Introduction
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As the first total war in modern history, the Great War not only mobilized millions of men into mass armies, but also depended on the efforts of innumerable civilians to support the military effort and bear the burdens of war. “Profound, enormous, [and] transcendent of the ordinary” in scale, total war also penetrated into “the smallest, seemingly insignificant everyday practices,” Maureen Healy, historian of the Austrian home front, has written.¹ The Great War imposed exceptional demands on civilian populations, while also opening unprecedented opportunities for participation in the war effort to groups such as women and minorities who had been excluded from public affairs. In the Russian Empire, which exceeded all other combatants in World War I in the size of its population and the vast extent of its territory, actual combat between 1914 and 1917 affected only the western borderlands and the Caucasus in the distant southeast.² Yet with 18 million men mobilized into the army over the course of the war, there was scarcely a single family or community beyond the war’s reach or exempt from its demands for sacrifice and engagement.

The English phrase “home front”—vnutrennii or глубокий тыл in Russian—aptly expresses the pervasive effects of World War I on those Russians living not only near the front but also far from the army’s rear. It also conveys the sentiments of the individuals and groups described in this volume who felt that their work on the home front supported and complemented the efforts of soldiers on the front lines to defend the nation in ways no less essential to victory. Writing in 1915, A. K. Iakovleva, the founder and editor of a magazine

¹ Maureen Healy, Vienna and the Fall of the Habsburg Empire: Total War and Everyday Life in World War I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 183.
² According to the Ministry of the Interior’s Central Statistical Committee, the population of the entire empire, including the Duchy of Finland, was 178,378,800 as of 1 January 1914. A. M. Anfimov and A. P. Korelin, eds., Rossiia, 1913 god: Statistiko-dokumental’nyi spravochnik (St. Petersburg: BLITs, 1995), 16. Germany’s population in 1914 was about 68 million.
titled *Women and War*, proclaimed that the war moved women into the “front lines of life” and turned “everyone into fighters.”

World War I nominally ended for Russia in March 1918, eight months before the Central Powers surrendered to the Allies, when the Soviet government signed the treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany. But in another sense the Great War did not end for another three years for Russians. Socialist revolution transformed the conflict between European nations into a civil war between the Soviet regime and its many opponents, and turned Russia arguably into the largest battlefield of the Great War. Previously mobilized for victory in the war against the Central Powers, Russians now threw their efforts—willingly or unwillingly—into defending or defeating the Bolshevik Revolution. Revolution and civil war prolonged and intensified the sacrifices and burdens on families and communities, and made sheer survival an all-consuming task.

The *Experience of War and Revolution*, the second of four books on *Russia’s Home Front in War and Revolution, 1914–1922*, presents new research on Russian society during the entire period of crisis, and offers insights into both the continuities and the radical changes in the home front experience that the democratic and socialist revolutions of 1917 and the ensuing civil war produced. While the next two books of *Russia’s Home Front* examine political events, parties, and movements, the contributions in the present book focus on how war and revolution affected individuals, groups, and organizations that worked far from the front and high politics, and usually did not define themselves as political actors.

The Russian home front possessed certain strengths when it first confronted the challenges of total war in 1914. One major asset was a civil society that had grown over the course of the past century from a handful of philanthropic, patriotic, and scientific societies in 1814 into a galaxy of more than 10,000 voluntary associations of all kinds when the war began. Russian men and women joined the war effort on the home front equipped with useful experience in mobilizing volunteers, raising funds, and administering organizations that they had acquired by participating in a broad range of local government bodies, educational and charitable organizations, professional societies, and religious and national associations, among others. Historians disagree about the robustness and political significance of Russia’s prewar

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civil society. But as many of the articles in this volume show, when the war began existing networks of volunteers and organizations were readily reoriented and mobilized in response to the needs created by total war.

A second source of strength on the home front was the outpouring of patriotic sentiment, especially among educated members of Russian society, from the moment Germany declared war on Russia on 20 July 1914. Support for the war was weak at best among the peasantry and working class, and the Russian army did a particularly poor job of explaining to soldiers on the front lines why they were fighting. But at least in 1914 and 1915 educated, urban Russians considered their cause to be a righteous one, their war a defense against German and Austrian aggression and threats to the homeland. The Great War quickly came to be known as the “Second Patriotic War,” a reference to Russia’s victorious war against France 100 years before, and many hoped that this war, like the one with Napoleon, would unify the nation and bring together the government and people in a common cause.

As a number of the articles in this volume document, this initial outpouring of patriotism inspired educated Russians not only to adapt existing institutions to war needs but also to invent new ones to support soldiers, their families, and the growing population of war victims. Initiatives such as the movement to rehabilitate wounded and disabled soldiers through kitchen gardening or in health resorts previously reserved for the elite illustrate the inventiveness that the war evoked. Women took wide advantage of the chance to engage more fully in public life, while minorities such as Muslims in the Volga region and Jews seized opportunities created by the war to advance their goals for citizenship rights, cultural preservation, or autonomy while supporting the nation. Even children were enlisted on the home front to sew linens for soldiers or visit the wounded.

For the most part, the mobilization of civilians was a spontaneous, grassroots phenomenon that owed little to the initiative of the Russian government. In the early months of the war the imperial government largely set aside its habitual suspicion that potential political dissent might be harbored in public initiatives. A kind of tentative partnership emerged between the government and society, upon whom it relied to provide essential human and financial resources, knowledge, and expertise in support of the war effort. At the same time, many of the philanthropic, civic, professional, and other organizations,

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along with the federations of local governments, the Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns, relied on funding from the imperial treasury to carry out their work.

As the war dragged on and Russian setbacks mounted, however, the spirit of patriotic commitment that characterized the first months of the war ebbed. Women and men who had enthusiastically committed their time, money, and effort to war needs in 1914 grew exhausted and disillusioned. One example is Countess Sof’ia V. Panina (1871–1956), a well-known progressive philanthropist before the war who became a leader in relief efforts for soldiers’ families and refugees in Petrograd. Vacationing at her estate outside Moscow in the summer of 1914, Panina reacted to news of the outbreak of war with a combination of shock and elation. The war “overturned” everything, she wrote a friend; “[i]t seems that everyone and everything have been displaced, have begun to live in a new way, and one has to adapt everything to this dislocation.”

She looked forward to returning to the “whirlpool” of public life in the capital, where “I would like to apply myself to work as intensively as possible.”7 Two summers later, however, in a letter to the same friend, this committed social activist looked upon her imminent return to relief work in Petrograd and its “endless winter” with unconcealed dread.8 In Russia as in the other combatant nations, total war strained the resources mobilized by the home front—volunteers, donations, expertise—to the breaking point.

As detailed in a number of the articles in this volume, the public commitment to supporting the war effort experienced a substantial if short-lived resurgence after the imperial government and Romanov dynasty fell in early 1917. To its millions of supporters in all social classes the February Revolution seemed to remove the obstacles both to victory and to the effective mobilization of resources on the home front in support of the war, its fighters, and its victims. Organizations such as the Free Economic Society, most of whose operations the imperial government had suspended in early 1915, rededicated themselves to both the war effort and their prewar goals of promoting economic and social progress. The establishment of a democratic republic now seemed to make possible the realization of initiatives such as people’s houses for adult education, or leadership by scientists in developing Russia’s defense capabilities to the fullest. Nurses were able to set up their own union for the first time. Even monasteries were affected by the democratic spirit that swept Russia in 1917.

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7 Letter from Sof’ia Panina to Lidiia Iakovleva dated 7 August 1914, Marfino, in Rossii-skii institut istorii iskusstv (RIII) f. 32, op. 1, ed. khr. 121, l. 38.

8 Letter from Sof’ia Panina to Lidiia Iakovleva, 10 August 1916 (ibid., l. 48).
The February Revolution placed in power many of those who had been leading the efforts to mobilize the home front, especially members of the liberal Constitutional Democratic Party (Kadets) and moderate socialist parties, along with local government activists in the zemstvos and municipalities. The expertise of such specialists as economists, scientists, and statisticians was now recognized and needed as never before. Sof’ia Panina moved from war relief into politics when she joined the Kadet Party and became assistant minister of state welfare in May of 1917, and then assistant minister of education in August. Her fellow Kadet leader Vladimir I. Vernadskii (1863–1945), the eminent geochemist who had contributed to the development of Russia’s defense capabilities as a leader of the Academy of Sciences during the war, joined her as assistant minister of education in the Provisional Government.

The momentum generated by the February Revolution did not come to an abrupt halt when the Bolsheviks overthrew the Provisional Government in October. To be sure, the socialist revolution left no initiative or organization in Soviet-controlled Russia untouched. Welfare initiatives that depended on imperial patronage, government funding, middle-class volunteers, and private donations first foundered, then disappeared. The system of monthly state allowances that supported soldiers’ families during the war collapsed along with the Provisional Government that funded them; at the end of 1917, as the economy and front were disintegrating, the new Soviet government advised local soviets to “resolve the question of allowances in a revolutionary manner”—by seizing the assets of the bourgeoisie. But many organizations that had been mobilized for war in 1914–17, like the Free Economic Society, fought to survive, adapt, and even resist. Others, like the Academy of Sciences and people’s houses, were reshaped to fit the Bolsheviks’ goals of economic modernization, scientific advancement or proletarian empowerment, and absorbed into the new Soviet system. Amidst the turmoil and deprivation that accompanied the revolutions and Civil War, new forces for spontaneous mobilization and self-organization like domestic communes emerged, inspired not by patriotism, as in 1914, or the hopes for political renewal raised by the February Revolution, but by the socialist revolution’s goals of remaking society, culture, and human nature.

The Experience of War and Revolution also provides insight into some of the strategies adopted by Russians on the home front to survive the privations, violence, and social disintegration caused by war and revolution. Some found opportunities for self-reinvention, empowerment, or social change, while others experienced threats to social solidarity and their very existence. Russian Germans, the great majority of whom had lived in the empire for generations, faced confiscatory laws and popular hostility that erupted into a deadly pogrom in Moscow in May 1915. Observing children’s war games, parents and
teachers expressed grave concerns about the war’s traumatic or coarsening influence on young minds and hearts. Social deviance seemed to increase in the civilian population, and criminologists looked for the causes of an apparent steep rise in crime in the impact of total war on human social psychology. While many sought an escape from brutal realities in alcohol or drugs, the war itself produced notable changes in the country’s drinking culture and in the availability and use of such drugs as cocaine and opiates, turning them into a staple in the criminal world of the revolutionary and Civil War periods. Russians despaired over the breakdown of institutions and social relationships. All the time, effort, and expertise invested by people like Vladimir Korolenko and Aleksandr Nesvitskii in Poltava, for example, into mobilizing the home front for war proved useless in the face of rampant disease, hunger, class conflict, and unrelenting violence. In a 1920 obituary honoring a friend lost to typhus, Panina lamented the indifference to death that the years of war and revolution had instilled in her fellow Russians: “Death in our day has turned into that ‘everyday phenomenon’ which the living hasten to pass by without slowing their pace even for a second,” she wrote.9

By the summer of 1920, as *Russia’s Home Front* coeditor Christopher Read has written, “one might have expected that the energies of the ordinary population of Soviet Russia would have been completely exhausted” after years of hardship and the apparent destruction of their world as it existed before 1914. Motivated by “self-defense against crisis,” however, some engaged in large and small acts of resistance against Bolshevik authority well into 1921.10 Resistance took myriad forms, ranging from the well-known Tambov and Kronstadt rebellions to the actions of the sisters of the Ababkovskii Monastery described in one of the contributions in this volume, who refused to reorganize themselves into a collective or work for the state farm that Soviet authorities subsequently imposed on them.

Russians also displayed great resilience and persistence. Despite the destructive effects of war and revolution on families and other social relationships, Vera Figner along with countless other men, women, and children managed to survive the years of starvation and disease thanks to networks of family and friends. Some wartime organizations like the Union of Zemstvos and Union of Towns were exported to the emerging émigré colonies of Russia Abroad, where they once again mobilized resources to meet a crisis, this time

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9 Handwritten manuscript dated London, 26 July (8 August) 1920, titled “My article about Dr. K. A. Mikhailov, located in Burtsev’s ‘Obshchее Delо’ SP,” in Columbia University, Bakhmetev Archive, S. V. Panina Collection, Box 11, Folder “Minor Manuscripts by S. V. Panina.”

to the masses of the refugees fleeing the revolution and Civil War. At home, remnants of the old imperial Red Cross coexisted with the Soviet Red Cross until 1921, and organizations like the Union of Sisters of Mercy, a product of the February Revolution, struggled against obstacles erected by the October Revolution in order to support their members and serve their profession. This one volume with 20 articles can provide only a sampling of the many ways historians may study the experience on Russia’s home front. The editors hope that the innovative work of these authors will encourage other scholars to investigate the social, emotional, and psychological impact of total war and revolution on the home front, and the strategies for survival, adaptation, and invention that ordinary Russians created in response to the immense changes that turned the years from 1914 to 1922 into a period of seemingly unending crisis.