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## Local Self-government and Out-of-school Education in the Russian Empire During the First World War

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### Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of the actions of such a body of local self-government in pre-revolutionary Russia as zemstvo in organization of the cultural growth of the rural population of Stavropol province on the eve and in the early years of the First World War. The authors, depending on the basic principles and methods of historical research, have revealed and investigated the main forms and results of out-of-school education organized and supported by the zemstvo of Stavropol province within the existing powers, financial possibilities and wartime conditions. The results suggest that the highest interest, activity and success of zemstvo lecturers in educating fellow countrymen continue before and, even, during the First World War. Moreover, such activity broke the stereotypes of the hostile attitude of part of the Stavropol peasantry to a new form of management as zemstvo, and enabled to gradually establish in the region an algorithm of the organization and functioning of a local government system adequate to the needs of Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century.

**Keywords:** Russia, Stavropol province, Zemstvo, Peasantry, Out-of-school education, People's house, Zemstvo lecturers, Library-reading room, the First World War.

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## **Introduction**

On January 1, 2019 it will be 155 years since the creation of zemstvo on the basis of the "Regulations of provincial and district institutions of zemstvo authorities" in the Russian Empire. Their emergence was due to the liberation of a huge number of peasants from serfdom, in whose life organization the state authorities needed assistants represented by the effective local government.

In fact, zemstvo became the first all-classes electoral institution in the history of Russia and in bodies of civil self-government. Their main functions included the organization of medical care for the population, care for its primary education and public charity, national food and veterinary medicine, local construction and maintenance of roads, trade and mutual zemstvo insurance. It is obvious that a significant part of life problems of the majority of the population has now become a matter of zemstvos.

It should be noted that today the successful development of Russia, as well as other states, largely depends on the effectiveness of local authorities in the life organization, on the way of building their actions in accordance with the needs of the population within the framework of the state's internal policy. Naturally, the study and consideration of historical experience in this area of zemstvo bodies, which had appeared in the government system of the Russian Empire as a result of reforms in 1864, seems to be a necessary condition for the effectiveness of modern transformations.

## **Literature Review**

Being unique for a country with established traditions of autocracy, zemstvos immediately became the subject of long-standing and comprehensive interest, especially of Russian researchers. The content and consequences of their activities had been studied and discussed, for example, by Russian pre-revolutionary social and scientific thought in three major areas: conservative (S.Yu. Witte, S.F. Platonov, S.S. Tatishchev, etc.), liberal (B.B. Veselovsky, K.D. Kavelin, A.A. Kizevetter, etc.) and Marxist (Lenin).

A number of representatives of these areas even insisted on the priority of zemstvo authorities in comparison with the government institutions of management: "...government agents do not belong to the local population, and cannot penetrate into people's life so deeply..."[2; 201]. B.B. Veselovsky in his research "The history of the zemstvo for 40 years" presented the most complete historical picture of the Russian zemstvos activity during their forty years of existence [3]. Not only the zemstvo budgets in their dynamics, but also the economic and cultural activities of zemstvo authorities were subjected to the detailed analysis.

Stavropol province had acquired the zemstvo status only in 1913 and was included in the objects of study neither of the named work nor of a few Soviet publications, which studied the history of zemstvos. In case of pre-revolutionary publications it was due to the late period of introduction of Stavropol province to the zemstvo circle, but during the Soviet period zemstvos were of little interest to the science based on the famous Lenin's idea of them as "the fifth wheel in the cart of Russian state administration" [5; p.35].

Only in modern historiography there are gradually appearing works, affecting the problem of formation and activity of zemstvo bodies in one way or another in such geopolitically important for the Russian Empire and modern Russia region as Stavropol Krai [1]. In 2001, N.D. Sudavtsov published a monograph in which he, fundamentally exploring the history of zemstvo and city self-government of Russia during the First World War [6], analyzed the documents of the Stavropol zemstvo history. At the same time, insufficient

attention had been paid to the problem of the work of zemstvo authorities in the sphere of cultural growth of the rural population of Stavropol Krai during the wartime period.

### **Methods of Research**

When studying the problem, the authors turned to the civilizational approach based on such research principles as historicism, scientific character, and concreteness. The reliance on the principle of historicism allowed studying the subject of research in its development. The principle of concreteness is involved in order to analyze the subject of research as evolving at a certain time and in a certain place. The use of the principle of scientific character, as well as the principle of historicism, predetermined the use of such methods as historical-genetic, historical-system and historical-comparative ones.

### **Discussion and Results of the Research**

The border status of Stavropol province, the features of the relatively recent development of this territory by Russia, in many ways predetermined the introduction of zemstvo here that was much later in comparison with the internal provinces of the Russian Empire. Having begun its activity only in 1913, the Stavropol provincial zemstvo faced the need to solve those large-scale tasks that the other zemstvos had been implementing for almost half a century. Moreover, the social and economic situation, complicated in the conditions of modernization transformations and scientific and technical progress in the beginning of the 20th century, had produced a great number of new and quite difficult problems to solve. Stavropol province, based on developed capitalist agricultural production, was faced with the need to resolve its own social tasks.

Of course, the most important task of the zemstvo established in the province was the organization of education adequate to the needs of the economy and the raise of the cultural level of all its population.

The zemstvo lecturers said the following about the organization of modern education on the local level: "About 200 years ago Posochkov, a self-taught peasant, dreamed of "not having an illiterate person in a small village", and proposed his measures and plans for the implementation of this business that seemed urgent to him even in that distant time. "Nevertheless, even now, 200 years later, we are still far from the realization of this dream. There are many illiterate people not only in a "small village", but in a big city, too. Moreover, our country takes the last place among the cultural countries in terms of literacy rate. ... For our province, the issue of the need for evening and Sunday classes with adults and primary schools of literacy for adults is exacerbated by the lack of primary schools for the entire population. A huge percentage of school-age children are left behind the primary school and subsequently provide a huge contingent of illiterate, ignorant adults" [4; p.33].

Therefore, despite many other problems caused by the war and realizing the importance of priorities of their own tasks in education, the delegates of the third regular Stavropol provincial zemstvo assembly of 1915, as the main zemstvo administrative body in the province, had supported "the views of advanced zemstvos" of the country which seemed premature for Stavropol province: "Correct and successful development of economic, social and public life is possible only with a high cultural level of the whole population. The school, even with its most perfect formulation and with a significant duration of the course, cannot meet the increased demands of the population itself, because it serves a relatively small part of the population at every moment and does not take an active part in public life yet, and because the knowledge acquired in the school is soon forgotten without further strengthening and replenishing. Therefore, the school education cost without the organization of out-of-school education is not productive. For these reasons, out-of-school education should take an independent place in a number of activities aimed at

raising the cultural level of the population and it should be recognized by society and the state as no less valuable as school education, and it should be considered equally necessary" [4; pp.7-8].

In one of the reports that sounded at this zemstvo meeting the state of educational work in the province before the introduction of zemstvo institutions was analyzed: "The Libraries of Guardianship about people's sobriety ... do not function at all, and the books represent a dead material without any movement. The local society of the national education expansion in the province, due to the lack of its funds, could not develop its activities widely. Cooperatives, as a private economic institution, only in recent years are beginning to include the educational functions in the program of its activities: and the population of the province was outside the influence of any educational organizations, because there were none" [4; p.8].

Zemstvo had created several "cultural cells" to educate adult population of the province and described this experience at one of the regular provincial assemblies in 1915 as a highly successful and profoundly responsive "to the needs and thrust of the population to the light", though it was difficult to implement. By 1915 Stavropol province had 6 people's houses and 15 libraries with reading rooms [4; p.8].

Here is one example of the people's houses work. Letnitsky people's house was opened on December 6, 1914. It was the time of the First World War. From January 1 to December 1, 1915 the library had 500 subscribers, most of them were adults. During this period, 5,836 books were handed out. The majority of readers were interested in fiction, a small group in religious issues, history, the natural Sciences, and "about 40-50 adolescents avidly read military books." For 11 months approximately 6,178 people had visited the reading room, on average 500 visits per month [7].

The distribution of the working hours of the library-reading room was "strictly coordinated with local conditions and the needs of the population". A survey was conducted among the readers, and there was carried out a work on "the establishment of recommendatory catalogs of books."

Since the village was long, two "handbag libraries" were organized for the outskirts: one contained 40 books, the other one – 50 books.

In Letnitsky people's house the lecturers of zemstvo gave lectures to the population on agrarian subject.

The evening and Sunday school, opened in the people's house, became popular, and 3 groups of adults had been trained "reading, writing and arithmetic" by the end of 1915.

Letnitsky people's house organized performances, concerts, and exhibitions. In 1915, the themes of the exhibitions were "about the war", "The history and geography of Russia". Approximately 2,000 people had visited them. At the exhibitions "appropriate explanations were made, popular conversations were conducted."

Nevertheless, it should be noted that much in the work of Letnitsky people's house depended on energy and opportunities of his head Mr. Runovsky. He had, besides everything mentioned above, "to give advice on a variety of issues, mainly legal ones. He must provide all sorts of catalogs, order books, etc". However, the rural "intelligentsia..., in most cases, was "rather indifferent" to the works of the people's house", testified the participant of the zemstvo provincial assembly.

An example, confirming the urgent need to expand the peasants' horizons by familiarizing with reading, can be the fact of great interest of the inhabitants of Bolshaya Dzharga village to the beginning of the people's house activities there, first of all, the library. So, since its opening in August 1915 and until December 1 of the same year, the number of subscribers was 228 people. They took on average 500 books per month. According to the age groups, the subscribers were distributed as follows: children from 11 to 13 years - 57 people, adolescents from 14 to 17 years - 63 people, and adults - 108 people. At the same time, the vast majority of them were farmers or people connected with them. Moreover, almost all of them "had never

read any books before the opening of the library at the people's house", and the head librarian had to "manage the reading process and to select the books." The works by L. Tolstoy were of the greatest demand. "They almost didn't return to the shelves of the bookcase, and on reclaiming were immediately transferred to the following hands on the same day."

For less literate peasants there were organized reading rooms in people's houses: "...as the reading room is visited by many peasants, who had never read newspapers at all, and also mass of illiterate people, the newspapers in most cases are read aloud with the corresponding explanations, reviews, etc., with indication where one can read more about this or that phenomenon" [4; p.13].

Stavropol provincial zemstvo treated the out-of-school education seriously as an opportunity for familiarizing the ordinary people with knowledge and literacy. The very importance for the maturation and socialization of local communities to activate this process was described in the excerpt from the zemstvo's report "On the activities of existing centers of out-of-school education: "The short experience of the Provincial zemstvo on out-of-school education has proved the need for cultural institutions. In those places where it was difficult to expect demand for a book, with the opening of libraries such an influx of people was determined, that it was necessary to fill up the libraries ... The attitude of the provincial population to libraries and people's houses exceeded all expectations. From many villages that do not have centers for out-of-school education, there are requests to open a library or people's house there. They promise cash benefits, free premises... Closing of wine shops, the war experienced by Russia, have caused such requests for the books that we can only wonder where it is still concealed. Female population of villages on which there were little hope of attracting to educational institutions already reads newspapers in reading room, demands explanations from the librarian of unclear moments, registers in the evening and Sunday school" [4; p.22].

The report of the provincial Government "On further activities of out-of-school education with submission of estimates for 1916 year" cites the desire of various public associations (Petrovsky agricultural society, Romanovsky and Ternovsky credit partnerships, etc.), rural societies to create such institutions, including a proposal to take over their maintenance or the acquisition of premises for them. It takes place in conditions of a sufficiently hostile attitude of the population to zemstvo as one of a series of "numerous governing bodies" that was characteristic of the Stavropol province. Moreover, such work of the provincial zemstvo won the favor of people. There are many examples confirming it. We should name the "language" spreading among the people: "... we do not want Zemstvo, but it sends us books, newspapers, arranged a school for adults, takes care of us."

In the village of Nadezhda, "in this center of irreconcilable opposition to the zemstvo", they became interested in innovations of the neighbors, residents of the village Staromaryevskoye: "And we would like to have a school for the peasants, too, because we also need to go to the soldiers". Residents of Alexandria, knowingly hostile to the zemstvo, asked after a demonstration lecture arranged by the zemstvo "to come to them and arrange lectures about the zemstvo." From the village of Aleksandrovskeye people wrote: "The dawn of a new life". That's how our peasants call what is happening now about the recently appeared here unprecedented institution, the people's house. Every day there is a crowd of old and middle-aged people, boys, women, and girls here. This is not a walking crowd, not farcical, and not the cinematographic rural audience. Something new blows over it. The expression of faces is new, and the talk is quite unusual for our rural crowds. From this crowd of 200 people a quarter is literate. They studied at the elementary school and continue their education in history, geography, natural study in the people's house. The rest of the

crowd started the alphabet for the first time, and how enlightened their faces are as they move forward" [4, p.35].

The Provincial zemstvo, in the conditions of increasing peasants' interest in it and its work, turned its attention even to the use of cinematography as a factor of out-of-school education of the population. At the fourth extraordinary zemstvo assembly, it was decided to provide 1700 rubles for acquisition of five cinema devices of the "Koch" system for the open people's houses [4; p.45]

## **Conclusion**

It is obvious that the analysis of the activities of the Stavropol zemstvo in the sphere of raising the educational and cultural level of the population through the organization and expansion of the range of forms and scale of people's houses work, conducted only on the materials of the meetings of the provincial zemstvo assembly, shows the highest interest, activity and success of zemstvo lecturers in educating fellow countrymen before and, even, during the First World War.

Moreover, such activity broke the stereotypes of the hostile attitude of part of the Stavropol peasantry to a new form of management as zemstvo, and enabled to gradually establish in the region an algorithm of the organization and functioning of a local government system adequate to the needs of Russia in the beginning of the twentieth century.

## **Conflict of Interest**

The authors confirm that the submitted data do not contain any conflict of interest

## **Footnotes**

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