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BUKALOVA Svetlana Vladimirovna

**THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
SYSTEM IN THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE DURING THE WORLD WAR I
(AUGUST 1914 -FEBRUARY 1917)**

ABSTRACT

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Scientific consultant:
Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor
Merkulov Pavel Alexandrovich

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The relevance of the research topic: The optimal forms of the state's implementation of its social function continue to be a subject of discussion. This has led to the need for a retrospective examination of the interaction between the government and society in the social sphere.

This study aims to analyze the main elements of the social assistance system that emerged in the challenging conditions of the World War I. Its purpose was to compensate for or minimize the social risks caused by the war. As a result, the institutionalization of socio-legal statuses for soldiers' families, orphans, and war invalids occurred - a groundbreaking development for the Russian Empire at the time.

By examining the institutional development of social assistance, we can gain a deeper understanding of approaches to addressing social issues, including political culture, social inequality, social solidarity, and economic stability.

The purpose of this study is to identify trends in the development of a system of social support for victims of the World War I, and to establish principles for interaction between the government and society in assisting war victims. This will help to clarify the role of government and public institutions in addressing social problems. To achieve this goal, the following **tasks** need to be accomplished:

1. Define the theoretical and methodological bases for studying the government's role in the social sector, and apply them to the specific context of the World War I.

2. Analyze the approaches used in historical research on the relationship between government and society during the war period.

3. To establish the regulatory, organizational, and financial foundations for the management of social assistance for war victims through the activities of the Supreme Council for the Custody of families of mobilized, as well as the families of wounded and fallen soldiers, as an organizational and administrative body.

4. To define the structural and functional organization of the Special Commission of the Supreme Council as a specialized body for social assistance to military veterans.

5. To examine the approaches to the development of a social assistance system in the socio-political discourse of the Russian Empire during the pre-revolutionary period leading up to the World War I.

6. To analyze the mechanisms for providing support measures for war victims through the lens of the activities of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna's Committee for Charitable Aid to Families of Those Called to War, as a coordinating and executing body.

7. The aim of this study is to reconstruct a set of social assistance measures for soldiers' families, children of soldiers, and war invalids, with a focus on the balance between state, public, and private elements.

The study examines a range of organizational and legal measures for social assistance related to groups of people affected by military events.

Specifically, the research focuses on the process of establishing a system of social support for victims of the World War I in the Russian Empire (soldiers' families, widows, orphans, and war invalids).

The timeframe of the study spans from the declaration of mobilization and Russia's entry into the World War I on July 18, 1914 (according to the old calendar) to the abdication of Nicholas II on March 2, 1917, after which the governance mechanisms in all spheres of public life, including social care, underwent radical changes.

The geographical boundaries of the study were determined on the basis of a uniform management system and included 51 provinces of European Russia. These provinces were characterized by a wide variety of natural conditions, population densities, the ratio of urban and rural residents, agricultural activities, handicrafts, remote earnings, and land ownership patterns, both private and communal. However, despite these differences, the provinces in European Russia shared a common structure of provincial and local government, which played an important role in providing social assistance for war victims. Additionally, the Cossack territories, St. Petersburg and Petrograd Province, as well as Moscow and Moscow Province, were excluded from the scope of this study.

The methodology of the dissertation research is based on the principles of objectivity, historicism, and complexity, as well as general scientific theoretical methods of cognition. The study was conducted within the framework of social theory, a broad conceptual area of the social sciences that addresses a range of universal societal issues, primarily those related to institutionalization, the structural organization of society, social differentiation, and social change.

The methodological foundation of the research lies in a systematic approach, which views society as a social system and draws upon the general theory of systems. This approach treats human society as a highly complex, open, non-linear, and dynamic macro-system comprising lower-order sub-systems. Among these, special attention should be paid to the social sub-system, which facilitates the integration of society's members, their necessary unity, ensuring the continuity and reproduction of social life. Its basic elements include social institutions, social organizations, and social groups. The research concept focuses on social groups, based on the theory of social stratification, which views society as a system of social statuses.

In the traditional society of the Russian Empire before the World War I, the system of social status was relatively stable. However, under the influence of war conditions, there was a significant decline in the status of many individuals. This was seen as a threat to the stability of society and led to demands for state social guarantees to compensate for these losses.

The government played an active and proactive role in addressing social issues caused by war, mobilizing public resources to address these problems. This activity can be analyzed within the context of national mobilization, a concept that describes the interaction between the state and society during extreme conditions.

To successfully implement a mobilization policy, the government needs to expand its control over resources and etatize a significant portion of public affairs. The role of the government can be further understood through the lens of paternalism, where vulnerable segments of society become the primary subjects of state intervention.

The formation of the organizational and legal system for social assistance to victims during World War I is revealed through the lens of the process of institutionalizing the social activity of the state. This is the transformation of a social phenomenon into an institution that is consistently reproduced - a set of daily practices formalized based on customs, traditions, or rules.

Social institutions act as normative and value-driven forms of organizing mass interactions. They ensure that each member of society can meet their needs within the values of that society. One type of social institution is those involved in social policy, which work to ensure that everyone's needs are met within the framework of those values.

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its perspective on the processes of providing social assistance to war victims, considering the involvement of state and official administrative structures. This allowed us to conclude that during the World War I, the polysubjective model of social assistance in the Russian Empire evolved into a paternalistic one, with increased state regulation and the laying of the foundations for a modern-type state social policy in this area.

Conceptual approaches to understanding the role of the state in social affairs during the pre-revolution period of the World War I were defined within the frameworks of theories such as modernization, social mobilization, and state paternalism.

- Gaps and misunderstandings in the established historical research regarding the structure of the support system for war victims have been identified and addressed;

- The principles, characteristics, and trends of regulatory and legal regulation of the All-Russian system for assisting war victims, including the system of assistance agencies and the legal status of recipients, have been determined. Social assistance is viewed as an integrated phenomenon that combines the efforts of the state and civil society, highlighting the increasing role of the state in organizing social assistance.

- A comprehensive historical analysis of the organizational basis for social assistance management has been conducted, and tools for its promotion and coordination have been developed. The role of various social institutions and entities involved in social assistance is clarified, as well as mechanisms for utilizing charitable activities to address public administration issues.

- The scope and direction of social assistance for war victims is characterized, and the number of major categories is determined. This allows for an objective assessment of state social policy formation in the Russian Empire.

- Types and forms of assistance for major categories of war victims are systematized, along with mechanisms for providing them. This makes it possible to view social assistance as a component of modernizing public relations.

- The periodization of the development of the system of social assistance for victims of the World War I is proposed;

- The categorical apparatus of the social sphere has been reconsidered, and the content and correlation of the concepts of "charity", "public charity" and "social policy" clarified. The nature and place of such organizational elements as a society/association, a body/organization, an institution, and an institution in the overall system of social assistance are revealed.

Thus, solving research tasks has made it possible to obtain new scientific results on the development of social relations and the social sphere on the eve of the revolutionary transformation of Russian society, as well as make important adjustments to scientific ideas about the evolution of the social function of the state in the early twentieth century.

Provisions to be defended:

1. The years of the World War I occupied a special place in the process of modernization of Russian society. The involvement of the Russian Empire in the global conflict required the mobilization of economic and social resources, which led to the strengthening of the state's role in the economy and society. The mechanisms for state support for vulnerable groups, which had been developed by the early twentieth century, failed to address the threats to the stability of social

relations, caused by two negative factors simultaneously: a significant increase in the number of needy people and a decline in societal well-being. The state addressed the challenges of providing social assistance to victims of war by consolidating, regulating, and supporting charitable activities. State regulation and oversight were implemented through a paternalistic ideology.

2. A distinctive feature of the state's social policy was the development of social guarantees for certain categories of the population. This was manifested in the legal consolidation and regulatory regulation of organizational mechanisms for implementing these guarantees. An important aspect of institutionalizing social assistance measures was accounting for their recipients - their census and registration, which were carried out or prepared for all categories of war victims.

It is worth noting the transition from individual assistance to group assistance, as well as the overcoming of class and social roles in providing support. At the same time, the organizational system of assistance developed during the war years was seen by the authorities as a temporary measure, reflecting the Russian tradition of creating large state-public institutions in the social sector. This allowed for the integration of charitable activities with government support and funding, making the system of support for war victims a mixed state-public system.

An alternative model, based on legally established guarantees for assistance and their implementation by local authorities funded by the state treasury, was promoted by organizations such as the All-Russian Zemstvo Union and the All-Russian Union of Cities.

3. The establishment of an extraordinary interdepartmental body, the Supreme Council for the Custody of families of mobilized, has been a significant step towards establishing a modern state social policy. This public structure, with broad administrative participation and state funding, endowed with the ability to initiate legislation and exercise regulatory and oversight functions over the social assistance system, served as the immediate precursor to the State Social Policy Body, the Ministry of Social Welfare. For the first time in Russian history, within the Council,

a Special Commission was formed as a dedicated body for providing social assistance to disabled veterans of war.

4. A peripheral system of organizations coordinating efforts to assist war victims was established by the local branches of the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna's Committee for charitable aid to families of called to war. These branches interacted with other organizations and local government bodies operating at the provincial and district levels, providing assistance to victims and coordinating their activities. They also provided financial support to these organizations. In addition, the Elizabethan committee branches could act independently. It is worth noting the significant administrative involvement of local branches of the committee.

5. Social protection for war victims was funded from the state treasury in the form of pensions and benefits provided on the basis of law, as well as subsidies provided by the military fund to the Council for Custody, which were then distributed to cooperating organizations. A significant portion of the budget for the Council's activities in 1915 came from fees from a lottery organized in its favor.

However, as shown by the study, the specific organization of lotteries during this period, as well as the nature and scale of the Council's lottery, make it difficult to classify it as a purely charitable event. It should be viewed as one of the methods of centralized funding for the social sector. In addition, the Council and related organizations received charitable donations, but these could not form the basis for financial support to war victims. As the war dragged on, the significance of charitable donations diminished, while government funding rose.

6. A characteristic feature of the social assistance system was poly-subjectivity. Various non-governmental actors performed the role of grassroots administrative and governing elements at the county, volost, settlement, and district levels. These included classical charitable societies, local branches of All-Russian charitable societies; zemstvos/city governments and the bodies they created (district guardianship, committees); church parish guardianship; and, in rare cases, parish guardianships of the families of mobilized individuals. These actors could act as

founders of specialized institutions for the relief of war victims and could collect and redistribute donations. By collaborating with the Elizabethan or Romanov Committees, these charitable societies and zemstvo/city governments gained access to additional funding. The parish and volost trustee boards operated exclusively on the basis of local charitable donations. The victims of the conflict can receive direct assistance through services provided by various specialized organizations or institutions, such as workshops, canteens, courses, shelters, dormitories, and nurseries. The principles guiding the social assistance system include the priority of grassroots initiatives, subsidiarity in financing, and formal independence of associated organizations.

7. Support for various categories of war victims has become a priority for society and the state, and it is in this context that the trends towards institutionalized assistance have emerged. The system of social protection measures for war victims is based on providing them with minimal state guarantees, such as government rations and pensions. Both the authorities and society recognize that these guarantees are insufficient, and victims need additional support, which is interpreted as charity. The main areas of this assistance include labor, housing, food, and fuel. Additionally, there are categories of people in need who are deprived of state support and could receive rations from local governments or branches of the Elizabethan Committee, similar to state support.

During the World War I, the development of social infrastructure became a characteristic feature of the evolution of the social sphere. This included the emergence of new forms of assistance, such as agricultural shelters, trauma institutes, and courses for the disabled. There was also a significant increase in the number and scale of existing social institutions, including nurseries, public canteens, prosthetic workshops, and sanatoriums.

In fact, those forms of social assistance that had been isolated and experimental before the war received state financial support during this period and began to replicate. This allowed for a more widespread and effective delivery of these services to the population.

Social activities were aimed at maintaining social stability as a condition for preserving economic potential in the present and immediate post-war future. We can discuss socially transformative technologies of social work that aim to rehabilitate and increase the resource potential of war victims' personalities through their personal development and integration into modern social relations.

It has been established that during the Russian-Japanese War, pilot projects for supporting war victims took place as charitable initiatives. During the World War I, these projects began to be replicated and institutionalized.

The World War I was a significant period in the development of the social role of the state. It was characterized by an increased need for social support for vulnerable groups of the population, driven by concerns for maintaining social stability and preserving economic potential. This led to a shift from religious ideologies of charity to ideologies of social solidarity, with the actual amount of government assistance depending on taxation levels and priorities in government policy.

The trends that emerged during the pre-revolutionary period, disrupted by the collapse of the state system, indicate the potential for the institutionalization of state social policy. The state and its special structures played a central role in the emerging system of assistance for war victims, while there was also a certain inertia in public administration that retained the usual forms of partnership between the state and the public welfare system, avoiding the institutionalization of social protection within the state apparatus. This institutionalization was only carried out by the Temporary Government.

9. The World War I led to a change in the relationship between social policy, public charity, and charity. The state expanded its involvement in addressing social issues and creating institutions to address them. Public welfare agencies integrated into the state-run social assistance system and became subject to regulatory oversight and financially dependent on government support. Charitable activities of the society took on a supporting role, providing additional funding and volunteer contributions.

Public activity in the fields of charity and social assistance is subject to state regulation. This narrows the concept of charity by excluding the state's implementation of its social functions from the definition. This allows for a more realistic understanding of domestic charity, avoiding idealization. In turn, increased government involvement in social affairs indicates the institutionalization of government social policy.

The theoretical and practical significance of the dissertation research is presented. The results of the study allowed us to systematize and understand significant factual and historiographical material, which allows us to comprehensively analyze the process of institutionalization of social assistance during the World War I as an important stage in the formation of state social policy and to identify the leading role of the state in this process.

The author's conclusions about organizational design models for social assistance to war victims, both those implemented in practice and those discussed or planned for implementation, demonstrate the variability of state-public interaction in the social sphere and are of theoretical significance.

The practical significance of this dissertation research lies in its potential to contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of social assistance and social policy, both in the context of national history and through comparative analysis. By studying the transformation of the social sphere, we can identify the mechanisms, opportunities, and limitations of mobilizing public resources to address social issues that arise in times of crisis.

It is crucial to understand the relationship between government-provided assistance and charitable support, as well as to clarify ideas about the role of the state in providing social services and the contribution of non-governmental organizations in addressing social challenges. This knowledge is essential for developing effective policies that address the needs of vulnerable populations and promote social justice.

The results obtained can be applied in the creation of training programs and the production of textbooks for undergraduate and graduate students on national

history, social history, the history of public administration, the theory and practice of social work, and the events of the World War I.

The degree of reliability of the research results is high, which is achieved by referring to fundamental sociological theories, confirmed by the consistent logic of the research and the author's conclusions, using scientific methods of collecting and analyzing information. The reliability is based on the author's reference to a wide range of historical sources, including the funds of federal archival institutions: the Russian State Historical Archive, the Russian State Military Historical Archive and the Central State Archive of the City of Moscow.

The main provisions and conclusions of the dissertation research are reflected in 70 scientific publications with a total volume of 88.25 printed sheets, including 21 articles recommended by the Higher Attestation Commission of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation for the publication of the main results of the dissertation for the degree of candidate and Doctor of Sciences, and three collective monographs. The research findings were presented in reports at scientific conferences.:

1. International Scientific Conference "Great, Sacred, and Patriotic: Russia in the World War I " (Kaliningrad, Ministry of Culture of the Russian Federation, Russian Military Historical Society, June 26-28, 2014);
2. International Scientific Conference "The World War I– the prologue of the twentieth century" (Moscow, IVI RAS – Lomonosov Moscow State University – MGPU, September 8-10, 2014);
3. II International Scientific and Practical Conference "State Youth Policy: History and Modernity" (Orel, Oryol branch of RANEPa, May 21, 2015);
4. V International Scientific and Practical Conference "The World War I: a look after a century. 1915" (Moscow, International Independent Ecological and Political Science University (MNEPU Academy), November 26-28, 2015);
5. IV International Conference "The World War I, the Versailles System and Modernity" (St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg University, October 9-10, 2015);

6. XXXVI session of the Symposium on the Agrarian History of Eastern Europe "Results and prospects of research on the agrarian history of Russia in the X – XXI centuries" (Bryansk, Scientific Council on the Problems of the Agrarian History of Eastern Europe at the Institute of Agricultural Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences, September 24-28, 2018);

7. International Scientific Conference "Socio-demographic, ethno-confessional, medical, social and socio-cultural features of the development of the Russian province in the XVIII-XXI centuries" (Tambov, Tambov State University named after G.R. Derzhavin, September 30, 2020);

8. International Scientific Conference "The World War I in the historical memory of Russia and Europe: documentary evidence and historical narratives" (Moscow, Russian State University for the Humanities, November 9, 2023);

9. International Scientific Conference II Pisarev Readings "Actual source studies and archeographic problems of the history of the World War I ", (Moscow, IRI RAS, November 16-17, 2023);

10. XVI International Scientific and Practical Conference "At the Origins of Russian Statehood" (Kaluga, May 24-25, 2024);

11. XII International Scientific Conference "Studia internationalia: The Western region of Russia in international Relations of the X–XX centuries" (Bryansk, Bryansk State University named after Academician I.G. Petrovsky, July 02-03, 2024);

12. International Scientific Conference "The Last Wars of the Russian Empire: the Russo-Japanese (1904-1905) and the World War I(1914-1918)" (St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, November 20-21, 2024);

13. II All-Russian Scientific and Practical Conference "Wars and Military Conflicts in the social and economic history of Russia: on the 80th anniversary of the Great Victory" (Moscow, RANEPa, May 29-30, 2025).

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: Introduction, 4 main chapters with 13 paragraphs each, Conclusions, a Bibliography, a list of abbreviations, and Appendices.

The First chapter provides a theoretical and methodological foundation for the research, analyzing the current historiography on the topic of social care during World War I and describing the source material used in the study.

Chapters Two and Three focus on the infrastructure of social assistance, including the Supreme Council for the Custody of families of mobilized, as well as the families of wounded and fallen soldiers and the Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna's Committee for charitable aid to families of called to war, examining their regulatory, organizational, and financial aspects.

Chapter Four discusses the various types of assistance provided to war victims, such as families of conscripts, children of soldiers, and disabled veterans. The dissertation consists of 420 pages of text. The list of references and bibliography includes 545 items.