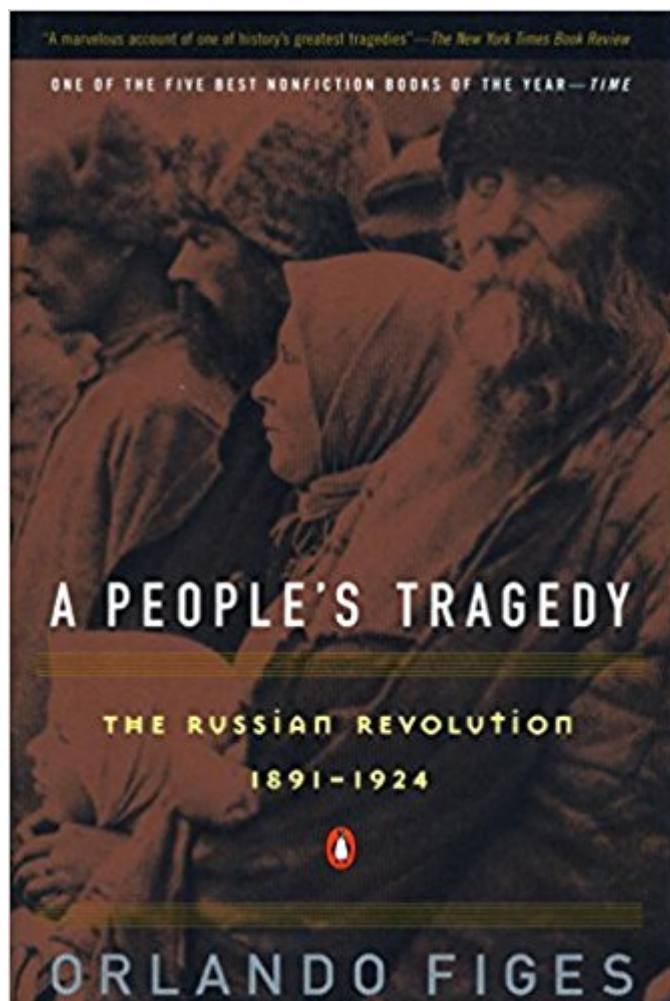


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# A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution: 1891-1924



## Synopsis

On the brink of the 100th anniversary of the Russian Revolution, read *A People's Tragedy* — the most vivid, moving, and comprehensive history of the events that changed the world. It is history on an epic yet human scale. Vast in scope, exhaustive in original research, written with passion, narrative skill, and human sympathy, *A People's Tragedy* is a profound account of the Russian Revolution for a new generation. Many consider the Russian Revolution to be the most significant event of the twentieth century. Distinguished scholar Orlando Figes presents a panorama of Russian society on the eve of that revolution, and then narrates the story of how these social forces were violently erased. Within the broad strokes of war and revolution are miniature histories of individuals, in which Figes follows the main players' fortunes as they saw their hopes die and their world crash into ruins. Unlike previous accounts that trace the origins of the revolution to overreaching political forces and ideals, Figes argues that the failure of democracy in 1917 was deeply rooted in Russian culture and social history and that what had started as a people's revolution contained the seeds of its degeneration into violence and dictatorship. *A People's Tragedy* is a masterful and original synthesis by a mature scholar, presented in a compelling and accessibly human narrative.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Written in a narrative style that captures both the scope and detail of the Russian revolution, Orlando Figes's history is certain to become one of the most important contemporary studies of

Russia as it was at the beginning of the 20th century. With an almost cinematic eye, Figes captures the broad movements of war and revolution, never losing sight of the individuals whose lives make up his subject. He makes use of personal papers and personal histories to illustrate the effects the revolution wrought on a human scale, while providing a convincing and detailed understanding of the role of workers, peasants, and soldiers in the revolution. He moves deftly from topics such as the grand social forces and mass movements that made up the revolution to profiles of key personalities and representative characters. Figes's themes of the Russian revolution as a tragedy for the Russian people as a whole and for the millions of individuals who lost their lives to the brutal forces it unleashed make sense of events for a new generation of students of Russian history. Sympathy for the charismatic leaders and ideological theorizing regarding Hegelian dialectics and Marxist economics--two hallmarks of much earlier writing on the Russian revolution--are banished from these clear-eyed, fair-minded pages of *A People's Tragedy*. The author's sympathy is squarely with the Russian people. That commitment, together with the benefit of historical hindsight, provides a standpoint Figes takes full advantage of in this masterful history. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Packed with vivid human detail and incident, British historian Figes's monumental social and political history spans Russia's entire revolutionary period, from the czarist government's floundering during the famine of 1891 to Lenin's death in 1924, by which time all the basic institutions of the Soviet dictatorship--a privileged ruling elite, random terror, secret police, torture, mass executions, concentration camps--were in place. Figes dismantles any number of myths surrounding the Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917, a military coup rammed through at Lenin's insistence ("hardly any of the Bolshevik leaders had wanted it to happen until a few hours before it began"). Using diaries, letters, memoirs and archival documents, Cambridge don Figes provides masterful portraits of cynical, power-hungry Lenin, driven by an absolute faith in his mission; Alexander Kerensky, weak-willed, vain democratic leader, the self-styled savior of Russia; writer Maxim Gorky, plagued by the fear--and later by the terrible realization--that the "people's revolution" was a descent into barbarism; Tolstoyan peasant reformer Sergei Semenov; and dozens of lesser-known figures. In this vibrant magnum opus, Figes illumines the manifold sources of Russia's failure to take a democratic path. Illustrations not seen by PW. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Figes's history of the Russian Revolution is detailed and an enjoyable read. Figes's use of individual

storylines is especially helpful in elucidating this complicated subject matter. These individual storylines never lose their context and Figes does not stray too long from the main story. Figes should also be commended for not pulling punches. Figes is sure to point out each party's weaknesses and positives. He also spends a great deal of the book (first 1/3 of book) examining the causes of the Revolution, including the 1905 Revolution. This portion of the book can be frustrating when you mostly want to know about the actual events of the Revolution. However, the reader is rewarded once the details and events of the Revolution are told. The actual Revolution is complex, proper introduction and context enhances the reader's understanding to a great deal. This information is especially important because of the different parties involved (Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, The Duma, the Social Democrats, the Revolutionary Democrats). A handy index of these parties is helpful; but more detail in the index would be helpful. Overall, this book is a detailed and compelling telling of the Russian Revolution. Although, its length will give some readers pause (rightly so), taking the plunge with this book will reward the reader interested in the Russian Revolution.

This is a great read. The author wrote in a style that reads like a novel instead of a boring history. If you want to learn why Russia moved to the political left and then back again, this is the book. The application to today is worth the time to read this. You won't be disappointed.

Wonderful. If there's a man who can write non-fiction books Orlando Figes is one. I wish he would write about other times and places, I would buy his books immediately. His other book on Russia's culture (I forgot the title) is also great. The best thing about this author is that anything he writes about, no matter how complicated it may seem or how foreign it may be, he makes it vivid and absorbing. Reading him is like having your best friend trying to make you understand something you've been studying but still can't get the gist of. I like the way he presents us with the facts. It's not deferential to any political side. He talks about the people, not about ideas or policies. He lets us know how people lived, their environment, their heritage and personal backgrounds, how they felt and what they believed in, what they lacked and what they wanted. It's all about people. You see what they did, you know their circumstances, then you judge. I love that. I did notice, though, that the author tends to explain (or should I say blame?) failure many times on lack of a consensus between factions, which seems to me a childish excuse, an easy scapegoat. Then, when he presents other versions of the facts, and compares them to his, he always makes sure his version stands middle-of-the-way between the "rightist" and the "leftist". But I doubt if there really exists any

"rightist" version at all in some cases. Anyway, this book was a pleasure to read.

You can't make an omelet without breaking some eggs and the Russian Revolution was one bloody big omelet. Orlando Figes does an admirable job of providing a look at the big picture of the Revolution--taking us back a good two decades before it began and bringing us up to Lenin's death, about a decade after. The advantage of this perspective is that it gives the reader an historical context for the events that eventually brought down centuries of tsarist rule and raised up the Bolsheviks. The obvious disadvantage of such an approach is that a certain amount of detail is unavoidably lost. Still, for a one-volume treatment of the subject, you can't go wrong with this book. Comprehensive and informed, it is a generally lively read, as history books go. Figes tries to balance the personalities, the politics, and the events of the Revolution to bring it to life without sacrificing facts. It is a compelling period filled with fascinating characters--Rasputin, Tsar Nicholas, Kerensky, Lenin, Trotsky, Lvov, Gorky and that's just scratching the surface. Figes, not quite agreeing with the Marxist/Hegelian view that men don't make history, effectively shows the importance of the personalities of the Revolution's cast of characters and how a different man in the same place at the same time could have easily changed everything. Figes tries to remain balanced in his account by pointing out where "right wing" historians and "left wing" historians often interpret events differently. His own view, in the end, is that the Bolshevik revolution was an idealistic concept that was doomed to fail when applied by and applied to imperfect human beings. The result was the erosion of idealism to totalitarian terror. If you are a committed Marxist, chances are you'll find yourself opposing the tone of this book. If you are a commie-basher, it'll probably suit you better, but Figes sympathy towards the more genuinely committed communists will probably aggravate your intolerance. For the rest of us, without a particular ideological axe to grind, Figes comes off about as fair and balanced as a thinking individual with the capacity for informed judgment can be. This book is long, dense, and it'll take a while for you to read, but if the subject interests you at all, it's well worth the time and effort. It's also essential reading to understand how and why the Soviet experiment degenerated into the nightmare that were the Stalin years. With so much talk lately about America's turn towards "socialism" and the rising level of vitriolic and polarizing discontent with our government, *\*A People's Tragedy\** offers unexpected contemporary insight into the dynamics of political and social change that should give us all pause. Even if we're condemned to repeat history, at least we can be prepared for it.

What a nightmare for those who live through it. Compelling and complete.

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