

Civil-Military Relations during World War I (Russian Empire)

By [Olga Porshneva](#)

Summary

This article examines the mechanisms, results, and characteristics of the national mobilization in Russia in the conditions of the First World War. Moreover, it considers the forms of cooperation between the government and the public, the self-organization and civic initiative of the population to give aid to the front and to those who had suffered from combat operations. The causes and manifestations of the evolution of relations between the government and the public, which traveled a path from unity and cooperation to confrontation, are shown.

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Introduction

The publication of a whole series of works devoted to the practices and the experience of national mobilizations in European countries on the eve of and during the First World War,^{[1](#)} which allow an identification of the general and the specific in the realization of their different variations, became the result of a long study of the social and cultural history of the First World War in the West. With respect to the Russian experience such research started to be actively accomplished only in the post-Soviet period when there was a shift of emphasis from identifying the preconditions of the revolution to an examination of the cooperation between the government and the public in solving wartime problems, the forms of patriotic practices, the state of civic activity, and the self-organization of the population in wartime conditions,

including at the local level.²

The goal of the article is to show the characteristics of the national mobilization in Russia, and the practices of the public self-organization of the population in wartime conditions viewed in the context of the relations between the government and the public.

“The Mood of 1914” in Russia and National Mobilization

The entry of [Russia](#) into the First World War on 19 July (1 August) 1914 provoked a powerful upsurge of patriotic sentiments which encompassed all social classes and regions of the country. Such an emotional reaction to the beginning of the war was characteristic of all the European countries which entered the world conflict, which found its reflection in the metaphor “[the 1914 mood](#)” adopted in Western [historiography](#).³ The general enthusiasm of the first days of the war reflected the widespread illusions of liberation from class egotism, privileges of status, and distinctions.⁴ This relates in full measure to Russia, where the “1914 mood” was embodied in particular in the patriotic and monarchist demonstrations of the first months of the war, participation in mobilization, and a volunteer, philanthropic movement in the capitals and provinces.⁵

The patriotic, monarchist, and religious sentiments which joined together the participants of mass demonstrations and [church](#) services held in the cities, workers’ communities, and villages of Russia in July and the beginning of August 1914 were recorded in numerous official and unofficial sources.⁶ There were no antiwar workers’ strikes either in the capital or in the provinces; only in St. Petersburg were there noted three brief street demonstrations of an antiwar nature.⁷

96 percent of those subject to conscription appeared at the mobilization commissions. Whereas before the declaration of general mobilization the strength of the Russian armed forces was 1,423,000 men, by the end of 1914 more than 6.5 million men ended up in the ranks after it was carried out and additional conscriptions were conducted.⁸ About 75 percent of all those conscripted into the army in the first week of mobilization were peasants.⁹

At the same time sources demonstrate that public sentiments at the beginning of the war were not uniform, and they need to be differentiated both by social strata as well as depending on the specifics of ethnic, territorial, and local communities. For example, the depression and alarm of workers, peasants, and even representatives of the middle class are

mentioned in Russian and foreign research as the first reactions to the declaration of war.¹⁰ This natural psychological “response” to the news about the war was replaced and forced out by a patriotic upsurge during participation in demonstrations, acts of a symbolic and ritual nature, which promoted a strengthening of an officially-approved value attitude toward the war.

Conceptions of patriotism displayed in the cultural practices of the population were diverse and dynamic.¹¹ Critical, [pacifist](#) sentiments and hatred of official [propaganda](#) were chiefly manifested among intellectuals.¹² However, the open expression of critical views was difficult not only in connection with the introduction of [censorship](#) restrictions at the start of the war but also because of the patriotic emotions which dominated in society. On the whole, from the viewpoint of Hubertus Jahn, two types of patriotism were characteristic of the middle and upper strata of Russian society, conservative and progressive. The first borrowed much from official symbolism, was based on loyalty to the current regime, and was most comfortable with social patriotism, which cultivated civic motivation and social action. Progressive patriotism was crystallized as the military condition of society deepened, was oriented toward new values, loyalty to the Russian people and nation, was based on the symbolism of charity, and reflected the public’s desire for an end to the war.¹³

Traditional patriotism oriented toward the state and/or region, which reflected a lack of development of the national forms of self-consciousness and self-identification in this social environment, dominated among the common peasantry.¹⁴ The workers and peasants of Russia, like some other European countries of the “second echelon” of modernization or of their regions,¹⁵ were not inclined to identify their interests with the interests of the educated and prosperous “higher-ups”, or were the peasants with the interests of [city-dwellers](#) and the residents of other localities. However, social conflicts were “frozen” at the start of the war, and the idea of unity perceived by a considerable part of the population as the unity of the Tsar with his people received broad support.¹⁶ Peasants and the majority of the workers regarded the war like a fate, a test sent down by God, a natural disaster, against which one could not fight.¹⁷ The authoritarian and patriarchal political culture caused the realization of the formula “For God, the Tsar, and the Fatherland” in the popular consciousness, and was the context of the traditional behavior of the recruits. A disruption of the traditional farewell ceremony ritual of draftees in connection with the introduction of “prohibition” became the cause of riots of lower ranks of reserves, which took on the form of spontaneous looting of state wine shops, warehouses, and landlords’ estates in the spirit of the traditional rebelliousness.¹⁸ These riots took place in forty-three provinces,¹⁹ but according to A. B.

Berkevich's data, in forty-nine of the 101 provinces, oblasts and districts of Russia, the rebelliousness was completely blended with the patriotic, monarchist, and religious views of the draftees.²⁰

An urgent need for cooperation between the [government](#) and public in solving wartime problems had already appeared in the first weeks of the war. This was explained by both the unforeseen scale of the military operations and the government's inability to manage the complex business of mobilizing national resources, and organize the supply of the army and the normal functioning of the front and rear by itself. A whole series of public organizations arose in the atmosphere of patriotic upsurge at the beginning of the war which were designed to help the government, army, and population in wartime conditions. The All-Russian [Zemstvo and City Unions](#) became the most influential of them.

On 30 July 1914 the All-Russian Zemstvo Union headed by Chairman Prince [Georgy E. L'vov \(1861-1925\)](#) was formed at a congress of zemstvo [district council] representatives in Moscow. It included forty-one zemstvo provinces (with the exception of the Kursk province zemstvo) and the Don Cossack oblast', which joined the Union at the special order of the War Ministry. On 12 August 1914 the Tsar approved the existence and legalized the activity of the Union. After this Minister of Internal Affairs [Nikolai Alekseevich Maklakov \(1871-1918\)](#) sent a special circular to all the governors with a suggestion to cooperate in the common cause.²¹ The primary authority of the Zemstvo Union, which was not secured legally, however, included helping sick and wounded soldiers in the rear.

Provincial and district bodies of the Zemstvo Union were created at the local level in addition to the national bodies. The forms of provincial committees were diverse, and varied depending on local conditions.²² District committees were instituted according to the need and also did their work taking local conditions into account.²³

Another public organization, the All-Russian Union of Cities, whose main task became the organization of medical measures, was formed on 4 August 1914, practically simultaneously with the Zemstvo Union.²⁴ The Committees of the Union of Cities used the symbolism and rules of [Red Cross](#) institutions, at the same time maintaining independence in issues of internal management and financing.²⁵ Provincial and oblast cities which had joined the Union of Cities organized a league between district cities.²⁶

When sanctioning the creation of influential structures of public self-governance, the ultimate authority was based on the seriousness of the situation, changed sentiments, and relations

with the public, and also the brevity of war, viewing the institutions which had arisen as temporary. However, on the contrary, zemstvo and liberal society also counted on preserving the public organizations which had arisen after the war.

Already after several weeks the scope of activity of the leagues began to steadily expand, spreading to front-line territory and including new diverse directions. The position of the military leadership, which differed with the attitudes of [Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia \(1868-1918\)](#) and the majority of the government, played an important role in this. [Nikolai Nikolaevich, Grand Duke of Russia \(1856-1929\)](#), the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, and representatives of the High Command entrusted the Zemstvo and City leagues with orders for the realization of a whole number of measures to help the army in the field.

The Self-Mobilization of Society: the Motivation, Institutions, and Experience of Civic Activity

Ideas about the need to combine the efforts of the government and public in the name of mobilization of the rear and the creation of a united national front became the fundamental motivation of the leaders of zemstvo and city self-governance shared by the broad urban strata and the intellectuals.²⁷ Other impelling motives were a desire to increase the status of the self-governing bodies and the role of bourgeois liberal society in solving governmental problems. From the first days of their existence the Unions developed diversified practical work whose chief direction became aid to sick and wounded soldiers. In just three months the Zemstvo Union prepared hospitals and infirmaries with 155,000 beds in which part of them, having 32,000 beds, were in the regions of combat operations, and were equipped with over 100 meal stations. By 1 January 1916 hospitals had been created from VZS [All-Russian Zemstvo Union] resources numbering 173,000 beds²⁸.

The Zemstvo and City Unions, like many other public organizations, became the centers of independent public activity, a focus of civic initiative. Numerous public volunteer associations which had arisen “from below” operated under their leadership in the provinces such as the Committees of Zemstvo Employees, the Trustee Committees at infirmaries, the Ladies Circles, and others. Besides the “educated” elements of the organization of the Unions they included in their ranks representatives of various social and professional groups, including the low-income strata of the population.²⁹

The activity of the Ladies Circles, which had appeared in public organizations and self-governing bodies, primarily in the Zemstvo and City Unions, demonstrated the selflessness and civic responsibility of the women and their growing capability for self-realization outside the family. The large-scale involvement of women during the war years in the medical field,

charity, cultural and educational work, the solution of social problems, industrial production, and army service created preconditions for them to acquire new social roles and practices, and was an important stage on the path to women's emancipation in Russia.³⁰

The Russian Red Cross Society was also an organization which accumulated the joint efforts of the government and public to serve the needs of the army and the population. An expansion of the realm and types of activity of this public-state organization took place in wartime conditions. The Red Cross Society gave medical aid not only to servicemen, but also to [prisoners of war](#), to the civilian population which had suffered from epidemics and combat operations,³¹ offered food to the poor, stored up agricultural products, etc.³² The Red Cross Society promoted the creation and functioning of an entire network of charitable organizations such as ladies committees, shelters for invalids and orphans, and health institutions which had been opened with the Society's involvement and "flagged" with respect to it, in spite of a bureaucratic component in the structure and activity which was more pronounced compared with other public organizations and close ties with the imperial family. The Russian Red Cross Society actively cooperated with other public organizations and government structures: the City Union, the Zemstvo Union, provincial zemstvos, the Synod, the War Ministry, and educational institutions.

Charitable activity, which relied on a rich experience of pre-revolutionary charity, reached an unprecedented scale during the war years.³³ Its role was especially high in the extreme conditions of wartime, when the numbers and the spectrum of the social categories of the needy had sharply risen. The state occupied an important place in the system of charity: whereas the pre-war welfare budget of the country had been approximately 60 million rubles and every twentieth resident needed mandatory charitable care, in 1916 government expenditures just to help soldiers' families exceeded 1 billion rubles, which was one-third of the 1913 Russian state budget, and every fourth person was in acute need of social assistance. These were primarily sick, wounded, and crippled soldiers, soldiers' families, [refugees](#), and homeless children.³⁴ According to official data, at the start of the 20th century there were 4,762 charitable societies in Russia, 2,965 of which were subordinate to the Ministry of Internal Affairs,³⁵ but during the war years numerous new organizations arose, both of a general and specialized nature.³⁶ Charitable organizations and local government bodies coordinated the movement to aid the front, the soldiers, and their families which had developed locally everywhere. It was expressed in the population's unpaid volunteer work to equip infirmaries, shelters for invalids and orphans, nurseries, and the construction of barracks for refugees, the manufacture of underwear, and the storing and sending of necessities to the army in the field, Easter and Christmas gifts, aid to soldiers' wives and

widows in carrying out agricultural work, and other forms of volunteer activity.³⁷ Donations of money and materials were the main form of the population's participation in charitable activity. A considerable part of the monetary donations was collected during public events – charity concerts, lotteries, lectures, readings, evening parties, exhibits, and bazaars. Public infirmaries, canteens, children's homes, and playgrounds were created from donations, and soldiers' wives and widows were paid a supplement to the government ration.

The peasant community itself was an important participant in charitable activity. Peasants gave material aid to the front: donations of grain or money for the army's needs from the reserves of [rural communities](#) became a widespread practice in 1914.³⁸ Rural communities also allocated money for the organization of infirmaries for sick and wounded soldiers, and decided about social assistance to draftees' families.³⁹ Peasant women knitted and sewed warm clothing for front-line soldiers.

During the war years the parish charity of the Russian Orthodox Church directed at the support of soldiers' and refugees' families became more active. Non-Orthodox ethno-confessional charitable societies also exhibited high charitable activity.⁴⁰ Various members of the imperial house of the Romanovs, primarily the women, played a considerable role in the support of the high status of charitable activity: [Alexandra, Empress, consort of Nicholas II, Emperor of Russia \(1872-1918\)](#) and [Maria Fedorovna, Empress, consort of Alexander III, Emperor of Russia \(1847-1928\)](#), [Elizaveta Fedorovna, Grand Duchess of Russia \(1864-1918\)](#) and [Kseniia Aleksandrovna, Grand Duchess of Russia \(1875-1960\)](#), [Olga Nikolaevna, Grand Duchess of Russia \(1895-1918\)](#) and [Tatiana Nikolaevna, Grand Duchess of Russia \(1897-1918\)](#), and others were involved. Empress Aleksandra Fedorovna and her daughters served as nurses, demonstrating high examples of philanthropy with personal example⁴¹. A considerable number of charitable organizations (the "Supreme Council for Charity to Family Members of Draftees and the Families of the Wounded and Fallen Soldiers"; the "Committee of Grand Duchess Tat'iana Nikolaevna to Give Temporary Aid to Those Who Suffered from Combat Operations"; the "Elizaveta", "Ol'ga", and other committees) were under the patronage of members of the imperial family, who took a personal part in their work. Obtaining substantial government, including financial, support these semi-public organizations acquired broader abilities to accomplish the tasks set before them, created a far-flung network of branches in the provinces, and coordinated the activities of other societies of a similar orientation.

The sphere of charitable activity was not free of the shortcomings inherent to many aspects of the process of national mobilization in Russian conditions: the lack of a systematic nature,

the lack of coordination of the actions of its individual elements, an irrational and at times wasteful expenditure of resources, theft, and abuse of authority.

The generous state subsidizing of public organizations did not preclude financial difficulties in the accomplishment of their tasks.⁴² For example, the work of the institutions of the Zemstvo and City Unions in the provinces was primarily supported through local resources. The cessation of the functioning of hospitals by the beginning of 1917 because of a lack of financing was a common situation, especially in districts and district centers. The main committees of the Unions irregularly paid the debts of self-governing bodies, which had extended credits to local institutions of the Zemstvo and City Unions, leaving them debtors for the entire war.⁴³

The “Patriotic Alarm” of 1915 and the Enlistment of “All Living Social Forces” in the Cause of Defense

The Russian army’s defeats in the spring and summer of 1915, the “great retreat”, vividly demonstrated the enormous oversights in the country’s [preparations for war](#), the organization of the army’s supply with [weapons](#), ammunition, and clothing, and the consequences of the lack of coordination and incompetence of the actions of the military and civilian authorities. The army found itself without the necessary [artillery](#), shells, and there was a shortage of [rifles](#), cartridges, and boots. The crisis of military and technical supply which was discovered by the end of 1914 reached its apogee at the beginning of 1915 when the army’s needs for combat equipment was on the average being 15-30 percent met.⁴⁴

The tragedy of the retreat, accompanied by the heavy losses, echoed in the country, giving an impetus to the development of a political crisis. The liberal opposition renewed its confrontation with the government, coordinating it with the aid of the Progressive Bloc created in the State [Duma](#) in August 1915. The instructions of the High Command to the military censor to limit itself to the preservation of military secrecy opened a wide opportunity for criticism of the government in the newspapers.⁴⁵ Calls to enlist “all living social forces” in the cause of the defense of the country and the mobilization of the rear for the needs of the front, veiled and direct demands for the creation of a “Ministry of Public Trust” or “a government responsible to the Duma” began to resound from the pages of the press, the podiums of local government bodies, public organizations, and the Duma.

Under the pressure of the situation Nicholas II agreed to enlist representatives of the bourgeois and the liberal community in the management of the cause of defense, sanctioning the creation of a Special Council on State Defense, Military Industrial Committees, and a joint

committee of the Zemstvo and City Unions, the “Main Committee for Army Supply” (Zemgor) in the summer of 1915.

Military-Industrial Committees [VPK] were created in May 1915 at the initiative of Russian businessmen in order to mobilize industry for the needs of the front. The policy documents which defined the competence of these organizations, the “Statute” and the “Mandate”, were approved by the Council of Ministers on 4 August 1915 and by the Tsar on 27 August 1915. A Central Military-Industrial Committee headed by its Chairman, Octobrist [Aleksandr Ivanovich Guchkov \(1862-1936\)](#) and Deputy Chairman, Progressist [Aleksandr Ivanovich Konovalov \(1875-1949\)](#), was elected at the first VPK congress in July 1915.

The Military-Industrial Committees included representatives of commerce and industry, public organizations, government institutions, scientific and technical personnel (scientists, engineers, and technicians), and cooperatives. At the initiative of A. I. Konovalov, an important textile factory owner, comrade of the chairman of the Fourth State Duma, and founder of the All-Russian Union of Trade and Industry, Working Groups were created in the Military-Industrial Committees in the autumn of 1915 with the object of maintaining social peace and ensuring social partnership between workers and the bourgeoisie.

The Military-Industrial Committees enlisted the production facilities of private enterprises which had not previously used in the fulfillment of military orders, promoted an increase in the amount of industrial production, the reorganization and engineering of the enterprises, the creation of private industry in those regions of the country where they had practically been non-existent before, the exploration for minerals, and the development of industrial sectors that were new for the Russian economy (chemical, chemical and pharmaceutical, electrical engineering, automotive). On the whole the Military-Industrial Committees, which headed up public industrial mobilization, provided more than one-tenth of all military supplies to the army in the field, filled 11 percent of military orders, enlisted about 1,300 medium-sized and small industrial enterprises in serving the army, and created 120 private factories and workshops. By the middle of 1916 the crisis of military and technical supply had been on the whole overcome, which was to the great credit of the Military-Industrial Committees.⁴⁶

In 1916, 239 local committees were formed, combined into thirty-three oblast [committees]. By February 1917 of the total number of 240 Military-Industrial Committees Working Groups had been created in fifty-eight committees (in Petrograd, Moscow, Kiev, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav, Rostov, Tsaritsyn, Samara, Kazan', Perm', Ekaterinburg, Omsk, and other cities). They had their own governing body in the form of the Working Group of the Central Military-Industrial Committee, published bulletins, and even held their own all-Russian conferences.⁴⁷ At the same time there existed a number of factors which impeded the

realization of the idea of cooperation between the workers and the bourgeoisie within the framework of the Military-Industrial Committees. Insufficient skill and the low living standard of a majority of the workers, and the police behavior of the authorities in protecting the interests of businessmen slowed the development of the practices and traditions of social partnership. This was also hampered by workers' feelings of hostility and embitterment against the privileged groups of society. Temporarily weakened under the influence of patriotic upsurge at the beginning of the war the negative attitudes of the workers with regard to the bourgeoisie were revitalized and acquired additional impetus in the spring and summer of 1915.

In the conditions of the development of a political crisis in the country the Military-Industrial Committees became part of the forces opposed to the government, and their members shared the platform of the Progressive Bloc in the Duma and the demands for liberal reforms. For their part, government leaders and the bureaucracy were jealous of the Military-Industrial Committees, and their bourgeois leaders were perceived as competitors invading the area of competence of government authority. Most of the provincial Military-Industrial Committees were busy dealing with everyday business problems at a time when the epicenter of the political activity of the Committees was the Central Military-Industrial Committee.

In August 1915 a whole series of Special Councils were created besides the Special Defense Council, to solve the most critical issues, on which the functioning of the military depended: on fuel, food, transportation, and the settling of refugees. They included government officials, members of the State Council and Duma, businessmen, and representatives of public organizations. They had their own authorized representatives and committees in the provinces, which also included representatives of government and public structures in their composition.⁴⁸

The [food](#) crisis, which required not just emergency measures by the government to overcome but also the intervention of local government bodies and public organizations, became one of the most acute problems. The zemstvos and cities, in particular, received the right to procure and sell grain at firm prices. In the middle of 1916 a Central Committee of Public Organizations for Food Matters was created at the initiative of the Union of Cities. It included representatives of the Unions of Zemstvos and Cities, the Military-Industrial Committees, the congress of delegates of the exchange trade and agriculture, the All-Russian Chamber of Agriculture, and other organizations.⁴⁹ However, the zemstvos could not effectively carry out grain procurement because of financial difficulties, a lack of trust in zemstvo procurement officials on the part of the peasantry, and the parochial use of the railroads by the zemstvos.⁵⁰

Social antagonisms and the variety of motives for individuals and groups to participate in the national mobilization were manifested in the activity of national and local public organizations. For example, when joining national and local government structures in wartime conditions, the upper bourgeoisie used them, and also the staff of the Military-Industrial Committees itself, to secure their own economic, and in a number of cases, monopolistic interests by pressure on small and middle-sized industry and political pressure on the government. Work in the staff of the Zemstvo Union, the City Union, the Zemgor, and defense enterprises, which released people of draft age from military service, attracted many people with this very opportunity. As the war dragged on and as its victims and the deprivations increased, mass discontent grew, especially at the lower levels of Russian society, among peasants, workers, and soldiers, because the bourgeoisie “was hiding” from mobilization in the rear and “capitalizing on the war”. Beginning in 1915 the conflict between the “front” and the “rear” began to gradually grow; the discontent of the “rear” with the front-line soldiers, primarily peasant soldiers who thought that not only a considerable part of the representatives of the prosperous elite, but even factory workers, “were hiding” from military service in the rear.

In spite of the development of signs of a crisis beginning in the middle of 1915 even up to the 1917 [February Revolution](#) the work of public organizations in the interests of the national mobilization continued to remain extraordinarily intense and strained. 1,260,000 wounded passed through the hospital beds which were registered with the Union of Cities from the start of the War until January 1916. The Union contained 247 health institutions which served 4,200,000 hospital bed-days, 270 outpatient clinics, dental offices, and X-ray units. The Union of Cities had 388 meal stations, dining halls, and tearooms at the front.⁵¹ The results of the activity of the Zemstvo Union were still more impressive. By the end of 1916 the number of VZS [All-Russian Zemstvo Union] institutions had reached 7,728. The Zemstvo Union spent 60,000,000 rubles a month on its work, which reflected the scale of activity of this organization.⁵² The supply of the army with warm clothing, the fight against contagious diseases, giving aid to refugees and orphans, the material and technical supply of the army, and providing the population with food and fuel were under the supervision of the Zemstvo Union and its local committees, as noted in the decree of the meeting of authorized representatives of provincial zemstvos in March 1916.⁵³

Thus, Russian society reached a new level of self-organization during the war years: public associations coordinating the work of local institutions appeared on a nationwide scale, new directions in the activity of the public organizations which had formed arose, and the scope of their authority, and of civic activity as a whole, expanded. The bodies of public self-government were able to successfully institutionalize and develop public initiative.

The National Mobilization Plan in the Conditions of the Confrontation Between the Government and the Public and the Revolutionary Events of 1917

Simultaneously with the cooperation between the government and the public in national mobilization, beginning in the middle of 1915 a confrontation started to appear between the main participants of this process. Nicholas II's refusal to listen to the representatives of the zemstvos and cities who had gathered in their congresses in September 1915 became the fatal "fork in the road" in the relations between liberal circles and the Tsar, the turning point in the mood of broad civic circles. The congresses adopted resolutions demanding political reforms in response to the disbanding of the Duma and in connection with the military reverses and disorder in the rear.⁵⁴ The attitude of the government toward the leagues changed sharply after this, control was considerably increased, and various police prohibitions and restrictions on their activity were regularly employed. Nicholas II and the conservative ministers proceeded from the idea of the immutability of the Fundamental Laws of 1906, which had confirmed a dualistic monarchy, and the danger of political destabilization in wartime, an impetus toward which reforms of the political system might become. The 11 January 1917 Circular of Minister of Internal Affairs [Aleksandr Dmitrievich Protopopov \(1866-1918\)](#), which ordered governors and city leaders to hold the chairmen of city dumas and zemstvo meetings responsible for their pronouncement of political resolutions of an anti-government content became the apotheosis of the confrontation between the government and the public.⁵⁵ However, the confrontation between the liberal democratic circles and the government, which had increased in 1916 and become exacerbated at the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917,⁵⁶ was coupled with the dangers of liberals calling for a revolution, which would take from the arena of history not only the tsarist regime, but also all the educated elements of the country.⁵⁷

The crisis of the system of government management which developed in Russia from the very start of the war became especially acutely manifest beginning in the middle of 1915. A mechanism capable of quickly and systematically ensuring the coordination of the efforts of the military and civilian authorities and solving the unavoidable conflicts and problems in wartime conditions was simply not formed.⁵⁸ At the same time success in the solution of the complex problems of national mobilization was impossible without high efficiency of government management, close cooperation and mutual trust between the government and the public, and government legitimacy in the eyes of the broad strata of the population. In reality, in the third year of the world conflict the government found itself discredited to a great degree in the eyes of the broad masses of the people and social, not national or state,

problems became the priority for the majority of the population. The spread of rumors at all levels of society about “treason” at the top, the actions of the “German party” headed by the Empress, the so-called “inside German”, became the embodiment of the psychosocial crisis of trust in the government. The government and the public traveled a path from unity and cooperation to confrontation, ending in the overthrow of the monarchy and the liquidation of the traditional Russian state system in the course of the February Revolution of 1917.

During the brief period of the democratic revolution, which lasted from February through October 1917, the political barriers to cooperation between the government and the public in the accomplishment of national mobilization were eliminated. Public organizations became a new mainstay of the [Provisional Government](#) in the implementation of government control, acquiring broad laws and powers. Their status rose and the economic base expanded.⁵⁹ As before, the educated, middle-level urban strata, intellectuals, and office workers actively participated in diverse practical activity to mobilize the rear for the needs of the front. As of 1 September 1917 about 70,000 people were serving in the institutions of the Union of Cities, an order of magnitude more worked in the Zemstvo Union. By September 1917, 630 cities were in the VSG [All-Russian Union of Cities], about 75 percent of the total number of Russian cities of that time.⁶⁰ However, at the same time other processes – the development of the revolutionary crisis, which led to a growth of massive discontent with the War and the Provisional Government, and the fall of the authority of public organizations inherited from the “tsarist regime” – were gaining momentum and beginning to dominate.

Questions of war and peace became one of the main factors of the development of the Russian Revolution in February-October 1917, which had opened the way to a just peace in the imagination of the broad masses of people. The social base of the supporters of the Provisional Government steadily contracted as events developed after February 1917. The national mobilization plan in the name of victory in the war, or defense from the external enemy, marked by productive cooperation between the government and the public during its existence in the first years of the war, found itself discredited, and then scaled down as a result of the October Bolshevik coup. By the middle of 1918 the Bolshevik government had liquidated the “bourgeois” public organizations, transforming part of them and including [them] in new state and public bodies.⁶¹ Unlike the experience of national mobilization in the developed countries of liberal democracy, in Russia, as in [Italy](#) and [Austria-Hungary](#), the mechanisms of national integration turned out to be less effective, and the social basis and legitimacy of the government insufficient in conditions of a war unprecedented in scale and misfortune.

The October Bolshevik coup marked the beginning of the realization in practice of the

Bolshevik platform for getting out of the War. The negotiations about the peace conditions very quickly showed the “annexationist appetites” of Germany and its allies with respect to Soviet Russia in conditions where the negotiations were not recognized by the Entente. In spite of the fierce struggle in society, in the government, and in the Bolshevik Party itself, on 3 March 1918 a separate peace with Germany was concluded at Brest whose conditions turned out to be extraordinarily harsh for Russia.⁶² The Peace [Treaty of Brest-Litovsk](#) became not only a point of reference for the intervention of the countries of the Entente, hatred of it was one of the foundations of the political and military consolidation of the Bolsheviks’ enemies. These circumstances promoted the unleashing in Soviet Russia of a widespread [Civil War](#), one of the main reasons for which was the aggravation of the social differences in Russian society which did not withstand the “strains” of the First World War.

Porshneva Olga Sergeevna, Ural Federal University

Notes

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