and women who were witnesses--to piece together the events of the 1917 Russian Revolution.

The prologue, I believe, gives a background focusing on the December and January leading up to the February Revolution. It introduces readers to the key witnesses as well: the English Ambassador (Sir George Buchanan), the American Ambassador (David Rowland Francis), the French Ambassador (Maurice Paléologue), newspaper reporters and photographers from various countries, women nurses working at a war hospital, etc.

What was the city like BEFORE the revolution? How had two years of war changed the city? Were there indicators of trouble ahead? What was the general mood of the city? And how much of that mood related directly to class?

Chapter one begins in February and recounts the days leading up to the Revolution. Most of the book focuses on 1917, concentrating on the two revolutions--February and October. In between there is an interim government of sorts. But essentially the entire year is a MESS politically, economically. No law. No order. No justice. Most people starving AND freezing. A collision of strong ideas, horrible weather, and desperation. The last chapter is Postscript. It serves as a conclusion. Readers learn what happened next...in Russia...and what happened next to all the many, many key witnesses we've spent time getting to know. In some cases, Rappaport was simply unable to find out what happened to various reporters after the war, after they returned home. But she also lists what books were written and published about the Revolution by these

witnesses.

My thoughts: This book is fascinating. Also intense and compelling. It describes nearly every level of society. Sometimes the book is very graphic in terms of violence. What including ALL those primary accounts does is give modern readers a sense of being there, of experiencing what it was like day by day, night by night. Sights. Sounds. Smells.

One thing that struck me was how different people reacted. For example, for some people the early days were a mere inconvenience. The 'revolution' to them meant a longer detour to their party destination. They were still having parties and balls and get-togethers. They were still attending ballets and operas. They were still carrying on as if nothing at all of importance was happening.

Of course, that wasn't the typical reaction. This book is a treat for readers.

Quotes:

From the grandest mansion to the shivering bread queues, one topic of conversation prevailed: the Empress's relationship with Grigory Rasputin. Against all the objections of the imperial family, Nicholas and Alexandra had stubbornly refused to remove him from his favoured position, and had made matters worse by appointing a series of increasingly reactionary ministers. With Nicholas away at army HQ, Alexandra was left alone, alienated from the Russian court and most of her relatives, and relying ever more heavily on their 'friend'.

By February the daily consignment of flour to Petrograd had dropped to just twenty-one wagonloads, instead of the normal 120 needed. What white bread there was 'had become greyer and greyer until it was uneatable', due to excessive adulteration. Official mismanagement, corruption and wastage of supplies were prodigious, made worse by a crippled rail network that was unable to transport food efficiently from the provinces –where it was still plentiful –to the cities that most needed it. People were incensed to discover that, due to the hikes in the price of oats and hay, much of the black bread –the staple diet of the poor –was being fed to the capital's 80,000 horses to keep them alive: 'every horse was eating up the black bread allowance of ten men'

For fully three weeks the average daily temperature had been -13.44 degrees Centigrade and there had been heavy falls of snow. Walking on the Liteiny Prospekt on the morning of 22 February, Paléologue was struck by 'the sinister expression on the faces of the poor folk' who had been standing wearily all night waiting for bread. The public mood was shifting from stoicism to anger; many women were spending forty hours or more a week like this and, in indignation, some of them had thrown stones at the bakers' windows that day.

Hundreds of them –peasants, factory workers, students, nurses, teachers, wives whose husbands were at the front, and even a few ladies from the upper classes –came out onto the streets. Although some carried banners with traditional suffrage slogans, such as 'Hail, women fighters for freedom' and 'A place for women in the Constituent Assembly', others bore

improvised placards referring to the food crisis: 'Increase rations for soldiers' families', or even more openly revolutionary calls for an end to the war –and the monarchy. But food was, fundamentally, what they all called out for that day: 'There is no bread,' they shouted as they marched, 'our husbands have no work.'

A few of the women began singing the Marseillaise. 'It was a queer Russian version that one couldn't quite recognize at first,' recalled Harper. 'I have heard the "Marseillaise" sung many times, but that day for the first time I heard it sung as it should be.' This was because, she asserted, 'the people there were of the same classes and were singing it for the same reason as the French who first sang it over a hundred years ago.'¹⁴ As the crowd moved off, heading for the Nevsky, 'a tram came swinging round the corner'. They forced it to stop, took the control handle and 'threw it away in a snowbank'. The same happened to a second, third and fourth tram, 'until the blocked cars extended all the way along the Sadovaya to the Nevsky Prospekt'.¹⁵ One tram full of wounded soldiers in the care of nurses even joined in, as the crowd, now numbering about five hundred, surged forward, still singing the Marseillaise, the women holding boldly to the centre of the Nevsky as the men took to the pavements.

So long as they only asked for bread, the Cossacks told the marchers, they would not be on the receiving end of gunfire. There were, inevitably, many agents provocateurs in their midst, eager to turn the protest into a violent one, but for the most part the crowd remained 'good tempered', as Arthur Ransome noted in that day's despatch to the Daily News. He hoped there would be no serious conflict. 'The general character of excitement,' he concluded was, for now, 'vague and artificial' and without political focus.

Throughout the night of the 24th there were occasional volleys of firing; and yet, astonishingly, the social life of the city continued. The Alexandrinsky Theatre was packed that evening for a performance of Gogol's *The Government Inspector*. Indeed, the audience had been 'in a lively humour at this satire on the political weaknesses of the mid-nineteenth century'. Few seemed willing to believe that a 'greater drama was at that moment unfolding in real life throughout the capital'.

It seemed as though the whole city was out of doors that morning, and on foot –for there were no trams or cabs. People seemed determined to get to church as usual or simply enjoy the fine weather for a promenade along the Nevsky. Couples were pushing their babies in prams, just like any ordinary Sunday; children were skating on the ice rink in the Admiralty Gardens.

Right in front of their eyes they had seen a little girl hit in the throat by gunfire, and a well-dressed woman standing near them had collapsed with a scream as her knee was shattered by a bullet. After crawling back out into the street, Thompson and Harper were once more thrown to the ground by rifle fire coming from the police on the Anichkov Bridge. All around people lay dead and dying in the snow –Thompson counted twelve dead soldiers, Harper noted far more

women and children than men: thirty dead in all. The two reporters lay there in the snow for more than an hour, numb with cold, but too frightened to move. Harper 'had a vague idea that I was freezing to death'; she wanted to cry. And then the ambulances appeared and started collecting the dead and wounded and they decided this was fortuitous: they could pretend they were wounded and be picked up and taken to safety.

At the House of Preliminary Detention on Shpalernaya, 958 prisoners were set free; others from the Litovsky prison near the Mariinsky Theatre were liberated the following day. All of the political prisoners were cheered; those who had been imprisoned for a criminal offence in some cases 'were thrashed and told they would forfeit their lives if they were caught again'. There were, however, some prisoners who could not be reached, as Bousfield Swan Lombard noted, 'because in many cases the inmates of prisons were locked in underground cells and in the confusion the keys were lost'; with the prisons then being set on fire, 'most of them were roasted alive before it was possible to liberate them'. Those who did emerge had 'hardly anything on, in the way of clothes'. The crowd took pity on these 'wrecks of humanity' and they were 'accommodated with the most amazing assortment of garments. Little men were dressed up in very long trousers and an enormous man might be seen struggling into a coat and waistcoat much too small.'

It became a common sight to see policemen being attacked and finished off out of hand –shot, bayoneted, clubbed to death –on the street, their dead bodies left untouched. 'Food for the dogs,' some Russians called it. 'There was no hope for them unless they surrendered,' recalled Dr Joseph Clare, 'and even then not much hope, for I know a place where thirty or forty policemen were pushed through a hole in the ice without as much as a stunning tap on the head –drowned like rats.'

Philip Chadbourn had become fearful for the safety of his wife and three-week-old baby son and had gratefully accepted an offer to stay with friends on the French Embankment. But there were no cabs to be had; Esther Chadbourn was still weak, and two friends had to assist her in walking into the city, with her husband leading the way with the baby in his arms. As they emerged into the street, his wife took one look at the crowds and the barricades and field artillery and her nerves totally gave way. 'Each time a shot rang out,' Philip remembered, 'she would call ahead to me, "Don't let them kill my baby, my baby!"', while passers-by stopped and stared at her, their eyes full of tears.' Once safely installed in their friends' house, the couple 'watched the progress of the revolution from the front windows' commanding the quayside, as one continual procession of motor cars roared past, loudly tooting their horns. On the streets it was the same jubilant crowds as the previous day, trashing the police stations and 'throwing armfuls of records out of windows onto blazing street bonfires' with a 'righteous zest'.

Luckily the cold had preserved the many un-coffined bodies she saw, but it had also left them in grotesque, contorted positions. Along three sides of the shack, Harper saw piles of rigid, muddy and blood-soaked bodies that had been thrown in 'as they had been picked up', some

doubled up, others outstretched –men, women and children. Next to that shack was another, and then another with even more. In a big shed opposite she found another 150 bodies piled up. People were pulling at them, searching for loved ones, trying to identify them. ‘One in the uniform of the police was beyond recognition,’ she noted, ‘he had literally been beaten to a pulp.’ Very few of the corpses had any boots on –for these were a valuable commodity in wartime and were the first things to be stolen from the dead. With so many to be buried, coffins were scarce and so, once people identified their dead, they would pin a note on them, giving the name and asking for money to help bury them. People visiting these makeshift morgues would throw a few kopeks on the corpses. It was only later, visiting another hospital morgue where the bodies had been properly washed and laid out like wax figures, that Harper finally took in the grim horror of so many deaths.

Throughout the ‘July Days’, as they became known, Donald Thompson had been out with his camera and tripod, sometimes on foot, but often racing up and down the streets in a hired car with the ‘camera sticking up in the tonneau’, looking ‘not unlike a new kind of gun’, as Florence Harper recalled. ‘In fact it looked so dangerous that it gave us a clear passage up the Nevsky.’ With reckless abandon, Thompson had set up his camera at every opportunity ‘and proceeded to crank’. But late that afternoon he had witnessed a final, sickening demonstration of mob savagery reminiscent of the February days, which he did not record on film. Out at the Tauride Palace he had seen three revolutionists dressed as sailors fire from a motor car on a group of officers on the steps of the building, after which they had driven away at speed, only to be stopped soon afterwards by a motor truck that blocked the road. The men had been dragged from the car and promptly lynched by the crowd that had gathered. It was a new kind of savagery that he hadn’t seen before: ‘they stretched them up to the cross arm of a telegraph pole, and didn’t tie their hands. Then they drew them off the ground about three feet. All three of them as they were hanging tried to hold on to each other, but the mob knocked their hands away and they slowly strangled to death.’ Hardly the most comforting story with which to conclude a letter to his wife Dot, back home in Kansas.

Michael DeBusk says

If you only read one book on the October Revolution, this is not the one to read. Helen Rappaport offers a supplemental account of the revolution chronicling the perspectives of Western expatriates caught up in the events in Petrograd. While interesting for what it is, Rappaport’s narrative reads like it might have been written by one of her journalist subjects. That is, she focuses almost exclusively on the facts of her subjects’ experiences with very little attention to setting the scene with commentary or context.

Chris says

Disclaimer: ARC via Netgalley.

Helen Rappaport’s most recent book is about the Russian Revolution. Now, I think I know what you are saying to yourself. Why do we need another one? Well, Rappaport presents the Revolution in Petrograd from

the viewpoint of foreigners, of those we didn't so much have a dog in the fight as it where, but who saw it all unfold.

It's this perspective that makes the book engrossing and well worth the time it takes to read. The majority of people that Rappaport follows are British and American, but they come from all social classes. There are ambassadors and their man servants, there are actresses, and communists. There are, of course, the news people.

When she can, and this is pretty of times, Rappaport lets her first hand sources speak for themselves. In many ways, this is more powerful writing, in particular when she deals with the last stand of the cadets. While every so often she interjects. For instance, when Thompson, a reporter from Kansas writes his wife about Lenin, Rappaport notes "the 'innocent boy' boy from Kansas had it in one" but even these asides do not disrupt the flow of the book.

While a basic understanding of Russian during WWI would be helpful, it is not fully required. Rappaport does give the reader enough background, not only of the Russian politics, but also of the foreigners in Russia, that it is impossible to get lost.

Cheryl says

Helen Rappaport studied Russian history at Leeds University and is now recognized as a specialist in that area of study. During the 1990's she began delving into accounts of the Russian Revolution. She found many accounts written by Russians. But little had been written from the perspective of foreigners who were living in Russia during that time period. She began researching and collecting the accounts of these people. The publication of her book coincides with the centenary of the Russian Revolution.

A large number of foreigners had been living in Petrograd, Russia (the capitol city formerly known as St. Petersburg) for many years, and in some cases, decades before the revolution in 1917. Of course there were diplomats and their support staff, but there were also many businessmen, bankers, doctors and nurses, governesses, teachers, aid workers, journalists, and spouses. After extensive research using eyewitness information gathered from archives, letters, diaries, diplomatic papers, newspaper and journal articles, books, and telegrams, Ms. Rappaport has compiled an exhaustive account of the events as seen through the eyes of these witnesses living in Petrograd.

At first, most accounts were hopeful after the tsar's abdication. However, with each passing day, the situation turned more chaotic as the country's economic and social structure disintegrated and no one seemed to be in control. The once beautiful, cultured and cosmopolitan city became "dingy and sordid and dilapidated" according to Somerset Maugham. The new Belgian ambassador arrived and was shocked at what he saw: "Petrograd is a revolting cesspool....I've never seen anything as horrible..." The Provisional Government, the Socialist Revolutionaries, the Mensheviks, and the Bolsheviks all fought for control. The Bolsheviks were actually a minority group but were determined to wrest control of the government by any means possible. One observer wrote that the Bolsheviks would have people believe that they were in control when actually the city was under "mob rule".

Ms. Rappaport's well written, comprehensive and well documented account will appeal to serious students and readers of Russian history. This insightful and informative book presents a sad and disturbing narration of events that will leave the reader with many thoughts of "what if" and "if only".

Susan says

I have enjoyed many of Helen Rappaport's previous books, such as, "A Magnificent Obsession," and "The Romanov Sisters," so I was eager to read her latest work. "Caught in the Revolution," gives us the first-hand, eye-witness, accounts of foreign nationals in Petrograd during the outbreak of the Russian Revolution.

Even before the revolution began, the city was in turmoil. We begin in 1917, with Russia at war and overflowing with refugees. Despite the first world war, and all of Russia's internal problems, Petrograd was a city which sheltered a large, foreign community, as well as international industry. There was a large community of privileged expatriates; dominated by the highly insular and ultra conservative British Colony, led by British ambassador, Sir George Buchanan. The war also saw this community joined by a number of American engineers and entrepreneurs and, in 1916, a new American ambassador; David Rowland Francis and his enterprising valet, Philip Jordan. There was also the flamboyant French ambassador, Maurice Paleologue. These three headed the expatriate community and their stories are told throughout this book.

However, this book is not simply told from the point of view of the great and the good. The unfolding political situation attracted journalists and photographers. Revolution brought unlikely visitors, such as Emmeline Pankhurst, who wanted to encourage Russia to stay in the war, as well as visit women's groups – including the Petrograd Women's Death Battalion. Names you will recognise include author, Arthur Ransome; then a journalist. Also, another author, then a spy, was W. Somerset Maugham; sent by the Secret Intelligence Service and given the rather daunting task, "to prevent the Bolshevik Revolution and to keep Russia in the war." For anyone who was not already aware of Maugham's experiences as a spy, I direct you to his wonderful book, "Ashenden."

Many in this privileged, expatriate society, were blind to the gathering resentment and hunger in the streets, but others realised the danger. The over-riding belief was that revolution, if it came, would come after the war. Revolution, though, obliterated any thought of war and, when revolution erupted, many foreign nationals in the city were there as witnesses. From nurses to governesses, to bank workers and industrialists, they were all caught up in events. Violence erupted on the streets, food shortages affected everyone and, although many were, justifiably terrified, others admitted that they found it rather thrilling.

The initial revolution seemed to result in many Russian workers assuming that 'Freedom' was equated with no work. Hotel rooms were no longer serviced; requests in the restaurants met with shrugs and the city dissolved into disarray. Eventually, the violence unleashed in the streets directly affected the foreign nationals, with the Hotel Astoria, where many were staying, being attacked. Those who ventured out faced abuse, or worse. Even something as seemingly innocent as wearing a hat, or gloves, could have you accused of being a bourgeois and justice could be swift. For example, one woman swore a man stole her purse, seeing him shot. When she discovered the missing purse in the folds of her dress, the mob decided that the only possible solution to the mistake was to carry out the same sentence on her...

This really is a wonderful read, full of larger than life characters. One of my personal favourites was Sir George Buchanan, who stoutly walked outside amidst the fighting – being caught putting on his coat like a 'naughty schoolboy' as he refused to listen to advice. So respected was he, that fighting came to a halt as he walked down the street and erupted again as soon as he had passed by. Still, the perpetual state of uncertainty and disorder affected everyone, as did a city being both slowly frozen and starved. Arthur Ransome was desperate to escape the chaos and futility, stating that, if he did make it back to England his sole interest

would be, “gluttony,” while photographer and filmmaker, Donald Thompson, thought that Russia was, ‘going to hell.’

This book will really put you in the very centre of the Russian Revolution, with those viewing events being largely impartial and so able to comment on the situation less emotionally. It is also clear that many of those in this book attempted to help the disastrous political situation in Russia before the revolution and, of course, were involved in the finally fruitless attempt to keep Russia in the war after it happened. There were those who refused to be intimidated by events, others who stayed behind voluntarily and others who were stranded by circumstances. Rappaport has done an excellent job of allowing them to tell their story and concludes by telling us what happened to all of the main characters we meet throughout this book.

Laurie says

This is a hard book to review since I do not like reading non-fiction. The four star rating is for the exceptional research by Helen Rappaport and her attention to details in the writing. There were so many times I felt that I was in Petrograd. I could hear the gun fire, see the women in the long bread lines and enjoy the architecture of the city. The hardships the people went through amazed me. The wealthy, the poor and the foreigners all suffered extremely. Of course war is horrifying; but being invited to stand and watch at such a close distance is shocking.

A few things jumped out at me as I was reading. I was unaware of the British helping the Russians during the war. (Before the revolution) They held benefits to purchase warm clothes for the Russian soldiers.

The first women’s battalion in the world was formed during the Revolution by Maria Bochkareva.

I questioned why foreign citizens and diplomats did not leave Russia earlier than they did.

I wished many times that photograph’s had been included in the book.

From February to December, 2017, the city of Petrograd fell. It does not take long for a revolution to destroy the way of life for so many.

I received an Advanced Reader Copy of this book from Book Browse and St. Martin’s Press for an honest review.
