

RESEARCH Notes

**Power and Society in Russia during the First World War:
The Rewiev of Modern Russian Historiography**

**Poder y sociedad en Rusia durante la Primera Guerra Mundial:
Revisión de la historiografía rusa moderna**

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Abstract

Relevance of the investigated topic is determined by the fact that modern historiography considers the society not only as a receptor but also as independent actor with its own purposes, ideas and interests. The study of society, which is under emergency conditions (wars, revolutions, etc.), is especially interesting for historians and other social sciences researchers. The investigation of historical experience of power and society interaction in Russia can be interesting under modern Russian conditions. The object of the given article is modern Russian historiography of World War I. The article aims to characterize the modern Russian historical literature, which deals with the power and society interaction in Russia in 1914-1917 (from the beginning of World War until the February Revolution in Russia). The authors describe the impact not only internal (source study, methodology) but also external (social and political aspect) factors on historiography. They made a conclusion that modern Russian historians consider the power and society interaction from two main points of view (social and political spheres), describe it as generally constructive and emphasize that at one point collaboration was replaced by confrontation (especially in the political sphere). In modern Russian historiography, there are controversial opinions about some problems (for example, who initiated the interaction: power or society). The materials of the article can be helpful for historians, university professors, teachers, who deal with problems of history of Russian historical science and Russian history of early XX century.

Key words: power, Russian society, social organizations, World War I, modern Russian historiography.

Resumen

La relevancia del tema investigado está determinada por el hecho de que la historiografía moderna considera a la sociedad no solo como un receptor sino también como un actor independiente con sus propios propósitos, ideas e intereses. El estudio de la sociedad, que se encuentra en condiciones de emergencia (guerras, revoluciones, etc.), resulta especialmente interesante para los historiadores y otros investigadores de las ciencias sociales. La investigación de la experiencia histórica de la interacción del poder y la sociedad en Rusia puede ser interesante en las condiciones rusas modernas. El objeto del artículo dado es la historiografía rusa moderna de la Primera Guerra Mundial. El artículo tiene como objetivo caracterizar la literatura histórica rusa moderna, que trata de la interacción de poder y sociedad en Rusia en 1914-1917 (desde el comienzo de la Guerra Mundial hasta el mes de febrero). Revolución en Rusia). Los autores describen el impacto no solo de factores internos (estudio de la fuente, metodología) sino también externos (aspecto social y político) en la historiografía. Llegaron a la conclusión de que los historiadores rusos modernos consideran la interacción del poder y la sociedad desde dos puntos de vista principales (esferas social y política), la describen como constructiva en general y enfatizan que en un momento la colaboración fue reemplazada por la confrontación (especialmente en la esfera política). En la historiografía rusa moderna, existen opiniones controvertidas sobre algunos problemas (por ejemplo, quién inició la interacción: poder o sociedad). Los materiales del artículo pueden ser útiles para historiadores, profesores universitarios, profesores que se ocupan de los problemas de la historia de la ciencia histórica rusa y la historia rusa de principios del siglo XX.

Palabras clave: poder, sociedad rusa, organizaciones sociales, Primera Guerra Mundial, historiografía rusa moderna.

Introduction

The study of the World War I is relevant not only from scientific but also from social point of view: the discussion about how the world came to this global conflict and how it was possible to avoid it is held as by researchers as by politicians, journalists, artists and celebrities. A centenary celebration (beginning and end) of World War I caused the increase in interest to this problem.

There were scientific conferences (Pervaya mirovaya: neoconchennaya vojna, materialy mezhdunarodnoj nauchnoj konferencii, posvyaschenoj 100-letiju Pervoj mirovoj vojny 1914-1918), publication of the source books (Pervaja mirovaja vojna v otsenke sovremennikov: vlast' i rossijskoe obschestvo. 1914-1918; Cheshsko-Slovatskij (Chechoslovatskij) korpus, 1914-1920) and collected papers (Ajrapetov, 2014; Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014).

Not only external factors (concerning historical science), but internal logic of modern historiography development are able to support the interest to this problem. Nowadays among topics especially actual for researchers, there are topics, which allow investigating “the society reaction to political changes, social and economic circumstances under the conditions of acute internal political changes, social and cultural conflict during the World War I and revolution” (Simonova, 2015).

Modern Russian historiography considers the process of power and society interaction in two main contexts: collaborative projects realization in social sphere (Bazhenova, 2012; Kajdysheva, 2013; Kuzmin, 2003) and cooperation/confrontation in political sphere (Budchenko et al., 2014; Ivantsova, 2017).

There are discrete works (Tumanova, 2014) as well as studies included in synthesis writings (Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014) which are devoted to Russian society and non-governmental organizations activity during the World War I.

Particular attention in modern Russian historiography is given to the study of religious institutions and their relations with the authorities in Russia during the years of revolutions and wars (Fakhrutdinova et al., 2019; Usmanova, 2019).

Which aspects of the problem of “the power and society in Russia during the World War I” have been raised and solved yet, and which problems should be solved? The answer to these questions requires historiographical study, which considers and investigates the main tendencies of this topic research development in modern Russian historiography (2000-s) and their importance for the future study and analysis.

Methodological Framework

Methodological framework of the research is the principles of systematic, multifaceted and nuanced approach to the questions considered. **Systematic approach** means the consideration of modern Russian historiography as complex system, where all schools and consensus groups are interconnected, fulfill certain functions and have their own place in the structure of system. Complex analysis of the system supposes the **historicism** principle application, which means the investigation of every historiographical event in progress and in connection with factors affecting it. Among the important principles for this research, there is **holism**, which aims to obligatory study of every period of historical science development as system of interconnected elements of scientific knowledge and reasons affecting their change. The principle of **versatility** is based on investigation of problematic and theoretical content of historians' conceptions internal as external social, political, intrascientific factors. The main **methods** of research are historiographical analysis and historiographical synthesis, which help to identify and understand certain scientific conceptions and compare them with each other, find out common and specific ideas.

Results

As a result of the research, we found that historians generally use the terms “power” and “society” automatically, without explanation. The exception is the article by E.V. Smirnova, who gives the definition of the terms “power” and “society”. The author considers the concept “power” mainly “as attitude towards legitimate power and also as an idea of power which should be taken for granted, according to main participants of political process in 1914-1918 – local agencies of town council, socialists organizations” (Simonova, 2015). She also suggests her own explanation of the

term “society”, which is considered as community of different stable social groups, their positions and interaction between them. In this case, the most important groups for revolution process – workers, representatives of socialist organizations and city government (Simonova, 2015).

The problem of “power and society in Russia during the World War I” is complex and can be divided into a number of specific problems.

The first aspect is interaction of power and society in the early war. Almost all historians point out that in the early war there was patriotic upsurge and enthusiasm (Ajrapetov, 2014).

The response to the beginning of war was not identical in the government agencies and society: if “on the Olympus of power” the beginning of the war caused “united response”, in the society it was only “favorable” (Zhuravlev, 2014). Information about mood at the local level “made power mistakenly believe that the war at last would resolve internal contradictions in the society” (Zhuravlev, 2014).

However, this unanimity was not unified: some political parties called to reject “the opposition to regime”, but there were others who lobbied for transformation of “imperial war into civil war” (Ivantsova, 2017). Anyway, the peace of the government and political parties lasted for a short time (Ajrapetov, 2014).

Historiography has an opinion that “in Russia, there was no unity of power and society in the name of victory: there was no unity of the front and the rear” (Budchenko et al., 2014). It was caused by the fact that Russian Army was defeated in the battlefields and power was blamed for this defeat by society (Budchenko et al., 2014). According to O.R. Ajrapetov, before the war “Russian society did not have enough time to fall under influence of military sentiments” (Ajrapetov, 2014).

Another important aspect was who exactly – power or society – initiated interaction. In historiography, there are diverse judgements upon the subject. According to V.Y. Kuzmin, “this was society which mainly arrived at a solution of the refugees problem. Power had to take part in solving the problem because it was getting almost national” (Kuzmin, 2003). When army turned out to be in short supply liberal agents initiated “the unity of government, manufacturers and workers for military demands” (Ivantsova, 2017). Non-governmental organizations advanced the initiative in order to overcome economic crisis “Public figures suggested fighting against economic disorganization by the way of society self-organization consolidated in public-service organizations and local governments” (Tumanova, 2014); representatives of Free Economic Society during the early of the war planned to reduce agrarian crisis “by the way of measures taken by government, country councils and cooperatives” (Tumanova, 2014). When during the first war months in Moscow many organizations appeared in order to help war victims the government had to support this initiative of Moscow citizens (Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014). Anyway, representatives of non-governmental organizations were optimistic and believed in “capability of Russian society together with power to gain a victory on the battlefields as in the rear during peaceful organizational work” (Tumanova, 2014); at the same time “the idea of unity of society and power was presented not only by public figures but also by government agencies representatives of in Free Economic Society meetings” (Tumanova, 2014).

In historiography, there is an opinion that power was not able to communicate with representatives of non-governmental organizations even despite the fact that there were some non-governmental organizations initiatives, e.g. in the organization of medical help in Permian province “Efficiency of this global problem solution required society and power interaction. However, government were not able to collaborate despite the fact that there was social activism and support from local citizens” (Bazhenova, 2012).

N.N. Kajdysheva, on the contrary, suggests that it was power, which made people take part in charity, and it was attempt to solve “numerous social problems which were impossible to cope with” (Kajdysheva, 2013). She considers state as “initiator and coordinator” (Kajdysheva, 2013)

and describes the role of non-governmental organizations as “assistant” (Kajdysheva, 2013). Ranging motives of the help, she puts “patriotism caused by compassion for the wretched” first and “expression of deep national identity” second (Kajdysheva, 2013). V.V. Zhuravlev does not give priority to one of the sides and writes about signals which “were sent by society in response to actions or, on the contrary, inaction of authorities” (Zhuravlev, 2014).

Historiography also characterizes mechanisms of power and society interaction. As usual, it should be following: there was a law passed which became a basis for national non-governmental organization creation and these organizations’ activity was regulated by legislative documents as well (Kuzmin, 2003). V.Yu. Kuzmin points out that “standard and legal papers were fell behind demands of life” (Kuzmin, 2003).

One of the channels via which power mobilized society was appeal to the public: “During the war power started appealing to the population more often” (Kajdysheva, 2013). Interaction script was as followed: power provided conditions for different initiatives (e.g. charity), “tried to steer public pressure” (Kajdysheva, 2013). Historians assess power and society interaction during World War I as “active collaboration” (Kajdysheva, 2013).

One tool government used was special meetings where authorities as well as representatives of non-governmental organizations took part in (Ivantsova, 2017).

Historians paid special attention to reasoning of power and society confrontation during World War I. They stress that government had contradictory attitude towards non-governmental organizations: e.g., Secretary of State for Home Affairs N.A. Maklakov supported tough policy, at the same time Chief Executive Officer of Land Planning and Agriculture A.V. Krivoshein considered “concerted efforts of government and non-governmental organizations as guaranty of victory in war” (Tumanova, 2014).

One of the things non-governmental organizations were blamed for (including by Free Economic Society) was that representatives of socialistic parties (social democrat and socialist revolutionary) used the organization as means of revolution propaganda (Tumanova, 2014). Problems of non-governmental organizations and government could appear when the government suspected representatives of non-governmental organizations of “impure propaganda” and was skeptical about their loyalty (Tumanova, 2014).

The situation started getting worse since 1915. V.V.Zhuravlev points out that “letters of 1915 circulating from province to capital as well as from capital to province show state of mind radicalization in different layers of society” (Zhuravlev, 2014); then “the level of negative state of mind gradually but continuously increased” (Zhuravlev, 2014). From the middle of 1915 started being more and more criticized: “enlightened society” under the conditions of wartime not only helped Nikolay II to cope with difficulties of the second half of 1915 but also did everything in order to make power weaker (Ivantsova, 2017). According to A.S. Tumanova, after the increase in non-governmental organizations criticism of power in spring 1916 prospects of non-governmental organizations and power interaction were getting more and more illusive (Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014); as a result, since autumn 1916 “the government bluntly started limiting activity of non-governmental organizations” (Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014).

As to peculiar “outcome” of power and society interaction, it should be taken into account that assessment of this question depends mainly upon sphere of collaboration. For instance, in the political sphere, this interaction (because revolution happened) can hardly be estimated as “productive”. At the same time, in social sphere there were some results, e.g. refugees received medical and social help: “owing to unity during emergencies and social and political problems society and power managed to mitigate and then solve the problem completely” (Kuzmin, 2003). V.Yu. Kuzmin writes that Russian government as well as non-governmental organizations “used all the sources they had in order to meet the refugees’ needs to some extent and enhance medical and sanitarian position of this part of population” (Kuzmin, 2003).

A.S. Tumanova drew a conclusion that with regard to power Russian society came the long way: from unity with power in 1914, criticism of some faults and warnings of some mistakes in 1915 to fighting in response to take social forces out of public life in 1916” (Rossiya v gody pervoj mirovoj vojny: ekonomicheskoe polozhenie, 2014).

Discussions

The problem discussed in the research was considered in Russian historiography.

Some authors refer to Soviet historiography experience pointing out that there this problem was terribly simplified: ruling social groups supported government, workers and peasants were against participation of Russia in war. N.F. Ivantsova tells “nowadays Soviet historiography tradition has not changed” (Ivantsova, 2017)

In search of new prospects of the problem mentioned in the research historians turn to “regional and local aspect” (Porshneva, 2015) and shift focus to “study of provincial regions during country’s war life” (Gulin, 2013).

Historians pay special attention to different aspects of problem of “power and society during World War I” (Gulin, 2013). Nowadays they re-estimate potential of existent historical sources with regard to how complete description of the problem of “ruling classes activity assessment from the point of view of society” they give (Zhuravlev, 2014).

As to methodology, researchers are absolutely for complex approach (Simonova, 2015).

In addition, history of the World War I is said to be interesting for historians not only on its own but also in context of the consequences it had. “Scientific literature repeated and proved the thesis about important impact of World War I on society radicalization” (Simonova, 2015).

The problem of World War and Russian Revolution and Civil War interconnection is still relevant for historians: how power “via actions as well as via inactivity made the road to revolution boom and following fratricidal civil war” (Zhuravlev, 2014). Another important problem is society’s perception of power’s actions connected with war and peace problems” (Zhuravlev, 2014).

Thus, the aspect “power and society in Russia during the World War I” considered in this research is relevant enough and at the same time has potential for future investigation.

Conclusion

The investigation of the problem “power and society in Russia during the World War I” from the point of view of Russian historiography is important for understanding of political, social, economic and cultural processes in Russia in 1914-1917. However, there is another important aspect of the problem that is study of experience of power and society interaction under the conditions, which were almost complete emergency, can be relevant not only from scientific but also from public point of view.

Contemporary Russian historians write about different aspects of power and society interaction, for example in social and political spheres. According to historians, non-governmental organizations usually initiated this interaction. As to some areas, the collaboration was successful until czar’s demise. However, in some cases collaboration turned into confrontation and each side had its own reasons for dissatisfaction: society was dissatisfied with defeat in World War and power was dissatisfied with increase in criticism and antigovernment propaganda.

Power and society interaction during war is relevant historical problem and study of their interaction in Russia in 1914-1917 in the capital and in province is prospective area for future investigation.

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