

State Regulation of the Economy in the Era of War and Revolution

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I. V. Potkina's new monograph examines state intervention in the economy during World War I by analyzing legislation enacted by the tsarist and Provisional governments between 1914 and 1917. Her analysis highlights the main areas of economic intervention, the economic priorities of the respective administrations, the quantitative distribution of regulatory activity by year, and the evolution of the legislative process in response to the extraordinary circumstances of wartime. The author concludes that the imperial government regulated the economy effectively during the war and more successfully than its Provisional successor. This conclusion challenges the prevailing narrative of the "backward" autocracy's mismanagement of the war effort as the primary reason for its collapse and compels a reconsideration of the question: If the tsarist regime efficiently managed the wartime economy, then why was it overthrown? This review focuses on Potkina's treatment of regulatory policies regarding wartime prohibition and the establishment of fixed prices for necessities to illustrate the discrepancy between official and popular perceptions of the relative success of the state's interventional measures. Prohibition was greeted with pogroms of premises trading in spirits and cases of poisoning by non-potable substances such as denatured alcohol, and most of the government's price-fixing resolutions applied only to goods procured for the armed forces, not those sold to the population in the rear. Potkina attributes the causes of the revolution to the disloyalty of public organizations that constituted the liberal political opposition, but this explanation fails to account for the popular dimension of the events of February, which remains a task for future researchers.

Keywords: World War I, legislation, economy, Russian empire, revolution, peasantry, prohibition, food supply.

Государственное регулирование экономики во время войны и революции

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В новой монографии И. В. Поткиной «В преддверии катастрофы. Государство и экономика России в 1914–1917 года» путем анализа законодательства, принятого царским

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и Временным правительствами в период с 1914 по 1917 г., рассматривается государственное вмешательство в экономику в годы Первой мировой войны: выделяются основные направления экономического вмешательства, экономические приоритеты, количественное распределение регулирующей деятельности по годам и эволюция законодательного процесса в ответ на чрезвычайные обстоятельства военного времени. Автор приходит к выводу, что имперское правительство эффективно регулировало экономику во время войны и более успешно, чем его временный преемник. Этот вывод бросает вызов распространенному нарративу о том, что основной причиной краха «отсталого» самодержавия было неумение вести войну, и заставляет пересмотреть ответ на вопрос: если царский режим эффективно управлял экономикой военного времени, то почему он был свергнут? В статье основное внимание уделяется трактовке Поткиной политики регулирования в отношении запретов военного времени и установления фиксированных цен на предметы первой необходимости, чтобы проиллюстрировать несоответствие между официальным и общественным представлениями об относительном успехе интервенционных мер государства. Сухой закон был встречен погромами помещений, где торговали спиртом, и случаями отравления веществами, содержащими технический спирт, такими как денатурат, а большинство постановлений правительства об установлении фиксированных цен распространялись только на товары, закупаемые для вооруженных сил, а не на те, которые продавались населению. Поткина связывает причины революции с нелояльностью общественных организаций, составлявших либеральную политическую оппозицию, но это объяснение не учитывает народного характера февральских событий, что остается задачей будущих исследователей.

Ключевые слова: Первая мировая война, законодательство, экономика, Российская империя, революция, крестьянство, сухой закон, продовольственное снабжение.

I. V. Potkina's new monograph on Russian state intervention in the economy during World War I is a welcome and impressive contribution to scholarship on the war in Russia and on the economic history of the late imperial, pre-revolutionary period more generally. The study is based on an analysis of legislation enacted by the tsarist regime first and then by the Provisional Government in the sphere of economic policy — broadly defined — and published in the multivolume *Collection of Statutes and Orders of the Government* (1863–1917) and also in the *Collection of Resolutions of the Provisional Government*. The author supplements and contextualizes these legal documents with the records of government agencies and public organizations, as well as with memoir accounts and scholarly studies penned by contemporaries during or shortly after the war, particularly those by the imperial minister of finance P.L. Bark, the imperial minister of trade and industry V.N. Shakhovskii, the Russian Soviet statistician Ia. M. Bukshpan, and the Russian Soviet economist N. D. Kondrat'ev.

Potkina employed a sophisticated and comprehensive methodological approach to the identification and interpretation of the regulatory acts that constitute her primary source base, which she outlines in Chapter 1. She first searched the *Collections* for resolutions issued between 1914 and 1917 that contained the phrase “in view of the extraordinary circumstances of wartime” (p. 62–63). Of the 9,297 regulations adopted during the war, 13.75 percent or 1,279 pertained to socioeconomic conditions, of which 876 were promulgated by the autocracy and 403 by the Provisional Government (p. 64). She then categorized the legislation by topic, date (year), and by initiating individual or institution. An examination of legal decrees by topic revealed eight thematic foci of intervention or concern: finance and credit; taxation; the social sphere; foreign trade; prices; the domes-

tic market; regulatory organs; and enemy subjects (p. 67–69). Based on the number of adopted resolutions associated with each of these topics, Potkina ordered the imperial government's top three priorities as follows: 1) the social sphere, in terms of material support for conscripts and their families, wounded and disabled soldiers, the poorest strata of the population, and subjects who were forcibly resettled due to wartime circumstances; 2) prices, in terms of efforts to restrict their growth on the domestic market; and 3) finance and credit, in terms of meeting the war effort's needs for additional funds (p. 71). Under the Provisional Government, the priorities were reordered, with the problems associated with the ever-rising prices taking first place, followed by the creation of new regulatory organs and the regulation of commodity exchanges on the domestic market (p. 72). The temporal distribution of regulations paints a slightly different picture. Quantitatively, the state's attempts to regulate the economy increased as the war waged on, with 1917 seeing the ratification of 468 or 22.3 percent of wartime legal acts (p. 64). By looking at the legislation by date, Potkina also illustrates how the priorities of the imperial regime — the only one in power over the course of multiple years of the war — changed over time. In 1914–1915, the tsarist administration was primarily concerned with policies related to its credit and tax functions, whereas, by 1916, its focus had shifted to price-fixing and the material support of soldiers and their families (p. 71). This analysis leads Potkina to a rather surprising conclusion: not only did the tsarist regime take significant measures during the war to regulate the economy to safeguard its subjects' material wellbeing, but it did so more successfully than the Provisional Government. In other words, the “catastrophe” to which the book's title refers occurred only *after* the overthrow of the autocracy.

Whether government intervention in the economy in the late imperial period was more detrimental or beneficial to the population's welfare, particularly that of the peasantry, has been the subject of much historiographical debate. Supporters of the detrimental side of the debate have tended to argue that the tsarist regime's method of financing industrialization through indirect tax receipts and grain exports reduced the peasantry to destitution. The most famous advocate of this argument is probably Alexander Gershenkron, writing in the 1960s, but other historians, both Russian and foreign, have followed suit¹. More recently, scholars have challenged the claim that the peasantry at the turn of the 20th century was facing a crisis of subsistence by citing the increased peasant consumption of taxed, so-called “luxury” goods, such as alcohol, sugar, tea, cotton cloth, matches, and kerosene, which was made possible by the state's reduction of direct taxes and, after 1905, elimination of redemption dues². However, these discussions about the impact of state economic policies on peasant standards of living have typically been invoked to explain the reasons for peasants' participation in the Revolution of 1905. To my knowledge, there is almost universal agreement among historians today that the autocracy's mismanagement of the economy during World War I was one of the, if not the main, reasons for its collapse. Potkina's evidence to the contrary therefore raises a most important question:

¹ See: *Gershenkron A. Agrarian polices and industrialization // The Cambridge economic history of Europe. Cambridge, 1966. Vol. VI. P. 706–800.*

² See: *Simms J. Y. The crisis in Russian agriculture at the end of the nineteenth century: A different view // Slavic review. 1977. Vol. 36, issue 3. P. 377–398; Wheatcroft S. G. Crises and the condition of the peasantry in late imperial Russia // Peasant economy, culture, and politics of European Russia, 1800–1921. Princeton, 1991. P. 128–172; Plaggenborg S. Tax policy and the question of peasant poverty in tsarist Russia, 1881–1905 // Cahiers du monde russe. 1995. Vol. 36, issue 1–2. P. 53–69; Smith S. A. “Moral economy” and peasant revolution in Russia, 1861–1918 // Revolutionary Russia. 2011. Vol. 24, issue 2. P. 143–171.*

If the tsarist regime efficiently managed the economy during the war, then why was it overthrown?

In the book's subsequent chapters, the author offers support for her thesis by detailing the motivations and results of regulations adopted in the following areas: social welfare, finances and taxes, market relations, foreign trade, and enemy aliens. I would like to focus my comments on two policies implemented within these areas that most directly affected the majority of the Russian empire's population — the peasantry — which constitutes the subject of my own research. These policies are wartime prohibition (the so-called “dry law”) and the establishment of fixed prices for food and other basic necessities, which Potkina treats in Chapters 3 and 5, respectively. A discussion of these policies helps to elucidate the disconnect or discrepancy between the intended consequences of state intervention in the economy and the popular perception or reception of these interventional measures.

The immediate aim behind the tsarist regime's enactment of a ban on the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages alongside the general mobilization of the Russian armed forces on July 19, 1914 was to ensure that the call-up of the empire's mostly peasant conscripts proceeded in a calm and orderly fashion. By a decision of the Council of Ministers from August 9, 1914, the ban was extended until 1 October, and then an imperial *ukaz* from August 22, 1914 extended it until the end of the war (p. 172–173). According to Potkina, the extension of prohibition beyond the initial mobilization period pursued two longer-term goals: the “sanitization”, from both the moral-ethical and medical points of view, of the treasury's revenue streams, and the reduction of the population's consumption of vodka (p. 170). However, the state's monopoly on the sale of vodka and other spirits, introduced in 1895, had generated considerable income in peacetime, and it is from the perspective of the loss of potential income that the decision to prohibit alcohol is usually criticized³. Yet, Potkina convincingly demonstrates that prohibition was not as financially disastrous for the empire as previously assumed. Using figures provided by the Central Statistical Commission of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Potkina estimates that tax receipts from the sale of alcohol in the prewar years of 1912 and 1913 constituted 26.5 and 26.3 percent of the state budget, respectively, a significant amount (p. 171). In 1914, revenues from “state liquor operations” decreased by 394.5 million rubles or 45.1 percent when compared with 1913 (p. 177). Given that prohibition was introduced just after the mid-year point, a 45.1 percent decrease makes sense. In 1915 and 1916, revenues from the sale of alcohol continued to fall in comparison with those from 1913, by 83.96 and 94.3 percent, respectively. However, the budget as a whole for 1914, 1915, and 1916 was smaller than that for 1913 by 519.2, 285.1, and 385.2 million rubles, or 15.2, 5.4, and 11.3 percent, respectively. Potkina therefore concludes that the autocracy's wartime deficits cannot be solely or even mostly attributed to lost revenue from sale of alcohol (p. 177).

As further evidence of the relative success of prohibition, Potkina points to positive evaluations of the measure by Russian and foreign leaders at the time. For example, the Russian minister of finance Bark, admittedly one of the progenitors of the prohibition legislation (p. 169), wrote in his memoirs, “When the ukaz about mobilization followed,

³ See: *Christian D. Prohibition in Russia, 1914–1925* // *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*. 1995. Vol. 9, issue 2. P. 89–118; *McKee A. Sukhoi zakon v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny: prichiny, kontsepsiia i posledstviia vvedeniia sukhogo zakona v Rossii, 1914–1917* // *Rossii i Pervaia mirovaia voina*. St Petersburg, 1999. P. 147–159.

all places that sold alcoholic beverages, with the minor exception of first-class clubs and restaurants, were automatically closed. This measure turned out to be unusually beneficial, mobilization proceeded in perfect order, without those excesses, which were observed during the Japanese war” (p. 171). Likewise, British prime minister David Lloyd George, in an address to the House of Commons on February 15, 1915, remarked that “with one stroke of the pen, Russia at the very start of the war enormously increased its own resources by banning the sale of alcoholic beverages. It is hard to believe that this measure alone increased the productivity of its labor force, in some cases by 30–50 percent. It is as if Russia added several million new workers to the quantity existing in the country, without even increasing expenditures on their support” (p. 172). Although Potkina describes Lloyd George as a “third-party and independent observer” of Russian party politics, the British prime minister was likely looking for new ways to increase his own country’s labor productivity that did not require him to loosen its purse strings. Concerning Bark’s comment, it is a better reflection of wishful thinking than of reality. It is possible that, overall, Russia’s soldiers arrived at the war front in 1914 in a less intoxicated state than they had in 1904, but to characterize the mobilizational process as unfolding “in perfect order” is a bit hyperbolic. As other scholars, myself included, have shown, the implementation of prohibition alongside general mobilization incited widespread discontent among conscripted peasant-reservists, which manifested in the form of pogroms of state liquor stores and other premises that sold or stored alcohol⁴. Potkina acknowledges the occurrence of these disorders in her discussion of studies conducted by the Russian historians V. B. Aksenov and O. A. Chagadaeva, but she seems to consider the disorders’ impact as inconsequential, based on her characterization of A. V. Nikolaev’s position that “the transition to administrative-prohibitive measures with the start of World War I was actually conditioned and did not provoke protest” as “a more realistic and balanced view” than that offered by either Aksenov or Chagadaeva (p. 172)⁵. The fact of the matter is that the declaration of prohibition provoked considerable protest on the part of peasant-soldiers and their families, for two main reasons. The first is that the inability to buy and raise a glass of vodka prior to their departure for the front violated a longstanding tradition observed by conscripted peasants, dating back to the days when induction into the armed forces was essentially a life sentence, a tradition to which Potkina refers (p. 171). The second, more important, reason is that the legal application of prohibition to only establishments that served the peasant population — the ban did not apply to those designated as “first-class” — demeaned peasants, from whom the regime demanded the lion’s share of the war’s sacrifices. By illicitly purchasing or outright stealing supplies of alcohol, peasant-recruits challenged the authority of both the prohibition laws and the government that decreed them.

⁴ See: *Sanborn J. A.* The mobilization of 1914 and the question of the Russian nation: A reexamination // *Slavic review*. 2000. Vol. 59, issue 2. P. 267–289; *Posadskii A. V.* Krest’ianstvo vo vseobshchei mobilizatsii armii i flota 1914 goda (po materialam Saratovskoi gubernii). Saratov, 2002. P. 82–94; *Moore C. M.* “Vino kazennoe, i my kazennye”: Krestiane-prizyvnik i zapret prodazhi spirtnykh napitkov v Rossii v 1914 g. // *Malen’kii chelovek i bol’shaia voina v istorii Rossii, seredina XIX — seredina XX v.* St Petersburg, 2014. P. 161–174.

⁵ Potkina cites: *Aksenov V. B.* “Sukhoi zakon” 1914 goda: ot pridvornoii intrigi do revoliutsii // *Rossiiskaia istoriia*. 2011. No. 4. P. 126–139; *Chagadaeva O. A.* Sotsial’nye i ekonomicheskie posledstviia rossiiskoi antialkogol’noi kampanii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny // *Istoricheskii zhurnal: nauchnye isledovaniia*. 2014. No. 4. P. 413–424; *Nikolaev A. V.* Antialkogol’naia kampaniia v Rossii 1894–1914 godov: istoricheskii opyt resheniia problemy // *Vestnik Cheliabinskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*. 2008. No. 25. P. 60–72.

In support of the achievement of prohibition's tertiary objective noted above — decreasing the per capita consumption of vodka in the empire — Potkina quotes the administrator of a sanitarium for patients suffering from alcoholism and neurotic disorders, a Russian physician by the name of I. N. Vvedenskii, who proclaimed that “on 19 July 1914 [the first day of mobilization and prohibition] Russia secured a victory over an enemy so much more terrible than the external enemy” (p. 174). Yet Dr. Vvedenskii's assessment is only one opinion. F. F. Charnetskii, the senior resident physician of the central reception ward for the mentally ill in Moscow, reported as early as November 1914 that the implementation of prohibition had prompted the Moscow population to ingest substances containing alcohol that were not potable, including but not limited to denatured alcohol, varnish, lacquer, and cologne. The first patient suffering from poisoning by such substances was admitted to Charnetskii's ward at the end of August 1914; between August and November 1914, the ward had admitted 30 so-called “denatured alcohol patients”. Of these, only 2 confessed to having consumed varnish and denatured alcohol prior to prohibition; the remaining 28 had resorted to the use of denatured alcohol only after July 1914. According to Charnetskii's patients, “everyone drinks”, and the sale and use of substances such as denatured alcohol, varnish, and cologne was ubiquitous in Moscow tearooms, taverns, and flophouses⁶. In short, the celebrations of prohibition's “victory” recorded by contemporary government officials, medical professionals, and zemstvo leaders in their accounts or recollections of the war were a bit premature.

The positive consequences of prohibition that Potkina lists include “a significant growth in the quantity of monetary funds among the rural population, since it excluded from its budget large expenses on drunkenness”, as reported by the ministry of finance (p. 175). The prevalent, if incorrect, assumption among Russian policymakers that the peasantry during the war was flush with cash negatively informed the state's response to the twin problems of ever-increasing prices for and endemic shortages of food and other necessities in the rear, commonly referred to as the “food supply crisis”. According to Potkina's quantitative analysis of wartime legislative acts, the tsarist and Provisional governments' attempts to resolve the food supply crisis constituted the second and first priorities of the respective administrations. Combined, the two regimes issued 253 resolutions related to the regulation of prices and another 191 to the regulation of the domestic market in general (p. 234). Having categorized the 253 price-regulating resolutions according to the products to which they were applied, Potkina finds that the items most subject to price regulations over the war's entire duration were cereal crops, including their processed forms; raw leather; various types of fuel (coal, coke, and petroleum); and textiles (cotton, wool, and linen), intended for consumption on both the war and home fronts (p. 237). Enumerated in the aggregate, the state's legislative activity in the sphere of establishing price limits indeed appears impressive. A chronological accounting of official efforts to restrict the growth of prices tells a somewhat different story.

Potkina locates the tsarist regime's first attempts to centralize price-fixing decisions in the fall of 1915, when the chairmen of the Special conferences for food supply, transport, fuel, and defense were given responsibility for setting rates (p. 238). She describes 1916 as a record year for price regulation, counting 122 decrees pertaining to the establishment of wholesale prices, 16 of which concerned grain products (p. 241). What Potkina does

⁶ Charnetskii F.F. Otravleniia denaturirovannym spirtom, polituroi i drugimi surrogatami vodki v Moskve (Predvaritel'noe soobshchenie) // V bor'be za trezvosť. 1915. Issue 1. P. 40–46.

not make clear is the fact that, until the fall of 1916, the fixed prices for grain applied only to products procured by government agents for the needs of the army, not to privately traded goods⁷. In December 1915, some members of the Special conference for food supply proposed regulating the wholesale and retail trade in food on the private market, but the majority rejected this proposal, arguing that “to assume all the work of supplying the population with food would be a task beyond the strength of any government in the world”⁸. Then conference chairman, the minister of agriculture A. N. Naumov, overruled the majority opinion and, in June 1916, announced that all purchases of grain, both public and private, would henceforth be conducted at fixed prices⁹. However, according to the American Canadian historian Lars Lih, the Special conference erred by setting the fixed prices for agricultural products too low. In doing so, it was following the misguided advice of economic experts, such as V. G. Groman, the conference representative from the Union of Towns, who argued that high fixed prices would not entice peasants to sell their grain because they had little need for money. Consequently, in September 1916, when the prices established by the Special conference turned out to be lower than many grain sellers had anticipated, they held onto their grain in expectation of a more favorable counteroffer; as a result, the domestic grain trade ground to a halt¹⁰. By November 1916, the army on the southwestern front had exhausted its food reserves and was living shipment-to-shipment, which prompted the new (and final) imperial minister of agriculture, A. A. Rittikh, to abandon the fixed-price scheme in favor of the *razverstka*¹¹.

As peasants during the war complained, the tsarist administration “established fixed prices only for those products that leave the peasants’ hands (rye, oats, and so on) but not for manufactured goods”¹². This lopsided approach to price-fixing resulted in a scissors’ crisis, according to which peasant producers could not earn enough from the sale of their produce to purchase the consumer products that they had come to view — and which the regime itself had designated — as basic necessities (*predmety pervoi neobkhodimosti*). In my opinion, the inability or refusal of the imperial government to safeguard the peasant population’s access to necessary goods at affordable prices, more than any other wartime issue, undermined its legitimacy in the eyes of the peasantry and directly contributed to its fall from power. Potkina sees the situation differently. Based on the number of regulatory acts that emanated from the tsarist regime, it made a good faith effort to arrest wartime inflation and ensure the timely delivery of vital products to regions of consumption and to the front. Of course, output does not imply efficacy, and Potkina admits that not all of the state’s resolutions achieved their intended outcome. Using the example of the rising cost of sugar, Potkina illustrates how the maximum price per *pood* set by the government allowed for an annual increase of 2.12 percent, whereas the actual price per *pood* in a year’s time increased by 37.73 percent. She attributes this discrepancy between prediction and reality to the opportunism of private traders, who simply ignored or evaded the govern-

⁷ Управление делами Особого совещания по продовольствию. Обзор деятельности Особого совещания для обсуждения и объединения мероприятий по продовольственному делу, 17 августа 1915 г. — 17 февраля 1916 г. Петроград, 1916. P. 54–59.

⁸ Ibid. P. 202.

⁹ Lih L. T. Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914–1921. Berkely, 1990. P. 22–24.

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 27–30.

¹¹ Ibid. P. 48–51.

¹² Доклад начальника Kazanskogo gubernskogo zhandarmskogo upravleniia // Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii. F. 102. Op. 254. 1915 g. D. 167. Ch. 28. L. 54 ob. — 55.

ment's resolutions, and to a decrease in the empire's supply of sugar due to the occupation of regions of sugar cultivation by enemy forces (p.239). She also blames the failure of food-supply regulatory measures on the population at large, which "did not want to reconcile itself with the introduced restrictions" on the purchase and consumption of meat and poultry and whose "shortsighted mass behavior in extraordinary circumstances led to the worsening of the food supply situation in the country by the end of 1916" (p.269).

Yet Potkina reserves most of her criticism of the state's legislative-economic actions in the realm of food supply work for the Provisional Government. She characterizes the new regime's adopted solutions to the food supply crisis — notably the distribution of goods by ration cards and the establishment of state monopolies — as too radical (p.270). To illustrate that conditions grew worse, not better, under the Provisional Government, she quotes Kondrat'ev's assessment that "especially from 1917 the situation [with the supply of grain], granted, with fluctuations, begins to deteriorate sharply" (p.244). She also references the findings of the Soviet historian A.L. Sidorov that inflation remained relatively in check until approximately mid-1916 but, by 1917, approached catastrophic proportions (p.256). One of the wartime challenges that Russian officials in both administrations faced was the normalization of the shipment of goods by railway. Potkina argues that in its management of transportation, the Provisional Government was also inept than its tsarist predecessor. She points to the fact that the imperial government issued 25 regulations on cargo transport, whereas the Provisional Government managed to issue only 7, quipping that "evidently, the political crises and endless verbal battles that gripped the country prevented highly qualified engineers from being employed full-time in their areas of expertise" (p.261). She cites the observation of a minister of the Provisional Government, S.N. Prokopovich, that Russia's railway network began to weaken under the strain of the war's demands from the second half of 1916 but suffered an evident breakdown only after July 1917, that is, after the overthrow of the monarchy (p.262–263). Her final piece of evidence is a conclusion drawn by Boris Mironov: "It may sound paradoxical but, before the overthrow of the monarchy, imperial transport, which was always considered to be the main culprit of the difficulties that arose during the war and the weakest link in the national economy, very satisfactorily coped with the increased loads" (p.263).

That late 1916 and 1917 constituted the apogee of food supply crisis conditions during the war (at least prior to the October Revolution) seems indisputable from Potkina's account. What is less certain is whether the worsening conditions are attributable to specific decisions made by the Provisional Government or to the accrual over time of hardships caused by the war. After all, even if the tsarist government handled the problems posed by the extraordinary circumstances of wartime comparatively better than the new administration, the problems did not disappear with the collapse of the old regime. And perhaps that is Potkina's point — that the people overthrew the autocracy expecting something better, but instead received something worse, because they mistakenly blamed the government, rather than the war, for their misfortunes. In fact, one of Potkina's central arguments in the monograph is that the obstacles that the imperial government encountered in the war were common to almost all the war's belligerents. In particular, she mentions that Russian regulations intended to uphold the country's credit-financial system, provide social security to conscripted soldiers and their families, identify supplemental sources of state revenue to cover military expenditures, and restrict the export and increasing costs

of items deemed necessary for daily life and the country's defense belonged to a general European trend (p. 360).

To assess the extent to which the tsarist government adapted its legislative process to meet these common challenges, Potkina developed the analytical concept of the “war-mobilized economy,” which she defines by the presence of the following characteristics: extraordinary circumstances connected with an external threat; the centralization of the administration of the increased state intervention in the economy; the unification of economic entities into a cohesive team (teamship); and agreement and mutual understanding among political elites (conscientiousness) (p. 95). Measuring the imperial regime's regulatory policies against this rubric, Potkina finds that they met all the enumerated criteria save one: mutual agreement and understanding among elites, or conscientiousness (p. 121). The author lays most of the responsibility for this deficit on the shoulders of public organizations, such as the War Industry Committees and the Unions of Zemstvos and Towns, the assistance of which the imperial regime enlisted in the allocation and fulfillment of state orders for war materiel, despite the fact that many members of these organizations belonged to the regime's liberal political opposition. Although these organizations accepted — hypocritically, in Potkina's view — state subsidies to carry out this work, she maintains that their actual contributions to the satisfaction of Russia's defense needs were negligible, in contrast to popular perceptions of their work at the time. For example, according to data compiled by Soviet historians, as of February 1, 1917, Zemgor (the United Committee of the Unions of Zemstvos and Towns) had fulfilled only 33 percent of the orders assigned to it (p. 111). Potkina calls into question the true motives of public organizations in offering to assist the government with the war effort, accusing them of turning the platform that the state legally granted them into a bully pulpit from which to condemn it (p. 108).

This accusation brings us back to the question posed at the beginning of this essay: If the tsarist regime efficiently managed the economy during the war, then why was it overthrown? Potkina's research suggests that the imperial Russian government was overthrown not because it mangled the regulation of the wartime economy, but because the liberal political opposition convinced the Russian people that this was the case. The uniqueness of Russia's war experience — compared to that of the other warring countries — thus lies not in the nature of its economic policies or in the form of its administration, but in the fact that state and society could not put aside their political differences long enough to bring the war to a victorious conclusion. To put it another way, the reason that revolution erupted in the midst of the war in Russia but not elsewhere is that the political opposition in other European countries did not exploit the opportunities provided by the war for its own selfish aims. The irony, of course, is that the Provisional Government succumbed to the same fate to which it condemned its imperial predecessor. When the post-February regime failed to conduct the war effort more skillfully than the tsarist administration had — a promise on which its leaders had campaigned — it too was overthrown.

What is missing from the interpretation of the relationship between the war and revolution outlined immediately above is the popular dimension. Mentioning this lacuna is not intended as a criticism of Potkina's work; her sources, which capture only the attitudes and experiences of ruling elites, cannot possibly address this issue. But it is something with which scholars who study the impact of the war on the population's support for the revolution — such as myself — will have to contend. Overall, I agree with Potkina's

assessment of the machinations of the liberal political opposition, which comprised the leadership of public organizations, that their professed apoliticism was, on balance, a ruse to convince the autocracy to allow them a greater, more visible role in war work, which they then used to launch themselves into power. However, it seems to me that ordinary Russians developed an opinion of tsarist rule as incompetent and arbitrary and thereby illegitimate independent of the influence of the leaders of public organizations, whose liberal political views and ambitions the *narod* hardly shared. Additionally, I disagree with Potkina's implication that the Russian people might have simply been unwilling to bear the sacrifices that the war — and their government — required of them. More likely, the autocracy and the mass of its subjects had different ideas about what decisions or policies were in the best interests of the latter. In that case, even if the imperial government's handling of the wartime economy was comparatively better than that of its successor, in the assessment of the majority of its subjects, it was not good enough.

This monograph has so much to recommend it. The statistical information that Potkina extracted and compiled from the published collections of Russian regulatory acts regarding the number of resolutions issued by year, topic, and initiator will be a boon to future researchers. Her novel approach to the analysis of legal materials underscores what knowledge can be gleaned by studying legislation collectively, as a mass source, as opposed to looking at individual pieces of legislation separately. Her book demonstrates the possibility — in fact, necessity — of conducting serious historical inquiries on the basis of published, non-archival sources. Her development of the analytical concept of the “war-mobilized economy” provides a model that scholars of other wars and in other disciplines besides history can apply in their work. Last but not least, by placing Russia's experience of the war in a pan-European context, by illustrating the tsarist regime's willingness to adapt its legislative process and economic functions to the extraordinary circumstances of wartime, and by comparing the regulatory efforts of the imperial and Provisional Governments, Potkina offers an important corrective to the prevailing narrative that portrays the autocracy as having been too “backward” to cope with the strains of modern war.

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