

## Peculiarities of the urban governance formation in Moscow in the first years of soviet power and its historical significance

Peculiaridades de la formación del gobierno urbano en Moscú en los primeros años del poder soviético y su importancia histórica

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to study the historical experience of the formation of municipal government bodies in the first years of Soviet power; to consider the order of formation and structure of municipal government bodies on the example of the Moscow City Council, as well as the features of its functioning in a severe crisis; to identify its strengths and weaknesses. The main methods in the study of this problem were dialectical method, method of analysis, synthesis, comparative-historical, statistical, problem-chronological, methods of actualization, concrete and logical analysis and some others.

**Keywords:** Moscow Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, Constitution of the RSFSR of 1918, urban economy, food dictatorship, fuel issue, municipalization, street cleaning, epidemics.

### RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es estudiar la experiencia histórica de la formación de organismos gubernamentales municipales en los primeros años del poder soviético; considerar el orden de formación y estructura de los organismos del gobierno municipal según el ejemplo del Ayuntamiento de Moscú, así como las características de su funcionamiento en una crisis severa; para identificar sus fortalezas y debilidades. Los principales métodos en el estudio de este problema fueron un método dialéctico, método de análisis, síntesis, histórico comparativo, estadístico, cronológico de problemas, métodos de actualización, análisis concreto y lógico y algunos otros.

**Palabras clave:** Consejo de Moscú de Diputados de Trabajadores y Soldados, Constitución de la RSFSR de 1918, economía urbana, dictadura alimentaria, problema de combustible, municipalización, limpieza de calles, epidemias.

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## **Introduction**

The historical experience of the management decisions of urban governance in emergency conditions is very important and can be used in modern conditions of the unfair competition connected with application of sanctions, and also problems of public administration [16].

The structure of the body of the urban government was determined by priorities, which needed to be solved: to combat counterrevolution, sabotage, speculation, epidemics, looting, etc., to provide the city with food, repair and heating of buildings, municipalization of enterprises and residential premises, the introduction of workers' control, etc.

The Supreme body of the Moscow City Council was the Plenum, which elected the Executive Committee and the Presidium. A number of departments and sections was formed to improve the efficiency of urban management, their staff and structure underwent significant changes.

The history of the Moscow City Council is associated with the revolutionary events in Russia in the early twentieth century. The City Council appeared as a body of revolutionary creativity of the masses to guide the armed rebellion in Moscow in December 1905. During the revolutionary events of February 1917, the experience of the Soviets was also used.

In November 1917, the Council of Workers' Deputies and the Council of Soldiers' Deputies, which appeared in the spring, united in the Moscow Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. This governing body became the highest city authority. The headquarters of the Moscow City Council was located in the Palace of the former Governor-General, in a building on Skobelev square [23]. Now it is Tver Square. On November 14, 1917 the joint Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council was elected, which included 63 representatives of the RSDRP (b) and 27 representatives of other parties [10]. The Presidium of the Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council, which Chairman M.N. Pokrovsky became, also included I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov, G.A. Usievich, E. Yaroslavsky, etc. [1, 26, 27]. In March-August 1918, the Moscow City Council was headed by P.G. Smidovich, who was replaced by L.B. Kamenev, who held this position until May 1926 [14].

Since the spring of 1918, the Council of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies became known as the Council of Workers' and Red Army Deputies [6].

## **The purpose and objectives**

Based on this, it is important to find out the genesis of the Moscow City Council, as a body of urban government; to reveal the peculiarities of its formation, structure and functions of its constituent elements; to consider the main activities of this body of urban governance and its effectiveness. To do this, it is supposed to analyze the materials characterizing the state of the urban economy of Moscow and the activities of the Moscow City Council in the first years of Soviet power; to study the evaluative judgments of Russian and foreign experts in the areas under consideration; to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Moscow City Council as an urban government body.

## **Methods**

To solve the problems, such methods as dialectical method, method of analysis, synthesis, comparative-historical, problem-chronological, methods of actualization, concrete and logical analysis and some others were used.

## **Results and discussion**

Elections to the Moscow City Council were implemented on the basis of the RSFSR Constitution of 1918, the Third section of the Constitution – Construction of the Soviet government, guided the organization of the Soviet power in the regions. So, Councils of deputies were formed “in the cities – on calculation 1 Deputy for each 1000 people of the population, but not less than 50 and no more than 1000 members” [8, 11].

The Constitution also determined the quantitative staffing of the Executive Committee of the Council. “For the current work, the Council of Deputies elects from its environment the Executive body (Executive Committee) ... in the cities on the calculation of 1 for every 50 members, but not less than 3 and not more than 15 people (St. Petersburg and Moscow not more than 40)” [8, 12].

In accordance with the Basic Law of the Republic, the Moscow City Council was the highest authority within its powers within the territory.

In February 1920, the Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council adopted “The Regulation on elections

to the City Council”, which determined the order of elections. In accordance with the Regulation, enterprises and military units, that had from 100 to 500 voters, elected 1 Deputy. If there were more than 500 voters, then 1 Deputy from each 500 was elected. Also 1 Deputy from 500 people was chosen to the City Council from the unemployed voters. As for trade unions, they chose 1 Deputy from each 5 thousand members. Elections were held at the place of work or residence of voters, by open voting. In February 1920, 93% of voters participated in the elections to the Moscow City Council. 1566 deputies were elected (1368 communists and their sympathizers, 65.1% workers, 8.7% women) [10].

Although the elections were non-alternative (one candidate for one seat), this was compensated by the system of accountability of the Moscow City Council deputies to the voters, who had the opportunity to withdraw the deputies who did not meet the expectations. For example, 20 deputies of the Moscow City Council were withdrawn for the reporting campaign of 1928 [12].

The city, which the Moscow City Council was to run, was in a state of deep crisis caused by the consequences of the First World War, revolutions and Civil war. The city economy was in critical condition. The population of Moscow, which was more than a million inhabitants, suffered from hunger, epidemics, lack of housing, cold.

In this situation, the Moscow City Council had to solve a number of the most important and complex political and social problems. In the conditions of the Civil war, the Moscow city Council, as the authority of the proletariat fought the counter-revolution, sabotage, speculation, epidemics, looting, etc., solved the issues of providing the city with food, repair and heating of buildings, municipal enterprises, the implementation of working control, etc. So, for the period from November 1917 to September 1920 the discussion of current socio-economic problems was made 49 times on the agenda of the Plenum of the Moscow City Council [9, 6].

It is interesting that in revolutionary enthusiasm environment of the masses, the concept of working control, as it is noted by the English sovietologist E. Carr, spread even to civil services. For example, the Council of employees was abolished, which seized control over the People's Commissariat of posts and telegraphs [18].

One of the primary tasks was to create a new apparatus of power. At the beginning it was supposed to use the existing bodies of state and municipal administration, so that the representatives of workers could get the necessary experience of management. However, due to the sabotage of government officials, and a significant part of Moscow employees did not accept the new government and went on strike, the problem of the formation of a new state apparatus came to the fore. Attraction of city workers to management of the Moscow enterprises prevented full collapse of municipal economy.

One of the new governing bodies was the Moscow City Council. Here it is necessary to take into account that the socialist revolution was carried out in the country, the dictatorship of the proletariat was proclaimed. The leaders of the Bolsheviks who came to power denied continuity in the system of statehood, suggesting building a new society free from human exploitation on fundamentally new principles.

Certain administrative and territorial changes were also made. Thus, in the conditions of Civil war, devastation, difficult economic situation at the II Moscow provincial Congress of Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies held in January 1918, the Moscow City Council Presidium was created consisting of 15 people, which became the united authority of Moscow and the Moscow province. The establishment of this government body was also to strengthen the union of the proletariat and the working peasantry. In March 1918, in order to resolve promptly important issues, from the Presidium of the Moscow City Council Small Presidium was allocated, at the same time the Council of People's Commissars of Moscow and Moscow province was formed, which Chairman M.N. Pokrovsky became [10].

In the spring 1918, the structure of the Moscow City Council was determined. Its Supreme body was the Plenum, which adopted resolutions in the interests of all citizens, approved local taxes and fees, as well as estimates and reports of organizations, institutions and enterprises. The Plenum was empowered to revoke any orders of the local Executive authorities. At the Plenum the Executive Committee and the Presidium were elected. Legislative and Executive power was implemented by the Executive Committee between the Plenums [6].

For the management of municipal economy a number of departments were established, including the Department of Urban Enterprises, Food Department, Supply Department, Municipal Department, Fuel Department, Water Department, Housing Department, Administrative Department, Finance-tax Department, Automotive Department, Department of Labor, the Department of Municipal Improvement, etc.

In 1919, the City Defense Committee and the Military Commissariat were established as part of the Moscow City Council, because of the aggravated military situation [10].

In the following 1920, the Moscow City Council adopted “The Regulation on the functions of the Executive Committee and the Presidium, the organization and functions of departments, the work of deputies and their participation in the work of the section”, which significantly concretized, systematized and concentrated the work of the Moscow City Council, its structural units, officials and deputies to perform the main tasks. In 1921, the Moscow City Council approved “The Regulations on Councils in Moscow and the Moscow province”, which reflected the first experience and features of the Councils in the Moscow province and Moscow as the capital of the Republic. In accordance with these Regulations, the City and Provincial Councils were united, and the Moscow City Council became known as the Moscow Provincial Council of Workers, Peasants and Red Army Deputies, which powers extended to Moscow and the Moscow province. The highest authority was the Provincial Congress of Soviets, convened twice a year. In order to improve the efficiency of urban governance, Small Executive Committee and Small Presidium (City Council) were allocated from the Executive Committee and the Presidium of the Council. The City Council consisted of departments, headed by Deputy Heads of the Moscow City Council departments [10].

In order to improve further the structure of the Moscow City Council and raise the efficiency and effectiveness of its work, in 1921, a Regulation on the sections of the Moscow City Council was adopted. The sections had an important role in monitoring the activities of the divisions of the Executive Committee.

The Moscow City Council and its Executive Committee throughout the history of their existence was headed by one official – the Chairman of the Moscow City Council [6].

The state of municipal economy was largely determined by the activities of the Department of Urban Enterprises. The creation of an integrated structure for effective management of enterprises was among the tasks performed by this management body.

In terms of the food and fuel crisis, the disorganization of transport and anarchy [17] in February 1918 at the Department of Urban Enterprises in Moscow, in accordance with the proposal of the People’s Commissariat for local government, the Horticultural Department was organized, which work is proved to be very fruitful.

In May 1918, as the American historian Saulius Suziedelis noted, the Soviet government announced a number of measures, which under the general name “Food dictatorship”, provided for the use of force to confiscate grain [25]. However, in practice, these measures began to be applied earlier. As Associate Professor of the University of Verona Silvana Mallet noted, on March 15, the Moscow Council authorized the local Food Commission to arrest all bakeries, meat and other shops selling products that can be exchanged for grain, seize and confiscate such products, if the order of the Food Commission was not executed and the calculation of standardized products was not made [21].

The food dictatorship in Moscow was established in the summer of 1918. Along with the card system (the release of products in three categories of class rations), food teams were created from representatives of workers of Moscow enterprises, the fight against speculation was conducted, and catering was organized. In the autumn of 1918 881 nutritional points were opened in Moscow, which was visited daily by 400 thousand people [3].

In the summer of 1918, the Moscow City Council municipalized bakeries and bakehouses, and in the autumn all private trade in the city was transferred to the city government. The Food Department of the Moscow City Council carried out the organization of trade not only of basic necessities, but also carpets, watches, jewelry, etc. Retail distribution of these goods was assigned to the Supply Department.

Along with the food, there was a fuel issue. Due to lack of funds and problems with transport, the Moscow City Council was not able to deliver coal to the city even from the Tula province (Podmoskovny brown coal basin). In the summer of 1918, not enough fuel was procured. Firewood, first of all, went to the industrial enterprises, houses were provided on the residual principle. In practice, this meant that they received almost nothing. Therefore, it is not surprising that in the apartments of Muscovites in the winter of 1918-1920 the temperature was usually 8-9° [11].

The English journalist Arthur Ransom also draws attention to this problem, noting that the city people were starving, and in winter they suffered from the cold. People carried their beds to the kitchen, which was a little warmer than a small room heated by the natural warmth of a few people. During the winter, there was no means to heat other rooms, where the temperature was almost always much lower than the freezing point [22].

In November 1917, the Moscow City Council decided to transfer the management of urban real estate to house committees. The problem of housing shortage was acute. In 1918, in Moscow, compared with 1914, the total living area decreased by more than 1.5 times, from 41250000 m<sup>2</sup> to 26813000 m<sup>2</sup> [5].

About 400 thousand Muscovites lived in extremely cramped conditions [7].

Implementing the municipalization, new municipal government assumed, on the one hand, to solve the housing problem quickly and relatively painlessly, and on the other hand, the organization of citizens – house committees and quarterly farms – will be effective property managers.

The municipalization was carried out in stages. In the first stage, private ownership of individual dwellings was maintained. They, as a rule, were the wooden one stored buildings which were not covered by the regulation. However, in the autumn of 1918 a continuous municipalization began in Moscow. All houses passed into the jurisdiction of district house councils and house committees, which became the collective owner of housing [13].

According to the Resolution of the Moscow City Council “On distribution of premises in Moscow” adopted in the summer of 1918, consolidation was made at the rate of “1 room for 1 adult” [7].

The class orientation of the carried-out actions with all certainty was reflected in the September Resolution of the Moscow City Council “On the order of requisition of premises and movable property” fixing “the principle of search and providing premises to workers at the expense of bourgeois-parasitic elements” [7].

The resolution “On accounting and distribution of residential and non-residential premises in Moscow”, issued in October, also testified that the Moscow City Council in solving the housing problem was on the class positions. The resolution called upon the workers to seize the “bourgeois apartment”, and reduced the minimum threshold consolidation, up to 2 square sazhen (9 m<sup>2</sup>) for 1 adult [5].

The class approach was further developed in the special instruction developed by the Housing and Land Department of the Moscow City Council, according to which the entire population of Moscow was divided into several groups. The greatest advantages extended to members of the RCP (b) and the family of the red army soldiers who fought at the front. Included in this group, in the absence of housing, received it and were not subject to consolidation. The second group included representatives of the large intelligentsia, Soviet employees and the bourgeoisie who did not have real estate. They were subject to consolidation in accordance with the established norm. Workers, small and medium intellectuals, referred to the third group and received rooms in the houses of class alien elements, had to create unbearable living conditions for the owners. The fourth group included representatives of the bourgeoisie, living on unearned income or having property, they were expelled from the capital. Their property was confiscated, and in return they received “field ration” of the red army soldier who was going to the front: couple of linen, a pillow and a blanket [7].

In accordance with this regulation, 3197 “bourgeois families” (about 15 thousand people) were evicted from Moscow in the autumn of 1918, and more than 20 thousand workers were settled in their apartments [2].

Taking into account the importance and relevance of the problem of municipalization for the new government, in the autumn of 1918 in the capital on these issues a seminar was held, which was attended by representatives of 60 city housing departments. The participants of the seminar shared their experience and summed up the first results of municipalization. The course of the Moscow authorities on “continuous municipalization” was approved, as these measures allowed providing housing for every person quickly, regardless of the number of available apartments.

However, along with the solution of one issue, the continuous municipalization created a number of other problems, so from the beginning of 1919 it was limited. And I All-Russian Congress of heads of municipal departments of the Soviets, held in the beginning of 1920, spoke categorically against the continuous municipalization, considering it irrational from an economic point of view and contrary to the policy of the Soviet government in its attitude to the petty-bourgeois segments of the population. [7].

In the summer of 1921, the demunicipalization of housing began. In making this decision, the Moscow experience was decisive for the Central government [13].

A serious problem was the threat of epidemics associated with the state of urban sewerage and street cleaning. According to experts' estimates that A.N. Fedorov conducted, in 1918, each Muscovite produced 19 pounds of solid waste (about 300 kg) and about 40 buckets of sewage (about 490 liters) a year. The population of the capital in 1918-1919 did not fall below 1100 thousand people so for 2 years on the streets of the city was at least about 400 thousand tons of waste [11].

With the aim of improving the sanitary condition of the capital, cleaning the streets from dirt and debris, by the Resolution of the Executive Committee of the Moscow City Council in February 1920, the Emergency Sanitary

Commission (MESC) was established in Moscow. In order to achieve the objectives, propaganda means (public lectures, posters, films with medical content) and coercive measures were used.

Among the administrative measures for the prevention of diseases, the Resolution of the Moscow Council "On the maintenance of bathhouses" was adopted in the summer of 1918. Private bathhouses had to work not less than 3 days a week, not to raise the prices and, perhaps, the most important, to serve the neediest citizens free of charge [11].

At the initiative of the Moscow Council, a number of weekly campaigns were held. Thus, in March 1918, the "Cleaning Week" was held, during which about half of the waste accumulated over two years was removed from the capital [13].

In the first decade of April there were "Bath week", "Week of haircuts and shaving", "Week of washing". Each Muscovite received a special order, which gave the right to visit the bathhouse, hairdresser and laundry once for free [7].

Western authors also pay attention to hygiene problems, as English journalist Arthur Ransom notes, to encourage the population of Moscow to visit the bathhouses during the typhus epidemic, each person, in addition to a free bath, was promised a free piece of soap [22].

Along with the MESC the Special Construction and Sanitary Committee was acting. The task of this Committee was to check the condition of houses. According to the results of the audit the decision was made: on needed repairs at home, breaking it up for firewood, or its demolition. So, during the construction season of 1920 3653 buildings were repaired in Moscow. For comparison, during the same time in all 53 provinces of the Republic, together only 2347 houses were repaired [11].

Epidemics, famine and typhus in 1919 claimed the lives of thousands of people [19]. In Moscow as a result of epidemics, cold and hunger in 1918-1920 more than 150 thousand people died [11]. However, the Moscow Council managed to reverse the situation. By the end of 1925, mortality in Moscow had fallen sharply and the birth rate had doubled. Sewerage, water supply, central heating were being restored. In 1924, the bus service was opened. The electrification in the city is performed, city services started to work regularly [4, 7].

## Conclusions

Thus, the historical roots of the Moscow City Council origination took their beginning in the revolutionary events of 1905 and 1917 in Moscow. The emergence of this body of city government was the result of the revolutionary creativity of the masses. In the conditions of the victorious revolution the elections to the Moscow City Council were held on the basis of the Constitution of the RSFSR of 1918, on the class principle.

The Supreme body of the Moscow City Council was the Plenum, which elected the Executive Committee and the Presidium. Between sessions of the Plenums the Executive Committee exercised legislative and executive power in the city. In the structure of the Moscow City Council, for the management of municipal economy a number of departments involved in the solution of important problems were established, for example, the Department of Urban Enterprises, Food Department, Supply Department, Municipal Department, Fuel Department, etc. For the solution of new important problems new departments were created. In addition, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the work of the Moscow City Council, a number of sections were established to monitor the activities of the Executive Committee departments.

Along with the fight against the counter-revolution, sabotage, speculation, looting, among the most important activities of the Moscow City Council in the early years of Soviet power the following ones were: providing residents with food and fuel, solving the housing problem, countering the threat of epidemics. The analysis shows that in general, the Moscow City Council coped with the solution of these problems. Although, this was done by the harsh, cruel measures of wartime.

The high degree of centralization, the excessive increase in the role of the state in the first years of Soviet power in the conditions of the Civil war helped the new government to win. The revolutionary aspect of this development is reflected in the character and particularities of the activities undertaken in the area of state regulation. The role of urban governments in the allocation of limited resources increased significantly. An important feature was that the bodies of urban governance in the redistribution of resources were guided by the class principle that provided social support to the authorities by workers.

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