

Marot's rejoinder to Pirani

Category: Intellectual History, Left Politics

written by newpolitics | February 24, 2024



Simon Pirani's moral indignation would be fully justified (though not his *ad hominem* attacks) if what he had written about my review, or the implications he drew from it, were true. But that is not the case.

Far from disparaging early critics of the Bolsheviks and their policies, I wrote of their "sincere" and "genuinely felt" reaction to objective realities, of "tormented souls" speaking their minds. How this is an expression of my condescension toward them, Pirani does not adequately explain.

My review examined the documents selected by the author. These documents did not select themselves. I also offered an analysis of the historical context in which they appeared. I pressed Pirani to evaluate analytically what his chosen dissidents were writing about that context, beyond expressing well-justified moral outrage or repeating Alexander Bogdanov. Pirani does little in his Reply to address these concerns.

My review did not deal directly with Pirani's book, *The Russian Revolution in Retreat*, but did offer a summary of Pirani's overall interpretation of the fate of the October Revolution, of which his book was but an early, ramified expression. I concluded that Pirani paid lip service to the objective limits and opportunities available to the Bolsheviks. In his Reply about this matter Pirani adverted to his "third" interpretation: "While some aspects of Bolshevik ideology played a crucial part in weakening and undermining the revolution, that ideology itself was powerfully impacted by social changes over which it had little control, and to whose operation it often blinded itself." Those uncontrollable "social changes" and features of "Bolshevik ideology" that propelled the October Revolution toward its Stalinist denouement are worthy of an independent study from Pirani, a study at a height that considers historiographical developments in the last 15 years — and one that *New Politics* would likely publish, and readers eager to read.