

## Russia in the First World War

**Veranstalter:** National Research University – Higher School of Economics, Moscow; German Historical Institute, Moscow; Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.; Kennan Institute

**Datum, Ort:** 03.06.2014–05.06.2014, Moscow

**Bericht von:** Johannes Arens, Glasgow

The international conference „Russia in the First World War“, held in Moscow from 3–5 June 2014, was organized by the National Research University – Higher School of Economics (Moscow), the German Historical Institute (Moscow), the Jack, Joseph and Morton Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies (Washington, D.C.) and the Kennan Institute.

Due to the very large number of speakers, this record will focus on presentations on the army, the economy, identity, nationalism and religious groups. Further talks that this report cannot cover, were given on topics such as refugees, political parties and organizations, images of enemies and allies, culture and the intelligentsia.

In his introductory lecture, DAVID SCHIMMELPENNINCK VAN DER OYE (St. Catharines, Ontario) discussed Russia's war aims, showing that Russia entered the war mostly „out of a sense of honour“ and only started developing clear strategic aims in the course of the war. The army generals wanted to prioritise the War against Germany and Austria-Hungary, thus opposing the traditional and widely popular goal of Russia gaining the Bosphorus. The latter aim was especially popular with the church, since it would have meant control over the old patriarchate of Constantinople. ALEKSANDR POLUNOV (Moscow) later reflected on this, as well as on other goals formulated by – often disagreeing – church representatives, ranging from the controversial idea of establishing Petrograd as a new patriarchate alongside Constantinople, to the utopian vision of some Grecophiles of reinstating the Byzantine Empire, now including Russia, as well as Jerusalem, to the suggestion of simply accepting Constantinople's religious

dominance over Moscow once and for all.

The Russian army of the First World War was compared to the later Soviet Army of the Second World War by OLEG BUDNITSKII (Moscow), who highlighted such continuities as the propagandistic use of the Victory over Napoleon or the harsh treatment of deserters, and who explored differences and continuity in areas such as technology, transport, wartime economy and finances or assistance by the Western Allies.

A lecture on an often underestimated aspect of military history was offered by ANTHONY JOHN HEYWOOD (Aberdeen), who gave a report on his current research on the weather during the war at the Eastern Front and its effects on the course of the war. Based on extensive meteorological data, Anthony John Heywood elaborated on the negative impact the extreme cold and the high precipitation of the winter of 1916/17 had on the front line troops, but also emphasized, that the severe supply problems of the time were less due to the weather than commonly assumed.

A number of presentations throughout the conference dealt with specific groups of persons involved in the war and its aftermath: DIETRICH BEYRAU (Tübingen) reflected on how former czarist Officers and Generals made use of their experiences gained in the First World War in the following Civil War, especially focusing on the role intended for the newly introduced Commissars, who by „education and violence“ made the Red Army into a „school of communism“, thus forming the soldiers to soviet patriots. Moreover, Dietrich Beyrau highlighted the transformation due to the First World War-experience of the Russian military doctrine, which incorporated elements both of partisan and of regular warfare so as to spread the revolution, and required a wholly militarized society.

According to CHRIS READ (Warwick), soldiers and sailors were „the most important actors“ in the revolution. Chris Read demonstrated that the roots of their actions are to be found foremost in conditions of the military service like the shortage of food and equipment, whereas social issues such as the land question were only of secondary importance. The Bolsheviks managed to make use of the soldiers and sailors as instruments of

---

central policy, despite relatively few of them being party members. Chris Read further challenged the assertion that the Czarist army was „disintegrating“ in the final stages of the war, desertion rates actually being „relatively low“, and the main problem instead being „mass disobedience“ within a basically intact army.

SIMONE ATTILI BELLEZZA (Trento) discussed the situation of Italians of the Austrian Army as prisoners of war (POWs) in Russia regarding their national identity. As Simone Attilio Bellezza demonstrated, Italian POWs, who had often been badly treated in the Austrian-Hungarian Army, were perceived by the Russian authorities as potential allies and therefore treated better than their German and Austrian counterparts. Despite identifying themselves as Italians, the Italian POWs mostly declined offers of being sent to Italy so as to fight against the Habsburg monarchy, since they feared retaliations against their families. Moreover, the Italian government mistrusted them and questioned their loyalty to Italy, thus confirming the unclearness of national and political identity of the Italian POWs in Russia.

GEORG WURZER (Tübingen) presented his research on Edwin Erich Dwinger (1898-1981), a German POW in Russia, whose autobiographical novels about his wartime experiences were best-sellers in the 1920s. Georg Wurzer proved them to have been largely fabricated. The image Dwinger conveyed of Russia reflected common stereotypes of the time instead of genuine experiences, and proved to be very influential for the image of „Russians“ and „Russia“ in the Third Reich.

This „multiplicity of social identities“ and „fragmentation“ did not only apply to Italian POWs, but also to the Russian population, as was shown by ALFRED RIEBER (Budapest). This multiplicity included particularism within individual social groups such as the nobility and the serfs, and was accompanied by a political fragmentation at the institutional level as well as on the level of political movements, thus leading Alfred Rieber to the conclusion of a „deep vertical and horizontal fragmentation along socio-economic and national lines“ in Russia during Czarist rule, which continued into Soviet Russia.

The situation of the Russian population was further discussed in ERIC LOHR's (Washington) lecture on citizenship during the World War, highlighting the rights and obligations associated with citizenship, and pointing out the „conditionality of support“, the demand for more rights for Russian citizens in return for their support of the war, whereas citizens of enemy states were persecuted. The war led to more awareness of citizenship boundaries, a division which even increased under the rule of the Provisional Government.

Two lectures dealt with aspects of the war economy. According to VLADIMIR BULDAKOV (Moscow), late Czarist Russia was not well prepared for a major European war, despite attempts of modernization in areas such as military technology, chemical industries or administration. The situation deteriorated in the course of the war, ultimately resulting in improvisation and the employment of pre-industrial industrial methods – an „archaization“ of production.

CHRISTIAN WESTERHOFF (Stuttgart) discussed the often-neglected subject of forced labour in the First World War in Eastern Europe. The German occupation authorities recruited workers so as to make use of the natural resources of the region and for the industries in Germany, initially recruiting on ill-informed „volunteers“, but relying more on force as the war proceeded. Especially the north-eastern „Ober Ost“ region, Christian Westerhoff argued, proved to be a „laboratory of forced labour“ foreshadowing the even more extensive use of forced labour in the Second World War.

In the course of the conference, broad attention was drawn onto the subject of Nationalism. ALEKSEI MILLER (Moscow) explored the impact of the First World War on the conflict between All-Russian and Ukrainian Nationalists, outlining the demise of the multinational Russian Empire in the course of the War, asserting that the Russian nationalists were the „foremost enemies of the Bolsheviks“.

ANASTASIA TUMANOVA (Moscow) discussed the „chauvinist enthusiasm“ that voluntary societies in Russia demonstrated in their patriotic campaigning against enemy aliens during the war. Even societies deal-

ing only with areas such as literature, music or science were mobilized against citizens of enemy states, leading to the aliens' expulsion from the societies and to further discrimination. Thus, the „enemy“ citizens were victims of a general hysteria, a growth of the national mindset and of support for the society's anti-foreigner policy by the Imperial government.

ELISABETH HAID (Vienna) explored the public discourse on the occupation of Galicia. Within the fierce public debate on the subject, most papers in Russia helped propagating the annexation of the „Russian soil“ of Galicia. Often, historical arguments for the claims to the region were put forward, adding to placing it in the broader concept of the „Russian mission to free all Slavs“. On the other hand, a minority of the Russian papers criticised the attempts for Russification of the locals, and argued for more autonomy for Galicia.

Throughout the conference, different aspects of Jewish life and anti-Semitism received much attention: DAVID ENGEL (New York) challenged the common assertion of widespread Anti-Semitism within Ukrainian nationalism, insisting that Jews were generally well integrated into Ukrainian society at least until the mid-1920s and pointing out that Jews and Ukrainians were „the two largest European ethnicities without nation states of their own“. According to David Engel, pogroms in the Ukraine were generally not associated with the Ukrainian national movement and were not seen as specifically Ukrainian. On the contrary, hope for a multi-national, multi-ethnic Ukrainian state led many Polish Jews to immigrate to the Ukraine.

DANIEL A. NEWMAN (Washington) interpreted the „often-neglected“ Anti-Semitic violence in Central and Eastern Europe as a prelude to the Holocaust. Since the front line zone was in control of local commanders, policies towards Jews varied, but often induced Anti-Jewish violence such as taking of hostages or deportations, especially during the summer of 1915.

A case-study of the Jewish population of Warsaw during the war was delivered by CHRISTIAN TEICHMANN (Berlin), who gave an account of the „fluid“, uncertain situation of the Warsaw Jews. Traditional insti-

tutions like the – bankrupt – Jewish congregation were incapable of effective assistance. On the other hand, the German administration, present from September 1915 onwards, installed an own department for the affairs of religious minorities, but dealt only superficially with the difficulties of the Jewish population; Ethnic tensions persisted.

A further case-study of the impact of the First World War on Jewish life in Imperial Russia was presented by VERENA DOHRN (Hanover), who showed how the Jewish Kahans family oil business flourished and expanded during the war, despite losing its Western dependencies to the advancing Germans, and further profited from reforms of the Provisional Government, but ultimately came to its end as it was nationalized by the Bolsheviks.

Two lecturers dealt with Islam in Russia during the War. OLGA BESSMERTNAIA (Moscow) showed how Islam had the image of an enemy in the correspondence of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the years leading up to the war. A „myth of panislamism“ was formed in the press in reaction to the nationalization of the state. According to this „myth“, the Ottoman Empire posed the threat of unifying all Muslim people under its rule, thus making Muslims potential spies and separatists. In the course of the war, the fears associated with vaguely-defined „panislamism“ and the use of stereotypical „Muslim“ images declined.

FRANZISKA DAVIES (Munich) explored the role of Muslim soldiers within the multi-ethnic, multi-religious Russian Army. Muslim soldiers from central Asia were integrated into the pre-war and wartime army alike with the help of loyal religious elites such as Muslim chaplains within the army. In news and propaganda directed at the Muslim population and Muslim soldiers, the War was presented as a „European War“ and „German War“ for the fatherland and for the Muslim community, thereby excluding potential conflicts of loyalty in a war „against the Ottoman Empire“.

The conference brought together researchers from a very broad range of different topics related to Russia in the First World War. The staging of parallel sessions offered

---

a choice of subjects, but the fact that participants could not visit all lectures made it somewhat difficult for discussions to continue beyond individual sessions. Thus, few overall results, linking different sessions, could be noted, even though the high quality of the individual presentations offered many insights on the topics concerned.

**Conference overview:**

Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow) / Nikolaus Katzer (Moscow) / David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye  
(St. Catharines), Opening remarks

*Plenary Session*

David Schimmelpenninck van der Oye (St. Catharines), Russia's Aims in the Great War

Anthony John Heywood (Aberdeen), Friend or Foe? „General Winter“ and Tsarist Russia's War Effort, 1914-1917

Dietrich Beyrau (Tübingen), What did Former Tsarist Officers and Generals Learn from the Lost War?

Oleg Budnitskii (Moscow), Russia in the World Wars of the 20th Century: An Attempt at a Comparative Analysis

*Panel 1: The First World War and the Problem of Political and Social Stability*

Alfred J. Rieber (Budapest), Social Fragmentation and the Crisis of the Old Regime

Eric Lohr (Washington), Russian Citizenship during WWI

Vladimir P. Buldakov (Moscow), The First World War and the Modernization of Russia: Illusions and Realities

*Panel 2: Russian Empire and the Rise of Nationalism during the First World War*

Aleksei I. Miller (Moscow), The Role of the First World War in the Conflict between All-Russian and Ukrainian Nationalisms

Olga Iu. Bessmertnaia (Moscow), Heat Check: The Rhetoric of the Enemy and Its Limits (The „Muslim Question“ in the Correspondence of the Special Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the Last Seven Years of „Peace“ (1908-1914)

Franziska Davies (Munich), For Prophet and Tsar? Muslim Soldiers and Russia's Great War

*Panel 3: Jewish Experiences from the First World War through the Civil War*

David Engel (New York), Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in the Shadow of War and Revolution

Daniel A. Newman (Washington), Violence at the Front against Jews during the Early Stages of the Great War as a Prelude to the Holocaust

Christian Teichmann (Berlin), Losing the West, Fighting the East: Jewish Struggles for Warsaw, 1914-1921

*Panel 4: Evacuation and the Problem of Refugees*

Konrad Zieliński (Lublin), The Evacuation of Russians from the Kingdom of Poland in 1915. Statistical Picture of Destruction

Liubov N. Zhvanko (Kharkiv), Refugees as a New Social Reality in the Russian Empire during the War: The Case of Ukrainian Provinces, 1914-1915

Irina B. Belova (Kaluga), Re-evacuation of Refugees of the First World War from Soviet Russia: The Case of the Central Provinces of European Russia

*Panel 5: Russian State and Society in the First World War in Transnational Perspective*

Ewa Bérard (Paris), Russian Capital Cities in the First World War in European Perspective: State and City Power

Verena Dohrn (Hanover), The First World War, Family Ties and Business Interests: Jewish Entrepreneurs on Two Sides of the Border

Chris Read (Warwick), The Revolutionary Role of Soldiers and Sailors from the July Days to the Czech Legion Rebellion: Sowers of Discord or Central Enforcers? An Aspect of Centre-Periphery Relations

*Panel 6: War, Culture and Memory*

Natalia Iu. Budanova (London), Does War Have a Feminine Side? The First World War in the Work of Russian Female Artists

Alexandre Sumpf (Strasbourg), The Image of the Front in Russian Film Chronicles, 1914-

1918

Harriet Murav (Urbana, IL), *Zombies and Broken Men: World War I in Russia and Europe*

Margarita S. Fabrikant (Minsk), „The Phenomenon of Disappearance”: The First World War in the National Narratives of Former Western Territories of the Russian Empire

*Panel 7: Home Front: Political Parties and Public Organizations*

Irina A. Gordeeva (Moscow), Russian Radical Pacifists in 1914-1917

Gennady Estraiikh (New York), Russian Jewish Civil Society in 1914-1918

Igor V. Narskii (Chelyabinsk), „Political Activity Is Not Noted,” or How the First World War Affected Political Parties: The Case of the Urals, 1914-1918

Anastasia S. Tumanova (Moscow), Voluntary Societies in Russia in the Campaign against Enemy Aliens in the First World War

*Panel 8: National Identities in Russia's Western Borderlands in the First World War*

Aadu Must (Tartu), The Fate of Baltic Germans in the First World War

Karsten Brüggemann (Tallinn), The Baltic Hinterland during the First World War 1914-1918: Imperial and National Identities, Political Choices and the Challenge of Everyday Life (as Represented in Memoirs)

Christopher R. Gilley (Hamburg), Iurko Tiutiunnyk: A Ukrainian Career in World War, Revolution and Civil War.

*Panel 9: Military Plans and Occupation Practices*

Dennis Showalter (Colorado), Conquest, Civilization, Colonization: Imperial Germany and World War I Russia

Bruce W. Menning (Lawrence, KS), In Search of an Exit: The Military-Intellectual Legacies of Delbrück, Fuller, and Isserson

Christian Westerhoff (Stuttgart), German Labor and Occupation Policy on Russian Imperial Territories during the First World War

*Panel 10: The Experience of Captivity and*

*Foreign Legions*

Georg Wurzer (Tübingen), Captivity in Russia during the First World War in Veteran Memoirs: The Example of Edwin Erich Dwinger

Simone Attilio Bellezza (Trento), Choosing Their Own Nation: National and Political Identities of the Italian POWs in Russia, 1914-1921

Viktor E. Kelner (St. Petersburg), „Next Year in Jerusalem”: British Pragmatism and Zionist Dreams, Toward the History of the Jewish Legion, 1916-1918

*Panel 11: Home Front: Economic and Social Aspects*

Olga M. Morozova (Rostov-on-Don), Homefront „Wars” in the Southern Russian Industrial Region, 1915-1916

Anna N. Ereemeeva (Krasnodar), „All Places of Recreation Work Wonderfully”: The Industry of Entertainment during the First World War

Tatiana I. Troshina (Arkhangelsk), State Social Policies during the First World War and the Rise of Social Tensions: The Case of the Northern Provinces of European Russia

*Panel 12: Russian Society, Public Diplomacy and the Fate of Empire*

Viktor E. Avdeev (Moscow), Russian Public Diplomacy the First World War: Goals, Methods and Peculiarities

Elisabeth Haid (Vienna), „Collecting the Russian Soil” – public discourses on the occupation of Galicia

Aleksandr Iu. Polunov (Moscow), On the Path toward the „Third Rome”: Projects to Change the International Status of the Russian Church in the First World War

John Steinberg (Austin), The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and the end of World War I on the Eastern Front

*Panel 13: Images of Enemies and Allies*

Aleksandr V. Golubev (Moscow) / Olga S. Porshneva (Chelyabinsk), The Image of an Ally in Russian Society in the First World War

Tatiana A. Filippova (Moscow) / Petr N. Baranov (Moscow), The Images of Enemies in Rus-

---

sian Satirical Journals during the First World War

Viktoria I. Zhuravleva (Moscow), The Image of the Russian Empire in American Representations in the First World War

*Panel 14: The War in the East of the Empire*

Igor O. Ermachenko (St. Petersburg), The Military-Economic and Diplomatic Alliance with Japan in the Mirror of Russian Public Opinion, 1914-1916

Ivan V. Sablin (St. Petersburg), The Battleground of Nationalisms: Disentangling Eurasian Empires at the Siberian Front

Shusuke Takahara (Kyoto), America's Withdrawal from Siberia and Japan-US Relations – A New Perspective on the Wilson Administration's Decision Making

*Panel 15: The Intelligentsia and the War*

O.Iu. Malinova (Moscow), The First World War and Redefining the „West“: An Analysis of Russian Public Discourse

Christopher Stroop (Moscow), The Russian Religious Intelligentsia's Civil Religious Project in the First World War

Trude Maurer (Regensburg), Exclusiveness or Integration? The Participation of Professors and Students in the War Effort in Germany and Russia

Tagungsbericht *Russia in the First World War*. 03.06.2014–05.06.2014, Moscow, in: H-Soz-Kult 22.11.2014.