

# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mark D. Steinberg. *Voices of Revolution, 1917*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. xiv + 404. \$48.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-300-09016-1.

Reviewed by Michael C. Hickey (Bloomsburg University)  
Published on H-Russia (October, 2003)



## An Emotional Revolution

### An Emotional Revolution

*Voices of Revolution*, Mark D. Steinberg's contribution to the admirable Yale University Press "Annals of Communism" series. The book presents stimulating interpretive essays on 1917, along with texts of 132 documents that allow readers to "hear" the aspirations, concerns, demands, and criticisms of ordinary men and women during the revolution.

The volume represents a high level of scholarship. Steinberg's introductory essay on "The Language of Popular Revolution" carefully distills recent monographic literature and the author's own astute reading of the documentary evidence. Steinberg has divided the documents into three chronological sections, each preceded by a lengthy narrative in which he explains key elements of the historical context. In the volume's afterword Ekaterina Betekhtina offers an interesting interpretive essay on "Style in Lower-Class Writing in 1917." Steinberg's book should join the (happily long) list of "must read" volumes on the revolution.

Like all contributions to the Annals of Communism series, this volume also is designed to be of interest and service to students and general readers. For the most part, Steinberg avoids academic jargon. There are interesting illustrations. The documents are appended with explanatory notes, and the book includes a useful general chronology, a map of European Russia, a fine glossary (of personal names, institutions, terms, and periodical publications mentioned in the documents), and a selected list of further readings in English. And, like other entries in

this series, it is nicely laid out and very affordable.

For all my enthusiasm, I do have some minor criticisms regarding both Steinberg's essays and the organization of the volume as a whole. I will return to these after summarizing at greater length the contents of this important volume.

Steinberg has organized the documents more or less by chronological period (February-June 1917; July-October 1917; November 1917-January 1918), each subdivided according to the reputed social origins of their authors ("workers," "soldiers," and "peasants"). As Betekhtina points out in her afterword, these documents can be grouped into five categories: resolutions from meetings of workers, soldiers, or peasants; petitions and appeals to government or soviet leaders; personal letters to key government and soviet leaders; letters from common people to *Izvestia* and to various socialist newspapers; and poems by plebeian writers (p. 309). Steinberg and his colleagues culled more than half of these from holdings in central archives.[1] Most are letters, petitions, and demands sent either to the VTsIK (All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets) or to the Provisional Government (to the Office of the Minister-President and the Main Land Committee). The remaining documents Steinberg drew from various socialist newspapers or picked from previously published collections.

The documents vividly present the voices of men (and to a much lesser extent women) caught in the excitement, promise, and the agony of revolutionary times. They al-