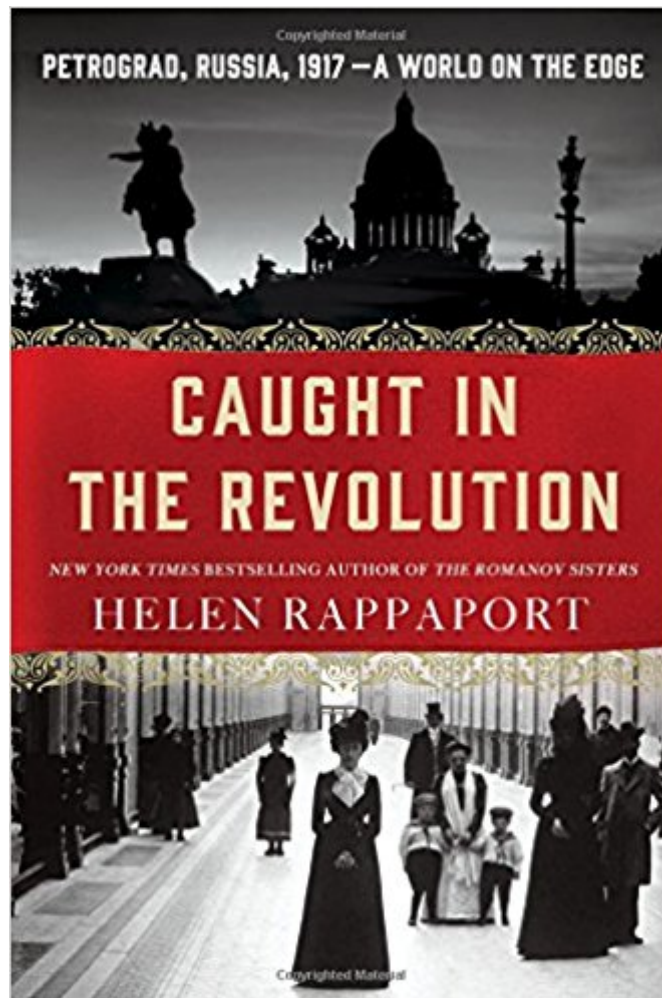


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# Caught In The Revolution: Petrograd, Russia, 1917 - A World On The Edge



## Synopsis

From the New York Times bestselling author of *The Romanov Sisters*, *Caught in the Revolution* is Helen Rappaport's masterful telling of the outbreak of the Russian Revolution through eye-witness accounts left by foreign nationals who saw the drama unfold. 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. There, the foreign visitors who filled hotels, clubs, offices and embassies were acutely aware of the chaos breaking out on their doorsteps and beneath their windows. Among this disparate group were journalists, diplomats, 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 Helen Rappaport draws upon this rich trove of material, much of it previously unpublished, to carry us right up to the action – to see, feel and hear the Revolution as it happened to an assortment of individuals who suddenly felt themselves trapped in a "red madhouse."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Splendid . . . By confining herself to foreigners in Russia's capital, Rappaport takes a necessarily narrow slice of revolutionary history. But the stories these witnesses tell is endlessly fascinating." • "One of the great

strengths of this book is the way in which the unheralded and the celebrated mingle in its pages . . . A mosaic of truth which no fictional one could outdo. [The Washington Times](#) "A multifaceted account of the 1917 Russian Revolution . . . gripping and thoroughly researched. . . [Rappaport brings] the streets and spirit of the early-20th-century Petrograd to life on the page." [Harper's Bazaar](#) One of Bustle's 16 Best Nonfiction Books coming in February 2017 One of Harper Bazaar's 14 Books You Need To Read In February "Helen Rappaport combines thorough scholarship with the stylistic grace of a novelist, and the result is a riveting tale of the Russian Revolution that's difficult to put down." [PopMatters](#) "Rappaport's elegantly detailed writing shapes and pulls together excerpts from letters, diaries, articles, and more, quoted throughout, creating the immediacy and energy of history in the making: terrifying, brutal, and unforgettable." [Booklist](#) "The most comprehensive compendium to date of non-Russian perspectives across social classes. . . . An engaging if challenging look at a country's collapse with worldwide repercussions. Informed general readers will enjoy this glimpse into history; scholars will declare it a definitive study." [Library Journal](#) (starred) "Rappaport creates a portrait of the Russian Revolution from the points of view of outsiders who happened to be in Petrograd at the time . . . An undeniably valuable history of the Russian Revolution." [Kirkus Reviews](#) "Rappaport adopts an eye witness approach to the Russian revolution of 1917 . . . fun, fast-paced." [Publishers Weekly](#) "Illuminating . . . Rappaport has collected a wonderful array of observations . . . delightful and enlightening." [The London Times on Caught in the Revolution](#) "A gripping, vivid, deeply researched chronicle of the Russian Revolution told through the eyes of a surprising, flamboyant cast of foreigners in Petrograd, superbly narrated by Helen Rappaport." [Simon Sebag Montefiore](#), author of *The Romanovs* "Helen Rappaport paints a compelling portrait of the doomed grand duchesses." [People magazine on The Romanov Sisters](#) "Rappaport, with a light hand and admiring eyes, allows the four Grand Duchesses to grow on us as they grow up." [Christian Science Monitor on The Romanov Sisters](#) (10 best books of June 2014)

HELEN RAPPAPORT is the New York Times bestselling author of *The Romanov Sisters*. She studied Russian at Leeds University and is a specialist in Russian and Victorian history. She lives in West Dorset.

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.

Meticulously researched, as usual. Having the memoirs and reports of diplomats and foreign journalists in the thick of the revolution adds another side to the tragic story.

Riveting account! Other reviewers here have already written extensively about Petrograd leading up to the Revolution, so there is no need for me to reiterate their remarks. "Caught in the Revolution" makes for absorbing reading. The Map of Petrograd and the Cast of Characters at the beginning of the book serve as a useful foundation. Once I got into the history, I was acquainted enough with the locales and personages to feel the tension and excitement. It was like a film was going on in my head---only this time there were no historical inaccuracies to mar the narrative. For readers interested in the singular place and time of the onset of the Russian Revolution, it is all here. Finishing this book was both sad and a relief. Sad because the story does not end happily ever

after---not the fault of the author, of course. Relief because the October Revolution was intense for everyone in Petrograd, and finishing the story was emotionally draining. I will have to rest before I read about the Russian Revolution again. Before I read any World War I related history again, for that matter.

I thought that this was a very well written book that covered a subject area that the history books never seem to cover in detail- what it was like for a foreign national to live in Petrograd during the tumultuous year of 1917 and the two Russian Revolutions. The book covered the experiences of not just the ambassadors of the Allied Powers- Paleologue of France, Buchanan of Great Britain and Francis of the US but also the lives of the journalists (Arthur Ransome) and several agents (Somerset Maugham) who were sent into Petrograd for the purpose of trying to keep Russia in the war. In reading some of the narratives in the book I experienced the feeling of just how difficult it was to live in Petrograd during that year (food and electricity shortages, violence and mayhem). Ms. Rappaport did an excellent job with this book and she should be commended for bringing history to life.

This is an amazing book, based on memoirs of foreigners living in St. Petersburg during the Russian Revolution. In the manner of Erik Larson's "In the Garden of the Beasts" it chronicles events as they unfolded and would have been experienced by those who witnessed them. The reader, of course, knows what will happen, but that makes vicariously watching it happen all the more poignant. I could not read this book straight through as I would have liked to have done, and it was difficult to put down. It is meticulously researched and fascinating look at the collapse of the Romanov Empire, the failure of the Provisional Government, and the rise of the Bolsheviks.

Caught in The Revolution: Petrograde, Russia in 1917 etc. this is an extremely well researched book on the chaos and the beginning of the revolution in Petrograde told generally from the point of view of various historical figures; ambassadors, journalists, nurses etc. , it has an enormous cast of characters, this isn't a book that deals with the Romanovs except very briefly in passing, this book deals with the beginnings of the revolution, violence and chaos all around, I got a better sense of the beginning of Russian Revolution from reading this book. The very beginning of the book just before all the chaos started really describes Petrograde/ St. Petersburg , with the various shops and restaurants, and after the revolution started in various stages it was hard to get food, it was violent, and everything was unpredictable. It was a worthwhile read, just not very enjoyable, but I'm glad I

read it.

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