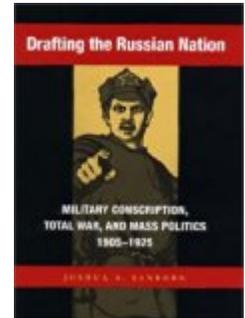


Joshua A. Sanborn. *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925.* DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003. 288 S. \$40.00, gebunden, ISBN 978-0-87580-306-7.



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Published on H-Russia (May, 2004)

In 1795, Immanuel Kant, champion of the "categorical imperative" and dedicated humanitarian, argued that replacing standing armies with armies made up of citizens would remove "the cause of wars of aggression" and lead to "perpetual peace." [1] Unfortunately, this pronouncement came two years after the French *levee en masse* had created the first modern citizen's army and three years after the revolutionary commander at Valmy had proved that *Vive la nation!* was a pretty good rallying cry. In fact, Kant's hopeful declaration came out at a very bad time. As another famous Prussian put it a few years later, as a result of the invention of the citizen's army, "war... approached its true character, its absolute perfection." [2] Swelled by conscription, armies grew larger, while invigorated with nationalism they became easier to mobilize--against opposing soldiers in the field in the first order but also against so-called internal pariahs and "enemies of the people" as well. Add to this increasingly terrible armaments and quickening communications and you have the recipe for the unprecedented human disasters of the First and Second World

Wars, not to mention the numerous smaller interstate conflicts of the twentieth century.

Building the citizen's armies that eventually carried out this kind of killing was complicated, however, and nowhere more so than in Europe's multinational empires where tinkering with notions of citizenship carried obvious explosive potential. Joshua A. Sanborn's original and engaging book is the first in-depth investigation of how the process unfolded in the Russian empire. Focusing on the first quarter of the 1900s, Sanborn shows that, for all the challenges of the task, late tsarist military planners and their Bolshevik successors did indeed create a Russian citizen's army, one in which military service became a national duty and nationality itself became militarized in far-reaching ways. At the same time, the army became an instrument of mass politics, and this too created powerful consequences. As Sanborn notes, "Mass politics would emerge with the mass army. Mass killing and mass death would quickly follow" (p. 4). Indeed, Sanborn's central argument is that the terrible interrelationship between these phenomena was all but unavoidable. The

nation and the national army were two pieces of a single puzzle. Fitted together they created an inexorable dynamic that drove Russia into its "murderous twentieth century."

Sanborn's principal subject is the administrative machinery that lay at the heart of this dynamic--the institution of universal military conscription. Though the tsars introduced a national draft in 1874, it was only after the country's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War that the deficiencies of the system became glaringly apparent and tsarist military and political leaders began their search to build a truly national army. Sanborn's book starts with the initiation of this search in 1905 and follows it through two decades of reform, total war, and revolutionary upheaval to 1925 when a new conscription law finally firmly established the new Red Army as a national force. To chart this tumultuous transition, Sanborn works in thematic fashion. His first chapter analyzes the contentious politics of conscription both within the military and political establishments and among regular Russians. In chapters 2 and 3, he focuses on the complexities of ethnicity and class that marked the road to a national army, and in the final two chapters, he examines how Russia's new military machine at once "nationalized masculinity" and "violentized" its "citizen-soldiers," all of which helps him expose in turn how the very act of engaging in violence emerged as a "central precondition for being a citizen and a man" (p. 200). In each of the chapters, Sanborn traces his chosen theme across the entire 1905-1925 period. This unorthodox organization results in a certain repetitiveness, but it also allows him to provide a truly unique and revealing perspective on the deep continuities that bound the late tsarist and early Soviet regimes.

In fact, anyone who still wants to believe that 1917 represents a critical break in modern Russian history should probably read another book. As Sanborn shows, when it came to the question of making a national army, both the old tsarist or-

der and the new Bolshevik regime were motivated by the same practical objectives and came up against the same practical problems--most obviously, the problems of defining the nation, categorizing its enemies, mobilizing men for war, and then successfully channeling their violence. And again as he makes clear, the "watershed moment" was not 1917 but 1914. Russia's entry into the Great War created the mobilizational pressure to crystallize the national army. Old exemptions were discarded and new national units were called up for service. Internal enemies (such as Russian Jews and Germans) were identified in terms of "naturalized population categories" and targeted for pogroms and deportations, while the country's newest crop of male "citizen-soldiers" were pushed through an expanded system of physical and moral training that stressed both limber fitness and selfless "devotion to the motherland" (p. 144). The breakdown of the army that followed the February Revolution led the Provisional Government to extend the mobilization effort all the further, and the Bolsheviks merely continued the process, albeit with some new dimensions, most notably concerns about class, which quickly became the new leadership's "primary national category" (p. 205). As Sanborn argues, the extraordinary experience of total war "proved transformative for the tsarist regime and formative for the Soviet one" (p. 19). It turned both political orders into unlikely collaborators in a shared nation-building and army-building project.

Sanborn paints this picture extremely convincingly. His book marshals a rich trove of evidence from diverse archives as well as obscure published sources. His forceful yet in places wittily sarcastic style is perfect for the argument, and his insightful conclusions fit with an emerging consensus in the Russian field that the revolution and civil war are best understood not as distinct events but as phases within a broader "time of troubles" in which the brutal fact of "total war" (even if somewhat hazily defined) provided the

essential wellspring for modern Russian political practices and institutions.[3] Sanborn's book should be widely assigned in graduate courses on war and revolution, and widely read by Russian as well as European specialists for the sharp way it distills a central problem of the modern Russian (and European) experience.

Indeed, if there is anything to question in Sanborn's study, it is not his argument about the Russian situation of the early 1900s but rather what seems to be his overly dark view of the nation in general as a form of political community. Sanborn describes the national principle of civic belonging as being marked by a terrible contradiction--its principal promise is to provide "equality and order" and yet its central practice is military service, which is to say "the performance of violence" (p. 206). In Russia, as Sanborn sees it, the pressures of World War I exploded this contradiction and proceeded to inundate the country "with murder, rape, brigandage, and pure sadism for a ten-year period" (p. 206). Yet these accompaniments of war have been around for a lot longer than the *levee en masse*, so how much can their havoc in twentieth-century Russia be attributed to the terrible spark of modern nationalism? And while the nation is certainly about "the promise of ... equality and order," isn't it also about seeking ties of real or imagined kinship, "the prospect of a closer connection, a deeper trust, a surer protection than alternative ties seem capable of providing," all of which sounds less absolute, less lofty, and hence less at odds with the darker drives of the national subconscious?[4] Sanborn rightly rejects overly simplistic arguments that would have us believe that civic nations are somehow better than ethnic or racial ones (p. 18), but his ultimate conclusion seems to be that all nations are troubling because "the national form itself" is inherently prone to violence (p. 208). Yet is this violence in the form or rather in the way that governments use it? Does nationalism shape militarism or militarism shape nationalism? Kant obviously woefully overestimated the peacefulness of citizen armies, but was

he completely wrong to imagine that there could be such a thing as peaceful national citizenship?

Notes

[1]. Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch," in *The Enlightenment*, ed. David Williams (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 378-379.

[2]. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 593.

[3]. For a view of the 1914-1921 period as a new "time of troubles" in Russia, see Lars T. Lih, *Bread and Authority in Russia, 1914-1921* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990). For recent works stressing the Great War's disturbing yet innovative impact on aspects of Russian development, see Mark von Hagen, "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity in the Russian Empire," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State Building*, ed. Barnett R. Rubin and Jack Snyder (New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 34-97; Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Peter Holquist, *Making War, Forging Revolution: Russia's Continuum of Crisis, 1914-1921* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Eric Lohr, *Nationalizing the Russian Empire: The Campaign against Enemy Aliens during World War I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003). For a helpful critique of the sometimes imprecise use of "total war" as a conceptual tool, see Roger Chickering, "Total War: The Use and Abuse of a Concept," in *Anticipating Total War: The German and American Experiences, 1871-1914*, ed. Manfred F. Boemeke, et al. (Washington: German Historical Institute, 1999), pp. 13-28.

[4]. See Robert H. Weibe, *Who We Are: A History of Popular Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 5.

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Citation: Willard Sunderland. Review of Sanborn, Joshua A. *Drafting the Russian Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905-1925*. H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. May, 2004.

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