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Review of The News Under Russia's Old Regime:
The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press, by
L. McReynolds

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Louise McReynolds. *The News Under Russia's Old Regime: The Development of a Mass-Circulation Press*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991. xiii, 313 pp. \$45.00.

What distinguishes this excellent work from other studies of pre-revolutionary Russian journalism is its scope. While earlier monographs focused on a particular newspaper or publisher, Louise McReynolds deals with "the origins, development, and repercussions of imperial Russia's commercial newspaper industry." In effect, this means a history of Russia's urban press from the era of the Great Reforms, which gave an unprecedented boost to large-scale independent publishing, to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, which engineered its demise. Most of the coverage goes to the press of St. Petersburg and a few of the more prominent Moscow newspapers. At the same time, the book incorporates a useful comparative element by examining parallel trends in America, England, and France.

McReynolds' principal theme is the political role that Russia's newspapers gradually assumed. Over time publishers cultivated larger numbers of urban readers, until even the lowest classes had their "penny press." Newspapers integrated these readers into the cultural mainstream by supplying them with a common body of knowledge. At the same time, they carved out a "public sphere," a forum for the discussion of political issues, and in this way began to empower the disenfranchised. The influence of the press steadily mounted, especially after 1905, as it mobilized the population for the purpose of liberalizing the autocracy. In the end, the Bolsheviks thwarted its hopes of greater political participation. Nevertheless, in the course of little more than fifty years, "the mass-circulation newspapers had contributed decisively to the transformation of power that ended Russia's Old Regime."

The social aspect of Russia's newspaper history also receives due attention. The "main protagonists" of McReynolds' book are the "lost middle classes," from which came the producers and consumers of the news. Journalism became a ticket out of the social and economic ghetto for ambitious and talented individuals from the non-noble estates, including women and Jews. Soon reporters began to regard their craft as a profession, and its members as a new intelligentsia, duty bound to bridge the gap between the masses and society. The traditional intellectual elite reacted to these upstarts with fear and contempt—ironically, in much the same way as did the government and its censorship. Before long, however, the newspapers triumphed over the intelligentsia and their "thick journals" in the competition for customers and the even more important struggle to determine national political discourse.

The rise of Russia's mass-circulation newspapers makes for a rich epic. Moreover, the author has a reporter's eye for the telling detail as she examines the emergence of the "new journalism." The trend toward objectivity in news reporting, technological innovations, circulation gimmicks, and commercialization of the news enterprise all are clearly delineated in this account. Russia's colorful press barons and the journalists who helped sell their papers move vividly through the story, too. McReynolds writes in a lively, even breezy style that befits her subject, but her analysis is consistently sophisticated and grounded in solid original research, much of it carried out in Soviet archives. She also demonstrates a thorough familiarity with the secondary literature. Two dozen

tables offer statistics on newspaper circulation and content, as well as the activity of the state censorship. Moreover, a generous helping of illustrations includes photographs of some of Russia's journalistic celebrities and even sketches from the press.

The attempt to cover as much territory as this book does inevitably results in certain gaps. It is occasionally difficult to follow the evolution, from chapter to chapter, of the several newspapers the author analyzes. Likewise, the comparison of the Russian newspaper industry with that in Western states is sometimes uneven, especially in the latter portion of the book. These minor criticisms, however, do not detract from the overall quality of a valuable work that is also a pleasure to read.

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Mark D. Steinberg, *Moral Communities: The Culture of Class Relations in the Russian Printing Industry, 1867-1907*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992. x, 289 pp. \$35.00.

Mark Steinberg's *Moral Communities* is a fine addition to the growing number of studies we now have concerning the experience of labor in the late Imperial period. In his focus on rhetoric and representation, Steinberg employs some of the newer methodologies utilized in West European labor studies and thus brings a new perspective to the study of Russian labor. He does so without resort to literary jargon, writing in a lucid and engaging style.

Steinberg begins with a discussion of the economic development of the printing industry of Moscow and Petersburg in the decades following emancipation—its growing commercialization, technical modernization, and increasing scale. As such, this is one of the few studies that charts the evolution of a particular industry and the labor relations within it over a significant period of time. He goes on to provide a close examination of the world inhabited by the owners and managers of the industry, in the process carefully delineating their social origins. Subsequent chapters look equally carefully at the language, workplace culture and rituals of printing workers; here again Steinberg seeks to undercover the beliefs and attitudes by which workers understood themselves, and how they ultimately came to use the rhetoric of a moral community to confront the authority of the owners.

In his examination of the language employer activists used to represent themselves before their colleagues, their workers and the society at large, Steinberg neatly articulates the self-conception of these men, the values they brought to their relations with workers, and the ways in which they sought to legitimize their authority. Among the attitudes that emerge are the employers own ambivalent sense of their entrepreneurial activity: they preferred to see themselves as culture-bearers and practitioners of the "art" of printing, not "capitalists" in pursuit of profits much less "exploiters" of wage labor. They consciously chose to speak in the language of a community of interests, accepting and advocating their "moral" obligation as "fathers" to the "family" of printers. By the 1890s, these values found expression in a range of paternalistic programs typically instituted within the larger plants.