

Mobilizing the Russian Nation: Patriotism and Citizenship in the First World

War. By Melissa Kirschke Stockdale. Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 2016. xvii, 284 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Chronology. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$99.99, hard bound.

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In the past decade, there has been an explosion of new archival work on the Russian experience in World War I. Earlier accounts of Russia's war, shaped by the postwar memoirs of Tsarist generals such as Nikolai Golovin, Anton Danilov, and Anton Denikin, tended to blame Russia's allegedly inferior battlefield performance on insufficient patriotism. Although these generals were anti-communist, their dismissive view of the national-social cohesion of tsarist conscripts actually fit in with Soviet ideological needs, while providing western historians a convenient explanation for the collapse of the eastern front in 1917. "Preoccupied with Russia's defeat," Stockdale argues in *Mobilizing the Russian Nation*, historians have ignored evidence of the "perseverance of Russian patriotism" right into the revolution (4).

Stockdale's account begins with the "mass demonstration of patriotism" in St. Petersburg on the outbreak of war in 1914, which saw nearly 250,000 people crowd into Palace Square to witness Tsar Nicholas II's address to the nation (19). While she allows that draft rioting occurred in sixteen rural provinces, reports of these riots were suppressed by government censors (32–33). Just as in France with her *union sacrée*, Russia's government enjoyed a honeymoon with her people in the early days of the war, a break from labor trouble and political unrest, as the public rallied around the narrative of a "sacred union of tsar and people" (42–44).

Contrary to the claims of Golovin and others after the war that Russia had failed, like her allies, to exploit modern propaganda techniques to foster "wholesome patriotism" in her soldiers, tsarist agitprop was broad and well-financed, if a bit lacking in the area of newsreel footage owing to Russian generals' objections to allowing filming at the front (47–48). Far better were Russian efforts with pictures, brochures, and written stories honoring patriotic heroes. In all, Stockdale writes, "the Russian authorities spent tens of millions of rubles through 1916 on efforts to inform, influence, and mobilize the public in support of the war" (73).

The Russian Orthodox Church, Stockdale shows, also powerfully aided the war effort, from parish schools inculcating "patriotic ideas and feelings" in young soldiers to charity work and medical care, to arranging requiems for the fallen (79–88). Somehow, Russia's church fathers proclaimed the struggle against the Central Powers a "holy war" (75) despite the fact that those powers were Christian. Stockdale might have noted here that the holy war propaganda made far more sense on the Ottoman fronts against Russia's Muslim enemy to the south; alas, she has almost nothing to say about the Turkish side of the war.

The story of social mobilization on the home front was broadly similar, with the rapid expansion of "Voluntary Organizations" providing critical logistical help to industry and the army (113–20). Russian women made heroic contributions in everything from nursing, sewing uniforms, general manufacturing (122–23), to the famous "women's death battalions," which fought at the front (241–44).

The picture grows more muddled when Stockdale turns her attention to the ideological side of "mobilization," as politicians and propagandists rallied Russians against perceived domestic enemies such as Jews (177–79) and Germans (192–93), which culminated in pogroms, mass deportations, and expropriations (199–200). The grand finale of these "fantasies of treason" was, of course, popular paranoia about the allegedly treasonous "dark forces" surrounding Rasputin, which culminated in his assassination. Although it tends to undermine her theme, Stockdale notes that by

the end of 1916, “belief in pervasive treachery,” had “robbed people of hope in victory,” making a “mockery” of sacrifices at the front (212).

Stockdale’s claims ultimately stand or fall on her explanation of the upheavals of 1917. Did the February Revolution give Russian patriotism a new lease on life, or was it the final nail in the coffin of the war effort? Stockdale concedes that the “national unity” born of the revolution was “short-lived” (245). Jarringly, her conclusion cites a Russian who wrote, after the Bolsheviks came to power in November 1917, that “the very idea of . . . a Russian nation, was a mirage . . . there is no nation in Russia, nor is there a people” (247). So were those bitter generals right after all?

To resolve the riddle, Stockdale might have examined the reams of defeatist propaganda Lenin and the Bolsheviks, aided by German subsidies, threw at the Russian army in 1917. Lenin figures only in a footnote aside (223n30), however, and in one patriot’s warning about “Leninism” (226): he is not even listed in the index. This is a glaring omission that undermines Stockdale’s argument just when it should be reaching its climax. Perhaps she could add a chapter in the next edition.

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Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space, and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia. By Christopher Ely. Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2016. xi, 325 pp. Notes. Glossary. Bibliography. Index. Illustrations. Maps. \$39.00, paper.

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In 1883, soon after *Narodnaia Volia* (The People’s Will) accomplished the unthinkable by assassinating Tsar Alexander II, Sergei Kravchinskii published *Underground Russia: Revolutionary Profiles and Sketches from Life*. The book was an instant sensation as it gave a morbidly fascinated European public a glimpse into the motivation and experience of the young Russian radicals who embraced terrorism in an effort to topple the Romanov autocracy. Much has been written since then, both by the revolutionaries who were involved in this subversive enterprise and the historians who study them, in various efforts to explain how and why otherwise peaceful propagandists turned to violence. Christopher Ely’s *Underground Petersburg: Radical Populism, Urban Space, and the Tactics of Subversion in Reform-Era Russia* is much more than just the latest in this series. Although Ely certainly intends to invoke the memory of Kravchinskii’s book through his monograph’s title, he insightfully realigns and narrows our historical focus to the city of St. Petersburg and the revolutionary underground that “established a novel way to occupy and control urban space” (5) in the critical decades of reform. Instead of trying to make sense of the shifting and sometimes contradictory ideological objectives among this relatively small group of radicals, Ely convincingly explores “the material constraints, the tactical decision-making, and the practical strategies that built the underground into a political weapon to be used against the autocracy” (x).

Underground Petersburg is a perceptive, well-written, and compelling monograph that explores well documented instances of revolutionary activity with an utterly fresh perspective by using the lens of space—both urban and underground—to present the city of St. Petersburg as a co-conspirator in the radical populists’ battle with the tsarist state. Ely brilliantly imagines the development of revolutionary populism as a dialectical process fueled by the practical reactions of politicized urbanites to the state’s alternate creation and restriction of public space in reform-era Russia. Ely