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# Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire

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# Eric Lohr, Nationalizing the Russian Empire

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## REFERENCES

Eric LOHR, **Nationalizing the Russian Empire. The campaign against enemy aliens during World War I**. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2003, XI-237 p. (Russian Research Center Studies, 94)

- 1 Domestic campaigns for the hearts and minds of the population took place in all belligerent states during World War I. An important element of this process was the dissemination of images of friend and foe. Tsarist Russia shared in this tendency. To be sure, not all enemies were immediately and irrevocably demonised, but the strains of war increasingly produced an insidious current of hatred. Accompanying the formal patriotic fervour was a more insidious undercurrent of persecution that extended to ethnic and religious communities. Material grievances helped to turn sentiment into violent action. Economic nationalism became a means of settling old scores and transferring economic assets to “loyal” populations. The campaign against the German “yoke” (*zasil'e*) was targeted at German ownership of land, and industrial and financial assets. The Russian High Command deported German farmers from the land on which many of them had settled for generations, and conducted a vicious campaign against Jews and other minorities. German residents in towns and cities faced opprobrium and even violence from their neighbours. Subsequently this hostility was translated into legalised expropriation. It is with radical developments such as these that this important and timely monograph is concerned.
- 2 Eric Lohr has already published several original articles on aspects of Russian government policy and on ethnic conflict in urban centres during World War I. In this short, concise monograph he has brought together the fruits of his research in Russian archives (particularly the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii arkhiv, the Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi voenno-istoricheskii arkhiv and the Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi

Federatsii). Lohr makes excellent use of the modest secondary literature, including Karl Lindeman's well-known study of the legislation that provided for the expropriation of German settlers, Boris Nolde's standard work on *Russia in the economic war*, which appeared under the auspices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in 1928, and V. S. Diakin's work on German capital. Little published work has escaped his attention, an exception being a study by B. M. Vitenberg, "P. B. Struve i Komitet po ogranicheniiu snabzheniia i trgovli nepriatel'ia, 1915-1917 gg.," in *Sankt-Peterburgskoe nauchnoe obshchestvo istorikov i arkhivistov: Ezhegodnik*, 1997: 217-228.

- 3 Lohr's work raises important questions about the widespread pernicious demonisation of "enemies within" during the world wars of the twentieth century. He demonstrates that this process had several dimensions in tsarist Russia during World War I. Initially the government took steps to deport and intern citizens of enemy states, but the campaign quickly extended to embrace Russia's ethnic minorities, with German settlers and Jews – subjects of the Tsar – being its most prominent targets. Lohr traces the process whereby they too were deported and expropriated. The main driving force behind these campaign against foreign nationals was a perception that "enemy aliens" owed exclusive allegiance to a foreign power. There were nineteenth-century precedents for these actions – France, for example, interned around 30,000 Germans during the Franco-Prussian War. What distinguished tsarist Russia, argues Lohr, is the role that many foreign nationals and naturalised immigrants played in Russia's economic life. Russian nationalists played to public opinion during the war and – combined with the suspicious minds of the Russian High Command – acted as the driving forces behind a new nationalizing ethos. Tsarist officials and generals began to target and strip foreign nationals and immigrants alike of their assets. This further encouraged mass hostility and violence. The author insists that these virulent forms of ethnic absolutism and differentiation originated in the cauldron of war; they were not the product of a prior evolutionary process.
- 4 This argument is elaborated by means of four case studies. The first concerns the riots that occurred in Moscow in May 1915, when German shops and warehouses in Moscow were subject to frenzied looting and arson over several days. "The era of dynastic war is at an end, and the era of popular participation has arrived," observed M. A. Tokarskii in the first issue of *Izvestiia Moskovskogo voenno-promyshlennogo komiteta* in 1915 – an ironic comment, in view of the violence and murder that was taking place as he spoke. Women workers played a leading role in the riots, conveying their anger at the exemption from military service given to enemy aliens. Lohr sets the riots in the context of rising anti-German sentiment elsewhere in Europe, as a result of the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the loss of the fortress at Przemysl. Tsarist officials had an ambivalent attitude, welcoming public demonstrations of patriotism but being simultaneously anxious about public order. Some observers argued that the lesson to be learned was that the government had to take a more aggressive stance towards enemy aliens. As to the economic impact of the riots, Lohr calculates that total losses amounted to 72 million rubles, equivalent (according to my calculations) to one quarter of annual investment in industry in 1914.
- 5 The second case study deals with the expropriation of German businesses. Before the war Moscow merchants denounced foreign economic penetration. The war offered them an opportunity to proclaim their patriotism and simultaneously rid the country of German "domination." Calls for a boycott of German enterprises – not just in Moscow, but throughout the Central Industrial Region – soon turned into more aggressive action. The Duma captured the public mood, agreeing on 3 August 1915 to establish a commission to

“fight the German yoke.” When he entered office two months later, the Minister of the Interior A. N. Khvostov lent his vigorous support to this campaign, which culminated in sequestration and the transfer of ownership to Russian individuals. Perhaps Lohr does not emphasise sufficiently strongly how these measures anticipated the Bolshevik campaign against private property (the Bolsheviks inherited and utilised the tsarist liquidation commissions). He does however quantify their results, which liquidated and transferred two per cent of share capital in industry by February 1917.

- 6 The third case study addresses the expropriation of landowners, as provided for by legislation in February and December 1915. A merit of Lohr’s analysis is that he again shows the interplay of bureaucratic and military thinking. He points to the willingness of Russian liberals to countenance expropriation as part of a strategy to develop Russian civic engagement, although he gives no space to Miliukov’s misgivings about government legislation, which (Miliukov argued) set a poor example to Russian peasants, amongst whom expectations had now been aroused of more radical measures to expropriate property owners. Lohr again spells out the economic implications of the wartime campaign. The combined landholdings of German farmers probably exceeded three million hectares. In terms of the total area sown to crops their farms accounted for a tiny fraction, but their output of cereals contributed around 3.3 million tons. Put another way, this was equivalent to half the recorded decline in grain output during 1915. The settlers’ land had gone unplanted as a consequence of the measures taken against them.
- 7 The final case study looks at the deportation of ethnic minorities. Again Lohr carefully juxtaposes civilian and military policies. He shows how the basis for deportation had been created before the war, by the collection of statistics for the Russian army in its search for potential spies. The riots in Moscow directly resulted in new rules rendering enemy aliens liable to deportation to remote parts of the empire. Lohr carefully traces the intensification of military action against enemy nationals and then German settlers and Jews. He points out that Alekseev differed but little from Ianushkevich in pursuing an aggressive policy towards these groups. He draws attention to lesser-known campaigns, for example against the Muslim population of Kars and Batumi and the Crimean Tatars.
- 8 Lohr has performed a valuable service in showing how far the campaign against “German economic dominance” called upon the support of a broad swathe of Russian political and public opinion. If there is a criticism, it is that contrary opinions are hardly registered. More broadly, Lohr has established beyond doubt that the war witnessed a shift from the “traditional” imperial politics of assimilation to the more “modern” style of categorical exclusion. As indicated above, a particular strength of his book is the juxtaposition of military and civilian thinking and practice. Its value is further enhanced by the author’s readiness to draw appropriate and informative comparisons with other belligerent powers during World War I. He has made a notable contribution to our understanding of the dynamics of late imperial Russia and of state practices in modern war.