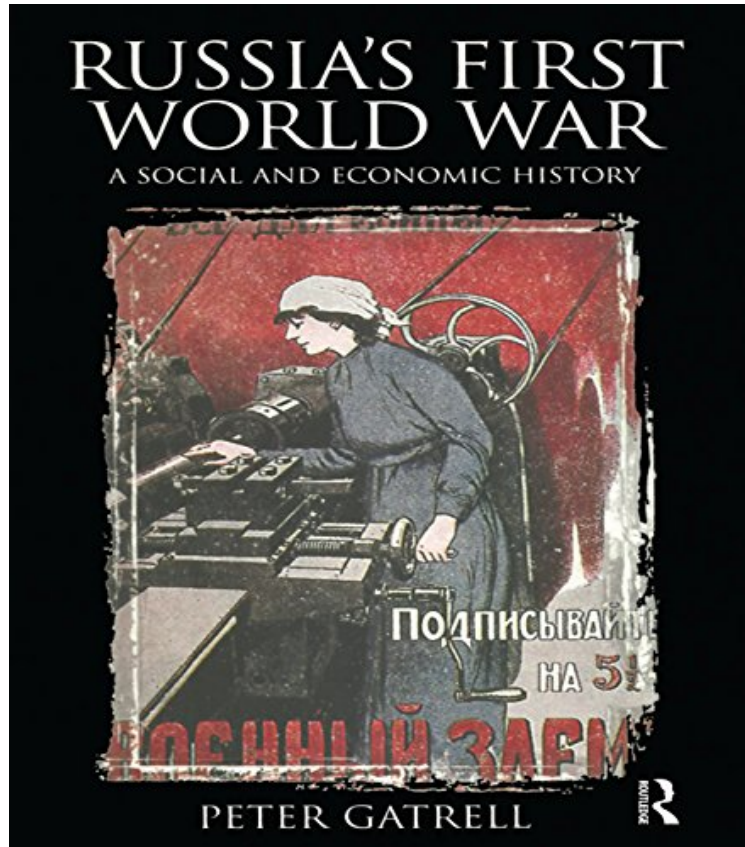


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## Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History

*Peter Gatrell*

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**Peter Gatrell : Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Very Useful; 4.5 Stars By R. Albin This useful and concise book is an analytically oriented survey of the social and economic history of WWI Russia. This book will be useful primarily to individuals with prior knowledge of the basic political history. An important feature of this book is Gatrell's synthesis of considerable secondary literature, much of it in Russian and unavailable to English language readers. As stated by the subtitle, Gatrell focuses on the effects of the war on Russian society and on the Russian economy. Using a somewhat chronological approach, Gatrell addresses social and economic changes at each major phase of the war from the outbreak of hostilities to the aftermath of the Bolshevik takeover. Social and demographic impacts are addressed for each strata of Russian society; the aristocracy, peasantry, urban workforce, and middle classes. There is a fairly detailed description and analysis of the economic changes and dislocations imposed by the war effort, resulting ultimately in disintegration of the economy. Unlike many historians, Gatrell makes good use of tabular data, so this book has considerably more information than its length would suggest. Gatrell is a thoughtful and articulate analyst. A major theme of this book is the way that the events of WWI exacerbated many of the social conflicts in Russian society. The tensions between the Tsarist state and liberal-parliamentary reformers, between business interests and the state bureaucracy, and between classes were considerable exacerbated by the war, particularly with serial defeats and a

failing economy. Military and economic failure, and Nicholas II's disastrous decision to assume personal responsibility ultimately discredited the regime. In a very nice comparative analysis that concludes the book, Gatrell makes the interesting point that the Tsarist state was the only one of the major belligerents not to make significant concessions to labor during the war. Gatrell also makes some other interesting points. He discusses how aspects of Tsarist policy during the war tended to encourage ethnic-nationalist unrest. He points also to some technocratic efforts to manage the economy that would be influential for the subsequent Bolshevik state. Finally, in his concluding and comparative analysis, Gatrell has a particularly nice analysis of the common features of social and economic effects of WWI in all the major belligerents.

8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. From economic mobilization to political disintegration

By George Coppedge

Comparatively little is known about Russia's economic mobilization during World War I. However, it was a rapidly expanding Russian economy that spurred a slower growing Germany to a 'preventive' war in 1914 - the longer Germany waited the more uneven the contest would be in economic terms. Apparently, no one either in Germany or Russia bothered to look at a map - almost all of Russia's imports and exports passed through either the Dardanelles or the Baltic, both of which were easily closed. And when these were closed by Turkey and Germany, Russia's international trade (and military imports) quickly evaporated and their economic problems really began.

Peter Gatrell, the author, organizes the book into 11 chapters covering: military administration, educated society and volunteer economic organizations, soldiers/workers/peasants/refugees, tsarist rule, the lack of industrial coordination, financing, food shortages, pogroms and discrimination, the Provisional Gov't, social collapse, and a final accounting. Gatrell concludes that the collapse of Tsarist gov't (compared to other belligerent nations which didn't experience revolution) was that ordinary Russians had no legitimate way to voice their protests, institute reforms, and participate more meaningfully in gov't. The result was the February and then the October Revolutions.

This is one of the very few books written about economic mobilization during WWI, and the only one I have found exclusively about the Russian experience. (About half of Gatrell's huge list of sources come from little-used Russian-language documents.) The book is well-organized, easy to read, and certainly well-documented. Suggestions I would make for Gatrell's future work include a detailed investigation of the Russians' seriously flawed railway management and its affects on the economy and any discussion of economic contingency planning by the Tsarist gov't in the event the Baltic and Dardanelles were closed to them for importing/exporting.

An excellent source for Russia's economic involvement in WWI!

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. Covers a Gap in Traditional History

By John Matlock

The usual treatment given to the Russians in regard to their actions during World War I has been one of two choices. On the one hand there was the seemingly minor inconvenience (to the Germans) of the Battle of Tannenberg which took some divisions from France. On the other hand was the impact on Russia itself as a precursor to the revolution a few years later.

In this book the author, an expert on Russian history, has written an excellent history of the actions of the Russians during the war. This includes not only the military campaigns but the impact on the Russian citizens, both the elite and the plebeian. Like the rest of the world, Russian industry was mobilized to dramatically increase production. In Tsarist Russia this was somewhat less effective than in other places like the United States. Likewise Russia had problems in feeding themselves. These situations seem to have started the problems that remained with the Soviet Union for generations to come. This is a book that points out the beginnings of recent history as we have come to know it.

The story of Russia's First World War remains largely unknown, neglected by historians who have been more interested in the grand drama that unfolded in 1917. In Russia's First World War: A Social and Economic History Peter Gatrell shows that war is itself revolutionary - rupturing established social and economic ties, but also creating new social and economic relationships, affiliations, practices and opportunities. Russia's First World War brings together the findings of Russian and non-Russian historians, and draws upon fresh research. It turns the spotlight on what Churchill called the 'unknown war', providing an authoritative account that finally does justice to the impact of war on Russia's home front

'In this mesmerising study...[the kaleidoscopic complexities and contradictions within Russian society as the country struggled to stay in the war are masterfully portrayed.]' Professor Geoffrey Swain, University of the West of England 'Gatrell is thorough and judicious in his judgments and analysis...; one can read this volume with full confidence in the reliability of the information.' Daniel Orlovsky, Southern Methodist University, Dallas 'I expect that this book will quickly find a wide audience...sure to remain a foundational text for a long time.' Joshua Sanborn, Lafayette College 'the definitive work on the subject ... thoughtfully constructed and brilliantly executed'. '...just the sort of reliable account of its subject that has long been needed and will benefit both specialists and students.'

Professor Lewis Siegelbaum; American Historical (vol. 111 no. 1, 2006) 'a thought-provoking analysis ... will be the first port of call for anyone looking to understand either wartime Russia or the economic background to the 1917 Revolution'. Professor Ewan Mawdsley Russian (March 2006) From the Back Cover 'In this mesmerising study...[the kaleidoscopic complexities and contradictions within Russian society as the country struggled to stay in the war are masterfully portrayed.]' Professor Geoffrey Swain, University of the West of England 'Gatrell is thorough

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- Who were the key decision-makers and what were the consequences of their decisions for Russia's home front?
- To what extent was Russia a victim of economic backwardness?
- How did the war affect the existing faultlines in Russian society?
- In what ways did the war continue to reverberate during 1917 and 1918?

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Peter Gatrell is Professor of Economic History at the University of Manchester. He has written extensively on Russia, including (with Nick Baron) *Homelands: War, Population and Statehood in Eastern Europe and Russia, 1918-1924* (2004) and the prize-winning book, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (1999).

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