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Pension provision for employees of the Ust-Sysolsky and Yarensky zemstvos of the Vologda province in the late 19th – early 20th centuries

Abstract

The article based on materials from the National Archives of the Komi Republic (NAKR) examines for the first time the pension provision of zemstvo employees in one of the northern regions of the Russian Empire: the Yarensky and Ust-Sysolsky zemstvos of the Vologda Governorate in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Drawing on a number of previously unpublished documents, the authors focus on pressing issues that have been insufficiently explored in the academic literature: the formation of zemstvo pension funds, the organization of pension and benefit payments to zemstvo officials, and cash flow management. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries the first legislative acts were adopted devoted to pension provision for zemstvo employees: teachers, doctors, junior medical personnel, and land surveyors. The inclusion of these categories among individuals with pension rights was linked, on the one hand, to the growing social significance of this new social group, and, on the other hand, to the interest of zemstvo leaders in staffing the lower echelons of zemstvo institutions. The establishment of pension funds in the region under study dates back to 1903. An analysis of documents from the National Archives of the Komi Republic reveals significant difficulties in their operation. Based on the sources the authors formulated a final conclusion regarding the reasons for the slow organization and unsatisfactory state of development of the zemstvo pension system in the region. One of the main reasons was the weak economic development of the northern region and the poverty of the population, which negatively impacted the zemstvo budget in general and the pension system in particular. The effectiveness of pension funds was low. Pension fund participants, workers in healthcare, education, and pharmaceutical institutions, could rely solely on their savings upon retirement, whereas in neighboring provinces, pension funds were supported by provincial authorities and private institutions. Low wages and difficult working conditions for zemstvo employees led to high staff turnover, which

also negatively impacted the development of the pension system. The activities of pension funds in the region were limited by constant oversight by local administrations represented by city councils. Government decisions stated that zemstvo pension provision was the exclusive prerogative of the zemstvos themselves. This hindered the development of the zemstvo pension system and diminished its potential.

Keywords

Pension, zemstvo, council, cash desk, salary, fees, pension book.

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