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## The Politics of Russian Memory: The Great War in the European Context

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**Abstract:** This article examines how the historical memory of World War I emerged and developed in Russia, and also compares it to how Europeans have thought about the conflict. The author argues that the politics of memory differed during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. In the wake of the 1917 Revolution, Bolshevik efforts to “re-format” the memory of the Great War were part of its attempt to create a new society and new man. At the same time, the regime used it to mobilize society for the impending conflict with the ‘imperialist’ powers. The key actors that sought to inculcate the notion of the war with imperialism into Soviet mass consciousness were the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Communist Party, the Department of Agitation and Propaganda, and, in particular, the Red Army and Comintern. The latter two worked together to organize the major campaigns dedicated to war anniversaries, which were important both to reinforce the concept of imperialist war as well as to involve the masses in public commemorations, rituals and practices. The Soviet state also relied on organizations of war veterans to promote such commemorative practices while suppressing any alternative narratives. The article goes on to explain how, under Stalin, the government began to change the way it portrayed the Great War in the mid-1930s. And after the Second World War, Soviet politics of memory differed greatly from those in the West. In the USSR the Great Patriotic War was sacralized, while the earlier conflict remained a symbol of unjust imperialist wars.

**Keywords:** World War I, Russia, Europe, politics of memory, historical memory, anniversaries

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## Политика памяти в России: Первая мировая война в европейском контексте

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**Аннотация:** Анализируются формирование и эволюция исторической памяти о Первой мировой войне в России в контексте подобных процессов в Европе. Рассматриваются влияние Революции 1917 г., социально-политических трансформаций советского и постсоветского периодов на политику памяти. Характеризуются факторы, определявшие особую роль политики памяти в становлении и функционировании советского государства, значение «переформатирова-

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ния» памяти о Первой мировой войне в реализации задач создания нового общества и человека, подготовки к новой войне с «империалистическими» державами. Раскрывается роль наиболее влиятельных акторов политики памяти, сыгравших решающую роль в утверждении концепта «империалистической войны» в сознании советского общества: ЦК РКП(б)/ВКП(б), его Отдела агитации и пропаганды, РККА, Коминтерна. Показаны специфика и содержание деятельности РККА и Коминтерна как акторов политики памяти, их взаимодействие в период подготовки и проведения массовых политических кампаний, посвященных годовщинам войны и ее «юбилеям». Характеризуются эволюция политики памяти, корректировка концепции войны и изменения в использовании ее образа в пропаганде середины – конца 1930-х гг. Главным объектом сакрализации после Второй мировой войны в СССР стала Великая Отечественная война, а Первая мировая война осталась символом несправедливых империалистических войн.

**Ключевые слова:** Первая мировая война, Россия, Европа, политика памяти, историческая память, юбилей

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## Introduction

Contemporary historians place much emphasis on the question of memory in the context of World War I. The boom in publications was prompted by the general “Mnemonic turn” in historiography and centennials of the conflict.<sup>1</sup> These studies provide national and cross-national comparisons of the politics of memory and commemoration among the combatant states.<sup>2</sup> Scholars pay particular attention to the interwar years, since it was in this period that the culture and politics of memory took shape.

From the beginning of the war, states devoted considerable resources to develop methods of mass manipulation and propaganda. That period also saw the emergence new concepts of state-society relations, while after 1917 the Bolshevik government started to explore the possibilities of social engineering to change human consciousness and behavior. In short, World War I stimulated the development of the politics of memory.

Aleksey Miller rightly argues that the term “politics of memory,” is used ‘to denote the whole sphere of public strategies in relation to the past, that is, used for conceptualization, for commemoration practices and teaching history’. Meanwhile, he defines “historical politics” as a

specific case of the politics of memory, characterized by active participation of power structures, confrontation and the pursuit of party interests.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> S. Heathorn, “The Mnemonic Turn in the Cultural Historiography of Britain’s Great War,” *The Historical Journal*, no 48 (4) (2005): 1103–1124.

<sup>2</sup> Samuel A. Hynes, *War Imagined: The First World War and English culture* (London: the Bodley Head, 1990); G.L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*. (New York; Oxford: Oxford University press, 1990); Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1996); Jay Winter, *Remembering War. The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2006); Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011); Kolonitskii B. I. “Pervaya mirovaya voina: kul'tura epokhi i sotsial'naya pamyat',” *Zvezda*, no. 11 (2014), 199–216; T.G. Ashplant, G. Dawson, and M. Ropereds. *Politics of Memory: Commemorating War* (London and New York: Routledge; Taylor and Francis Group, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Natsionalisticheskaya platforma ili liberal'nye versii istorii? Istoriograficheskie razvilki poslednikh desyatiletii v versii Aleksey Miller, accessed August 27, 2018, <http://gefter.ru/archive/author/miller>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, both Russian and international historians largely considered World War I to have been “forgotten” in Russia. As Dan Orlovsky puts it,

throughout the Soviet period, human memory was suppressed and there was a desire to forget not only the Great War but its victims and death as such.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary experts acknowledge that the metaphor of the “forgotten war” can be used to emphasize the difference between the Russian and Western memorial traditions.

What distinguished Soviet Russia from Europe and the United States was that the former turned its official memory of the war into an element of the revolutionary myth, subjugated to its logic. Bolshevik history politics drove the Great War to the margins of mass consciousness. Another reason was that in Russia, the Revolution and the Civil War in particular seemed to have had a much greater death toll than World War I. Meanwhile, the public’s general disillusionment with the aims of the fighting, war weariness and the terrifying trench experiences of combatants during the war’s final stage also affected the historical memory.<sup>5</sup>

Examining a wide range of sources, from official documents to literary texts, enables us to compare memorial traditions in Russia and the West.<sup>6</sup> Boris Kolonitskii analyzed the literature and art created in different countries during the war, their public perception and the socio-historical context and discovered major differences

In Russia, in 1914–17, such books or paintings were not created that would forever leave an imprint on your memory ... the war started to slide into oblivion even before it was actually over.<sup>7</sup>

E.S. Senyavskaya, by contrast, detects some similarities: the “official” historical memory was heavily dependent on ideology and politics; the “vernacular” memory in the public consciousness was autonomous to a certain extent since it fed on frontline experiences; and the “cultural fixation” of the war experience played an important role in literary texts and memoirs.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>4</sup> D. Orlovsky, “Velikaya voina i rossiyskaya pamyat,” in *Rossiya i Pervaya mirovaya voina* (Saint Petersburg: Institut istorii RAN, Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999), 49.

<sup>5</sup> D. Orlovsky, “Velikaya voina i rossiyskaya pamyat,” 49–51; O.Yu. Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov: Osoaviakhim i voennaya podgotovka naseleniya v ural'skoy provintsii (1927–1941 gg.)* (Moscow: Novyi khronograf, 2010), 93–94; S.B. Ulyanova, “Pamyat' ob ‘imperialisticheskoy voyne’ v sovetskom obshchestve v 1920-e gg.,” in *Rossiya v gody Pervoy mirovoy voyny. 1914–1918* (Moscow: IRI RAN, 2014), 675; B.I. Kolonitskii, “Pervaya mirovaya voina: kul'tura epokhi i sotsial'naya pamyat',” 199–216; E. Lohr, J. Sanborn, “1917: Revolution as Demobilization and State Collapse,” *Slavic Review* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2017): 703–709.

<sup>6</sup> See: Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*; B.I. Kolonitskii, “Pervaya mirovaya voina: kul'tura epokhi i sotsial'naya pamyat',” 199–216; O.S. Nagornaya, “Plen Pervoy mirovoy voyny v sovetskoj khudozhestvennoy literature: konflikt i konsensus individual'nykh perezhivaniy,” in *Bol'shaya voina Rossii: sotsial'nyy poryadok, publichnaya kommunikatsiya i nasilie na rubezhe tsarskoy i sovetskoy epokh* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 127–140; Ben Hellmann, “In Search of the Truth about the Great War: The Theme of War in the Works of Five Russian Writers,” in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914–1922*, bk 1. *Popular Culture, the Arts, and Institutions* (Bloomington: Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2014), 209–232; E.S. Senyavskaya, “Istoricheskaya pamyat' o Pervoy mirovoy voine: osobennosti formirovaniya v Rossii i na Zapade,” *Vestnik MGIMO-University*, no. 2 (2009): 1–13.

<sup>7</sup> B.I. Kolonitskii, “Pervaya mirovaya voina: kul'tura epokhi i sotsial'naya pamyat',” 216.

<sup>8</sup> E.S. Senyavskaya, “Istoricheskaya pamyat' o Pervoy mirovoy voine,” (11–12) 31–37.

In her monograph about the Russian memory of World War I during the interwar years, Karen Petrone demonstrates how the “porous” boundaries of knowledge between the states led to similarities in European and Soviet cultures of memory. Printed materials in Russian crossed borders, while the works of political and military leaders and émigrés were translated and published in the USSR in the early Soviet period. She concludes that this created multiple vectors of memory both in the USSR and the West.<sup>9</sup> In fact, Petrone’s findings upend the common historiographic assumption of the “forgotten war,” and show that the lack of official commemorations does not mean the absence of memory. They also demonstrate that memories and reflection about the war regularly occurred in interwar Soviet culture, even though the “imperialist” war was often pushed to the background and presented as the Revolution’s “opening act.”<sup>10</sup>

In one way or another the theme of war persisted in Soviet reality: it was present in the official discourse in the form of simplified symbols reinterpreted in a Marxist vein, while in other spheres it existed as a “subtext” and “hidden information” in social and discursive practices and attitudes.<sup>11</sup> Aaron Cohen points out that the politics of memory in both Russia and European countries endeavored to mobilize the public. However, there were differences in the ways Soviets and émigrés remembered the Great War.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the “divided memory” caused by different attitudes to the Soviet past is still very alive in Russia today.

Thus, historians continue to debate the memory the Great War in Russia. For a deeper understanding, we need to look at the connection between the politics of memory and Soviet mass consciousness; the impact of the communicative memory and the war experiences of specific social groups on historical memory and memory politics, in addition to the role of representations of individual experiences in Soviet society and their relation to collective memory. While we do not expect to address all these issues, we intend to shed light on the following questions concerning the politics of memory in Russia compared to European countries: What factors determined the special role played by the politics of memory in relation to World War I and its mechanisms in the Soviet state? What are the similarities and differences between Russian and European politics of memory? What was the role in Soviet memory politics of the most influential actors, who instilled the concept of “imperialist war” in Soviet mass consciousness? How did the actors of the politics of memory interact to prepare and realize the mass campaigns dedicated to anniversaries of the war? How did the politics of memory change in the post-war and post-Soviet periods?

### **The Bolshevik Politics of Memory: Actors and Imperatives**

The principle of “revolutionary defeatism” proclaimed by Lenin, the revolutionary rupture with the past and Bolshevik efforts to secure and legitimate their power all led them to adopt their leader’s notion of World War I as “mutually aggressive,” unjust, and

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<sup>9</sup> Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> O.Yu. Nikonova, “Voennoe proshloe Rossii i sovetskiy patriotizm: k postanovke problem,” in *Vek pamyati, pamyat' veka: Opyt obrashcheniya s proshlym v XX stoletii* (Chelyabinsk: Kamennyy po yas, 2004), 498.

<sup>12</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, “Oh, That! Myth, Memory, and World War I in the Russian Emigration and the Soviet Union,” *Slavic Review* 62, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 83.

“imperialist.” Lenin’s theory of just and unjust wars underpinned his call to turn the imperialist war into a civil one, and struggle against the country’s own government and bourgeoisie.<sup>13</sup> In his “Farewell Letter to the Swiss Workers” of 1917, Lenin proclaimed:

We are not pacifists... we have always declared it to be absurd for the revolutionary proletariat to renounce revolutionary wars that may prove necessary in the interests of socialism.<sup>14</sup>

Mikhail Pokrovskiy elaborated his idea about imperialist wars as “unjust” in the early Soviet period. In the introduction to his book of 1928, *Imperialisticheskaya voina* [imperialist war] Pokrovskiy wrote:

The war was rotten capitalist and predatory, “aggressive” on the part of the Entente in general and Russia in particular... not in the least degree was this war “in defense of the motherland” and “the protection of freedom,” it did not eliminate but reinforced militarism – this fact remains unchanged regardless of how we understand the term “imperialism” ... or whether we recognize the existence of independent “Russian,” “national” imperialism or consider Russia as the Entente’s vassal.<sup>15</sup>

Pokrovskiy thereby raised the question about the tsarist government’s responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict. Indeed, the historian was the first to invoke the image of a “forgotten” war. He associated this disappearance with the death of the old regime:

The imperialist war was forgotten here, in the USSR, more than anywhere else... the past was burnt to ashes. Is it worth remembering what the building destroyed by the fire had been made of?<sup>16</sup>

Memory politics were actively used in the Soviet “New Man” project to engineer a new identity. The latter, as A. Assmann rightfully observes, is most effectively fostered by affective engagement, when national history is appropriated through a mythical past.<sup>17</sup> The Bolsheviks employed these politics of memory for their grandiose plans to “resignify” the past and build a new society, not to mention the authoritarian character of the Soviet regime itself. This was all the more important since witnesses of the recent past were still alive and could challenge the Bolshevik narrative. The official image of the past often contradicted their personal experiences, which obligated the Party to go to great lengths to suppress these “undesirable” memories and “reformat” the collective memory.

The principles and methods of the politics of memory were developed by the agit-prop sections of the Communist Party’s Central Committee, Red Army, People’s Commissariat for Education, and Comintern. In the official Bolshevik discourse, World War I, overshadowed by the Revolution, was presented as the latter’s prelude, with the image of the “imperialist war” as the dominant narrative. Two main factors – the nature of the state and the war that is remembered – shape memorial narratives. An authoritarian state imposes the dominant narrative and uses oppression and violence to disrupt the established

<sup>13</sup> V.I. Lenin, “Socializm i voyna,” in vol. 26 of *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat Publ., 1973), 307–350.

<sup>14</sup> V.I. Lenin, “Proshhal’noe pis’mo k shveytzarskim rabochim,” in vol. 31 of *Polnoe sobranie sochineniy* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat Publ., 1974), 91.

<sup>15</sup> M.N. Pokrovskiy, *Imperialisticheskaya voina. 1915–1930* (Moscow: USSR, [1934] 2010), 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> A. Assman, *Dlinnaya ten’ proshlogo: Memorial’naya kul’tura i istoricheskaya politika*. Trans (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2014), 39.

mechanisms of intergenerational memory transmission, which, as the case of the USSR in the 1930s illustrates, results in the phenomenon of “repressed memory.” In 1930s Soviet Russia, veterans of the Great War could be arrested not only for keeping military awards and decorations but even for possessing photos showing men wearing the imperial army’s uniform.<sup>18</sup>

Mass celebrations, in particular those devoted to anniversaries, were a popular way to organize the politics of memory in the USSR. Since the first half of the 1920s, the characteristics of such festivities were determined in advance by the Party’s Central Committee. Its decrees also set the ideological agenda of the celebrations, which writers and speakers were obligated to follow.<sup>19</sup> In the interwar period, anniversaries became central to the deliberate construction of the past and reshaping of memory.

The Bolshevik Party’s Agitation and Propaganda Department designed and published materials for mass campaigns dedicated to World War I anniversaries. These materials were meant both to train cadres and the “political enlightenment” of the masses. Apart from the agitprop department’s own propaganda, they included quotes by V.I. Lenin and other revolutionary leaders, Comintern documents, statistics, satirical cartoons, and extracts from anti-war literary texts. Its ideas were disseminated through propaganda leaflets, schools, and mass media as well as awareness raising campaigns, such as meetings in clubs, factories and village reading rooms.

The Red Army was another important actor in the politics of memory as its military commanders sought to enhance the country’s defense capability, strategy and tactics by studying their predecessors’ experience in the Great War. To put the experience of the recent conflict to practical use, it established the Military Historical Committee for the Study of the War of 1914–18.<sup>20</sup> Headed by Aleksandr Svechin, a former general of the imperial army, after its reorganization in December 1918, the committee’s experts studied archival documents, wrote papers, and delivered public lectures, as well as publishing a journal of military history.<sup>21</sup> In addition to using the lessons of the war to improve the military, the Committee also sought to preserve the memory of the Russian army’s heroic sacrifice in the Soviet public. As Svechin put it:

Regardless of the people's attitude to the past war, they have to respect the effort, persistence, sacrifice and memory of those whose countless humble graves are scattered across our Western border lands... Military valor must be honored, and we need the cult of military valor to win victories in the future.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> S.I. Bykova, “‘Nakazannaya pamyat’: svidetel'stva o proshlom v sledstvennykh materialakh NKVD,” in *Neprikosnovennyi zapas. Debaty o politike i kul'ture*, no 2 (2009): 38–54.

<sup>19</sup> G.D. Alekseeva, “Istoricheskaya nauka v Rossii posle pobedy Oktyabr'skoi revolyutsii,” in *Rossiia v XX veke: Sud'by istoricheskoy nauki* (Moscow: Nauka, 1996), 53.

<sup>20</sup> Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyy voennyi arkhiv (thereafter – RGVA), f. 7, op. 5, d. 66, l. 2–12, 23; N.S. Tarkhova, “Kak sozdavalas' istoriya Pervoy mirovoy voyny (O deyatel'nosti Komissii po issledovaniyu i ispol'zovaniyu opyta voyny 1914–1918 gg.),” in *Poslednyaya voina Rossiyskoy imperii. Rossiya, mir nakamune, v khode i posle Pervoy mirovoi voyny po dokumentam rossiyskikh i zarubezhnykh arkhivov* (Moscow: Nauka, 2006), 27.

<sup>21</sup> RGVA, f. 7, op. 5, d. 66. l. 33, 79turned, 179–185; A.A. Svechin, *Trudy Komissii po issledovaniyu i ispol'zovaniyu opyta voyny 1914–1918 gg.* Iss. 1 (Moscow, 1919), 4–6; N.S. Tarkhova, “Kak sozdavalas' istoriya Pervoy mirovoy voyny (O deyatel'nosti Komissii po issledovaniyu i ispol'zovaniyu opyta voyny 1914–1918 gg.),” 28–36.

<sup>22</sup> A.A. Svechin, *Trudy Komissii po issledovaniyu i ispol'zovaniyu opyta voyny 1914–1918 gg.*, 6.

The Red Army commanders' attitude to the war was different from that of civilian officials. With a more practical interest, they looked at the experience of the war like their pre-revolutionary predecessors. Even after Lev Trotskiy was dismissed as Commissar for Military and Naval Affairs, and the old military specialists were replaced by a new generation of "red" specialists, the Committee continued to study the strategy and tactics of the army during the Great War. G. Khmelevskii's bibliography reflects the impressive amount of work they carried out between 1914 and 1935.<sup>23</sup> Even if it did not include all of the department's findings, as the cataloguers themselves admitted, the list contained an impressive 1,633 entries,<sup>24</sup> including Russian translations of the memoirs written by combatants of other countries on both sides.<sup>25</sup>

Between 1921 and 1926, the State Historical Museum maintained a branch devoted to military history. With exhibits from the collections of the Imperial Army's regimental museums, its purpose was to explore the history of Russian military art beginning in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>26</sup> The museum's section devoted to World War I, which displayed objects illustrating the daily lives of its soldiers, such as flags, icons, personal items, weapons and so on, proved to be the most popular among the visitors,<sup>27</sup> reflecting the endurance of the living memory of these events and the unrelenting public interest in the 'German' war that shattered empires and affected millions of people.

The Red Army actively cooperated with the Comintern, which took the leading role in the politics of memory in the 1920s and the early 1930s. The Executive Committee of the Communist International (ECCI) organized mass commemorations and was responsible for the conceptualization of the war.

### **Official Commemorations and forms of Public Participation in the Construction of Memorial Culture**

From July 27 to August 4, 1924, to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War I and the "demise of the Second International," the Comintern organized the large-scale "Week of Struggle Against Imperialist Wars," the most extensive commemoration of the interwar period.<sup>28</sup> According to the official version, The Anti-War Week was intended to be an international event and was first proposed in a letter of 3 June 1924 from the German Communist Party's Central Committee addressed to the Comintern.<sup>29</sup> However, it is likely that the idea actually originated in the Politburo of the Central Committee of the Russian Bolshevik Party since that body was responsible for organizing the Fifth Congress, which approved the Anti-War Week.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, O. Kuusinen, A. Lozovskii, and D. Manuilskii, all Russian Bolshevik Party members who had

<sup>23</sup> G. Khmelevskii, *Mirovaya imperialisticheskaya voina 1914–18 gg. Sistematischeskiy ukazatel' knizhnoy i stateynoy voenno-istoricheskoy literatury za 1914–1935 gg.* (Moscow, 1936).

<sup>24</sup> Excluding V.I. Lenin's works or interpretations of his works.

<sup>25</sup> See: *Ibid.*, 3–4.

<sup>26</sup> Gosudarstvennyy istoricheskiy muzey. Otdel pis'mennykh istochnikov [State Historical Museum. Department of Written Sources] (thereafter – GIM.OPI), f. 137, d. 38, l. 23, 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 38 turned, 39, 51, 55.

<sup>28</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 13, d. 369, l. 63.

<sup>29</sup> Rossiiskiy gosudarstvennyy arkhiv sotsial'no-politicheskoy istorii [Russian State Archive of Social and Political History] (thereafter – RGASPI), f. 495, op. 30, d. 63, l. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i Komintern. 1919–1943: Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2004), 257.

attended the German Communist Party's congress in April 1924, had apparently prepared the ground for the initiative.<sup>31</sup>

On 10 June 1924, the ECCI Secretariat established a special commission to prepare the Anti-War Week through a broad international propaganda campaign involving communist parties and other left-wing organizations abroad. As for the USSR, the Party's Central Committee circulated a secret letter on 11 July

to all regional bureaus of the Central Committee, to central committees of national communist parties, as well as regional and guberniia (regional) committees of the Russian Bolshevik Party.<sup>32</sup>

To manage the Anti-War Week, the Central Committee proposed to

organize special commissions in the agitprop sections of guberniia committees, councils of professional unions, departments of political education, women's departments, committees of the Revolutionary Communist Youth League, and the political departments of the corresponding army units.<sup>33</sup>

This instruction reflected the broad scope of the upcoming events and the organizers' intention to reach the widest audience possible. The instructions also specified the formats, dates and slogans for the events, including mass marches on August 3 and mass meetings.

In addition to the general instruction, there were also secret "Guidelines for Conducting the Campaign to Commemorate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Imperialist War in the Press."<sup>34</sup> This document contained detailed recommendations on how to organize the propaganda in print media for different social groups, in addition to specifying the topics and the order in which they were to be published. The campaign was to be accompanied by large-scale public broadcasts of the Bolshevik narrative about the "imperialist" world war.<sup>35</sup>

During the Anti-War Week, especially on August 3, the day of the march, mass demonstrations involving over 10,000 people were held in the USSR. The demonstrations were accompanied by theatrical performances, mock agitation trials (*politsud*) of war instigators, political games (*politigra*), and carnival processions.<sup>36</sup> The instructions for workers,

Red Army and school clubs, recommend participating in the march and to 'create more or less original costumes for the participants, such as costumes of generals, invalids, cripples, costumes in the form of tanks, cannons and missiles.<sup>37</sup>

The Anti-War Week also included street performances of agitation comedies, *chastushki*, sketches, and tableaux vivants.

<sup>31</sup> *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b) – VKP(b) i Komintern. 1919–1943: Dokumenty* (Moscow, 2004), 252.

<sup>32</sup> RGVA, f. 9, op. 13, d. 369, l. 63.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., l. 65.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> S.Yu. Malysheva, *Sovetskaya prazdnichnaya kul'tura v provintsii: prostranstvo, simvoly, istoricheskie mify (1917–1927)* (Kazan: Ruten, 2005), 79; S.B. Ulyanova, "Kampaniya protiv imperialisticheskikh vojn v 1924 godu: zadachi, provedenie, rezultaty," *Vestnik KGU im. N.A. Nekrasova*, no. 1 (2015): 41–44.

<sup>37</sup> O. Nikonova, T. Raeva, "Pervaya mirovaya voina," 15.



The Comintern also set up and supervised international “red” associations of war veterans, whose goals and methods contrasted with those of the 'reformist' associations of war veterans established under the auspices of the League of Nations as well as those supported by Social Democrats.<sup>38</sup> In Soviet Russia itself, the Orgburo [Organization Bureau] would run the Society of Veterans of the Imperialist War, according to a letter of 27 August 1924 to the Presidium of the Comintern and the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party.<sup>39</sup> The society was officially established at the meeting of war veterans on 26 July 1924 in the club of the Dzerzhinskiy Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU) to organize

extensive agitation among war veterans and through them reach the broad masses of workers for ideological and active prevention of new imperialist wars.<sup>40</sup>

On 13 February 1925, A. I. Rykov, the chairman of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, approved the charter of another organization, the Society of Former Russian Soldiers of the First and Second Special Divisions Operating in France and in the Balkans.<sup>41</sup> According to the documents, the society's main goals were:

taking measures to collect, preserve, develop and publish the materials concerning the life and forced detention of the former soldiers of the first and second special divisions... [and] perpetuating the memory of comrades killed in the war.<sup>42</sup>

The Society was authorized to hold meetings, conferences, congresses, and remembrance evenings; running book clubs and readings; and sending its members on missions in the USSR and abroad to collect materials related to the divisions' operations.

The books about the Great War published for political purposes included a collection of memoirs, *Oktyabr' za rubezhyem* [October Abroad]<sup>43</sup>, featured the recollections of soldiers who had fought in France and in the Balkans and took part in the revolutionary struggle. Its authors were predominantly members of soldiers' committees. Despite the publication's ideological agenda, the heroic discourse was still distinctly present. According to the introduction, which was written on behalf of the “Bureau of the Former Russian Soldiers in France and in the Balkans,” the Entente deployed Russian soldiers on its fronts abroad because of their superior military performance:

Russian soldiers, who succeeded in breaking through the resistance of the Boche, forced their way into Eastern Prussia, Galicia and reached the Carpathians, while French, English and Belgian soldiers were defeated and thrown back to the Parisian walls.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> RGASPI, f. 495, op. 30, d. 281, l. 63–68.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., d. 83, l. 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., l. 4 turned.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., d. 281, l. 1–2.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., l. 125, 125 turned.

<sup>43</sup> *Oktyabr' za rubezhyem. Sbornik vospominaniy* (Moscow: Gos. Iz-vo, 1924).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

Despite the government's efforts, the theme of "tragic heroism" tended to persist in the memoirs published in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>45</sup> It was an exception rather than a rule that they followed rigid Marxist-Leninist canons.<sup>46</sup>

In 1927, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the ECCI decided to inaugurate the "Society of Veterans and Victims of the Imperialist War." Rather than being based on individual membership it functioned as a "federation of separate organizations already existing or to be established in the future," including the All-Russian Production-Consumption Union of Veterans (VIKO), the Society of Former Soldiers in France and the Balkans, associations of veterans in some Soviet republics, among others.<sup>47</sup> This task began to be implemented in August 1927, when the Draft Charter of the Society was developed.<sup>48</sup> The Charter set out how veterans were to commemorate the war, linking the memory about its casualties with the narrative about the anti-war revolutionary struggle.<sup>49</sup> The society's main purpose was to "prevent imperialist wars,"<sup>50</sup> while *lishentsy* (those who were deprived of political rights) and representatives of the "non-working" classes were not allowed to join it.<sup>51</sup>

Anniversary campaigns and the Anti-War Day program included evenings of remembrances of the veterans. Despite the government's ideological grip over the "Anti-Imperialist War Day," celebrated on 1 August beginning in 1929, events sometimes got out of control. The case of Ufa illustrates how local authorities labelled dissenting opinion as "biased" and stifled them.<sup>52</sup>

Thus, government-supported social organizations were used as an instrument of political control over the communicative memory about World War I, while grassroots and "anti-Bolshevik" organizations were suppressed. The government also monitored public sentiments and war veterans' behavior. Members of "unions of war veterans," that arose during the Great War were persecuted or disbanded because some of their members had fought against the Bolsheviks during the Civil War.<sup>53</sup>

One important element of Soviet memory politics was its anti-Versailles propaganda, which criticized the treaty's flaws and the international contradictions it engendered. The inevitability of another imperialist war and/or world revolution as the consequence of the Versailles peace was a special theme.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike Russia, members of European civil society who offered their own interpretations of the meaning of the war were legally permitted to participate in the politics of memory. Commemorations often sparked discussions about contemporary political problems and references were made to the heroic feats of soldiers as ideals of citizenship. According to A. King, in the UK the purpose of debates was to attribute specific meanings

<sup>45</sup> K.A. Pakhalyuk, "Otrazhenie geroizma russkikh soldat," 206–236.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>47</sup> RGASPI, f. 495, op. 30, d. 401, l. 194.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., d. 404, l. 24–36.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., l. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., l. 27–28.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., l. 25.

<sup>52</sup> O.Yu. Nikonova, *Vospitanie patriotov: Osoaviakhim*, 97.

<sup>53</sup> P.N. Dmitriev, "Organizatsii byvshikh voennosluzhashchikh nakanune Izhevsko-Votkinskogo vosstaniya," *Idnakar: metody istoriko-kul'turnoy rekonstruktsii*, no. 1 (18) (2014): 5–23.

<sup>54</sup> RGASPI, f. 495, op. 30, d. 192, l. 14.

to commemorative symbols and actions.<sup>55</sup> Such pluralism and competition of memorial narratives were also characteristic of Germany before 1933 as well as France in the interwar period.<sup>56</sup>

The Soviet propagandistic discourse about World War I, particularly in media anniversary campaigns, did not include any references to specific military experiences, details of the battles, or the suffering of soldiers and civilians. For example, the sections “Remember about the War” in newspapers in 1924 and 1926 urged their readers to recall not any specific dates and facts but the war’s imperialist nature. Emphasizing the international aspects of the fighting, the articles sought to separate the war from Russia’s past. Much like Bolshevik anti-war propaganda before 1917, they attacked the bourgeoisie and “the petty bourgeois minions,” or Europe’s Social Democrats.<sup>57</sup>

The Anti-War Day was marked by a mass campaign dedicated to the anniversaries of the “imperialist war.” As the decisions of the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 and the 10<sup>th</sup> ECCI Plenum in July 1929 put it, the occasion was set up according to the decree of the Sixth World Congress on the Organization of the International Day Against the Imperialist War.<sup>58</sup> The introduction to the instructions for speakers and group agitators to celebrate the Anti-War Day on 1 August stressed that, even though it coincided with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War I and the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Versailles Peace, the Comintern had not organized the event to celebrate them.<sup>59</sup> As the brochure explained,

1 August is not going to be just a regular meeting or anti-war parade, it is not just a simple reminder about the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first global imperialist war. The current international political situation makes the threat of war the most pressing concern.<sup>60</sup>

Speakers were expected to highlight the connection between the struggle against the threat of another war and such current goals as industrialization, the collectivization of agriculture, and the fight against the internal enemy.<sup>61</sup>

Reflecting the evolution of Soviet celebratory culture in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, the militarization of World War I commemorations began with the Anti-War Day on 1 August 1929.<sup>62</sup> Festivities during this period included parades of athletes and

<sup>55</sup> A. King, *The Politics of Meaning in the Commemoration of the First World War in Britain, 1914–1939*, Ph.D. Thesis (University of London, 1993), 3–4.

<sup>56</sup> C. Theodosiou, *Le deuil inachevé. Lacommemoration de l’Armistice du 11 Novembre 1918 en France dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2018); Hrsg. von T. Arand, ed. *Die Urkatastrophe als Erinnerung. Geschichtskultur des Ersten Weltkriegs* (Münster, 2006); *Voina, politika, pamiat’: Napoleonovskie voyny i Pervaia mirovaia voina v prostranstve iubileev* (Moscow: Politicheskaiia entsiklopediya, 2020), 323–413.

<sup>57</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, “Oh, That! Myth, Memory,” 80.

<sup>58</sup> *Kommunisticheskiiy Internatsional v dokumentakh. Resheniya, tezisy i vozzvaniya Kongressov Kominterna i Plenumov IKKI. 1919–1932* (Moscow: Partizdat, 1933), 908.

<sup>59</sup> *1-e Avgusta – mezhdunarodnyi krasnyy den’ bor’by protiv imperialisticheskoy voyny Metodicheskoe posobie dlia dokladchikov i gruppyvykh agitatorov* (Moscow; Leningrad: [S.n.], 1929), 3.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 53–58.

<sup>62</sup> M. Rol’f, *Sovetskie massovye prazdniki* (Moscow: The Russian Political Encyclopedia; Foundation Presidential Center B.N. Yeltsin, 2009), 97–110.

members of the OSOAVIAKhIM.<sup>63</sup> In general, as O.Y. Nikonova and T.V. Raeva observe, the ways of celebrating the International Anti-War Day in the 1930s were considerably simplified, while the range of instruments used to shape public opinion expanded widely. Including radio, films, theatre, exhibitions, mobile cinemas, and spartakiads, they allowed the government to centralize their agitprop.<sup>64</sup> As a result, 1 August became a symbol of the abstract idea of 'imperialist war' rather than that of a specific historical event.<sup>65</sup> Cohen points out that, like any other public memory, that of World War I is aimed at creating the present as much as at remembering the past.<sup>66</sup> In the USSR, the myth of the "imperialist war" marked the boundary that separated Soviet Russia from both its imperial past and the hostile capitalist present. The narrative of the war was expected to reflect the Soviet version of contemporary reality as a struggle between the Soviet state and imperialist aggressors.<sup>67</sup>

The threat of war now loomed on the horizon. As hopes for an imminent world revolution faded and Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, the USSR attempted to create a system of collective security and joined the League of Nations. Such changes in the political situation shaped the commemorative discourse of 1934, which was diverse and somewhat ambiguous, featuring pacifist rhetoric and a more complex perspective on the world war.<sup>68</sup>

The use of pacifist rhetoric in the 1930s was deliberate and stemmed from the Central Committee's intention and the decisions of the Seventh Comintern Congress to create a single front of workers and Popular Front governments to combat the Nazi threat together with the reformist, Social Democrat, Christian Democrat, nationalist and pacifist organizations.<sup>69</sup>

### **From Soviet Patriotism to Post-Soviet Memory: the Return to Heroic Discourse?**

The "imperialist war" discourse of the 1930s resembled the general political dialog of the period by combining nationalist and anti-war elements while promoting "Soviet patriotism" as a commitment to the interests of the socialist homeland and a readiness to defend it. A relatively new development, it reflected the national-patriotic turn in Soviet ideology between the mid-1930s to the beginning of the Great Patriotic War. Unlike the previous period, the anniversary literature of the thirties ignored the question of Russia's responsibility for World War I. The propaganda for the Anti-War Day on 1 August 1939 went so far as to accuse Germany of "instigating" the war. The editorial of the newspaper *Uralskiy rabochiy* for that day, which reprinted that of the previous day's issue of *Pravda* to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> war anniversary, proclaimed:

<sup>63</sup> O. Nikonova, T. Raeva, "Pervaia mirovaia voina," 19.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>65</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, "Oh, That! Myth, Memory," 80.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>68</sup> See: Karen Petrone, *The Great War in Russian Memory*, 181, 235.

<sup>69</sup> VII Kongress Kommunisticheskogo Internatsionala i bor'ba protiv fashizma i voiny. Collection of documents (Moscow: Politizdat, 1975), 386–387.

The war was instigated by the imperialists of all countries. The warmonger was German imperialism... The lessons of the first imperialist war are still alive in the memory of peoples... The first imperialist war inflicted a terrible blow on imperialism. Hoping to regain its strength, it is now instigating the second war.<sup>70</sup>

Published in 1938, *The History of the Bolshevik Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course* revised the concept of World War I and Russia's role as a part of the Entente. The book also reassigned the responsibility for the war's outbreak to Anglo-German contradictions and described Russia's role as dependent on Great Britain and France.<sup>71</sup>

Changes in the propaganda about the “imperialist war” in the Anti-War Day commemorations of the late 1930s became evident as they started to include more historical details.<sup>72</sup> “The Heroism of the Russian Soldier,” D. Zaslavskiy's 1939 article in the Red Army's newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda*, glorified the heroism, resilience and individual courage of ordinary Russian soldiers:

Soviet military-historical literature about the world war provides ample evidence of the heroism of Russian soldiers... The Russian soldier won new glory for himself during the imperialist war.<sup>73</sup>

The article also gave specific examples of the courage, feats of bravery, and heroism of the soldiers, which determined the outcomes of battles. The author concluded that the Russian army was not defeated in 1917 but willingly withdrew from the war.<sup>74</sup>

During World War II, historical representations of the earlier struggle were widely used in appeals to patriotism and civic duty to mobilize the public.<sup>75</sup> Thus the “imperialist war” now became the “First World War,” while the enemy was no longer “international imperialism” but “German imperialism.” More emphasis was laid on the latter's similarities with the Nazi expansionism. An article in *Pravda* on 31 July 1942 compared the Red Army's experience of the War to that of the Imperial Army in the first years of World War I, when the Eastern Front had a great military importance.<sup>76</sup> The Soviet press also wrote about 'German atrocities', including those committed between 1914 and 1918, and documents on this theme were published.<sup>77</sup> Another popular topic was the heroism of Russian soldiers during the earlier conflict, which featured in the memoirs of military commanders published after 1945.<sup>78</sup> As K.A. Pakhalyuk puts it, they

sought to reconcile two values: patriotism (of tsarist Russia type) and revolution. Loyal service in the imperial army was no longer contaminated by a counterrevolutionary odor to be avoided.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>70</sup> *Ural'skiy rabochiy*, August 1, 1939.

<sup>71</sup> *Istoriya kommunisticheskoy partii (bol'shevikov). Kratkiy kurs* (Moscow: TsK VKP (b) Pravda, 1938), 155.

<sup>72</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, “Oh, That! Myth, Memory,” 82.

<sup>73</sup> *Krasnaya zvezda*, August 1, 1939.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> B.I. Kolonitskii, “Pervaya mirovaya voina: kul'tura epokhi i sotsial'naya pamyat',” 199.

<sup>76</sup> *Pravda*, July 31, 1942.

<sup>77</sup> *Dokumenty o nemetskikh zverstvakh v 1914–1918 gg.* (Moscow, 1942).

<sup>78</sup> K.A. Pakhalyuk, “Otrazhenie geroizma russkikh soldat i ofitserov Pervoi mirovoi voiny v memuarnoi literature sovetskogo perioda,” 211.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

After the war, however, in Soviet politics of memory World War I was considered much more “useful” as a symbol rather than as a historical event.<sup>80</sup> World War II became a new basis for the legitimacy of the Soviet system and by the 1970’s replaced the myth of the Revolution in its importance. Official historical memory largely centered around the “Great Patriotic War” as an event that threatened the existence of the nation itself. Over the course of time and passing away of its survivors, the “imperialist” war receded into the background of collective memory.

However, this does not mean that the memory of World War I has completely disappeared from public life. It was permissible to refer to the First World War in three contexts: the historical traditions of the Soviet army, the prehistory of the “Great October Socialist Revolution,” and the biographies of the “virtuous” citizens of the USSR.<sup>81</sup> The war was not completely “forgotten,” but the meanings that were put into it did not contribute to the practice of its commemoration, and its material legacy was consigned to virtual oblivion. The displacement of the memory of World War I to the periphery was also “facilitated” by the absence of vivid art images that embody the war and its experience.<sup>82</sup>

From the historiographic perspective, World War I was never forgotten, even in the Soviet period, since it was closely tied to the topic of the Revolution and was widely discussed in the light of the Marxist and Leninist theory in relation to various military-historical, socio-economic and political questions.

De-Stalinization and liberalization of the country's political and social life in the “thaw” of the second half of the 1950s coincided with the new stage in World War I studies as sources on the history of the revolutionary movement were published for the celebration of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great October Revolution. Memoirs and other documents that appeared in this period were rich in factual material, which provided historians with sufficient grounds for drawing new conclusions and making new generalizations.<sup>83</sup>

The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great War from 1964 to 1968 again aroused scholarly interest. Monographs and collected papers were published and conferences organized, such as the one hosted by the Academy of Sciences in Moscow in which 160 scientists from 42 Soviet cities participated.<sup>84</sup> Over the next two decades World War I studies made use of a wider source base, including archival materials, statistical data, memoirs, and document collections, as well as magazine and newspaper articles. The range of topics was also broadened, and the quality of the research improved. Quite a number of works published in this period by representatives of the “new wave” in historiography contained not only valuable factual material but also more objective conclusions about mass consciousness in Russia during World War I and the Revolution of 1917.<sup>85</sup> However, the general scholarly climate only began to change with the advent of Perestroika and

<sup>80</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, “Oh, That! Myth, Memory,” 83.

<sup>81</sup> *Voyna, politika, pamyat'*, 502–512.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

<sup>83</sup> See: O.S. Porshneva, *Krest'yanе, rabochie i soldaty Rossii nakanune i v gody Pervoy mirovoy voyny* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004), 30.

<sup>84</sup> *50 let sovetskoy istoricheskoy nauki, 1917–1967: Khronika* (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 430.

<sup>85</sup> See: O.S. Porshneva, *Krest'yanе, rabochie i soldaty*, 31.

the subsequent disintegration of the USSR in the late 1980s – early 1990s, which heralded a period of radical reassessment of Russian history, including that of the Great War.

Unconstrained by ideological limitations, post-Soviet historians enjoyed access to a greater diversity of sources, which enabled them to develop a new perspective on World War I. One of the results of this methodological pluralism and the growing public interest in the history of Russia during the war was the publication *World War I* in the series “History of the Homeland in Novels, Stories and Documents. Twentieth Century.” There was also an upsurge in the number of publications about World War I in popular science journals, while memoirs, diaries and other documents of war veterans about life in the Russian army appeared in the “Rare Books” series.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, translations of foreign research also began to be published,<sup>87</sup> while scholarly exchanges at international symposia and colloquiums were organized.<sup>88</sup> These events signified a pronounced trend towards integration of conceptual approaches in Russian and international World War I studies. The Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences produced a collection of papers, *World War One. Controversial Issues in History*, to

reconsider the dramatic experience of 1914–1918 through the prism of new criteria of objective research and in the light of the latest achievement of the world science.<sup>89</sup>

The interest in studying World War I was sparked by the two anniversaries in 1994 and 1998 – the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the war’s outbreak and conclusion. These dates were commemorated by the international conference “World War I and the Twentieth Century,” a roundtable discussion of Russian historians, and the international colloquium “Russia in World War I.”<sup>90</sup> These events signified a pronounced trend towards integration of conceptual approaches in Russian and international World War I studies.

Another important development in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, was bridging the gap between the military and civilian history of Russia in 1914–17 that had characterized Soviet historiography. The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War I saw new publi-

<sup>86</sup> *Pervaya mirovaya. Istoriya Otechestva v romanakh, povestyakh i dokumentakh. Vek XX* (Moscow: Molodaya gvardiya, 1989); L.N. Voitlovskii, *Vskhodil krovavyy Mars: Po sledam voyny* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1998); *Byt russkoy armii XVIII – nachala XX veka* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1999); *Bochkareva Mariya. Yashka: moyazhizn' krest'yanki, ofitsera i izgnannitsy. V zapisi Isaaka Don Levina* (Moscow: Voenizdat, 2001).

<sup>87</sup> A. Rabinovich, *Bol'sheviki prikhodyat k vlasti: Revolyutsiya 1917 g. v Petrograde* (Moscow: Progress, 1986); E. Karr, *Istoriya Sovetskoy Rossii: bol'shevistskaya revolyutsiya, 1917–1923* (Moscow: Progress, 1990); R. Payps, *Russkaya revolyutsiya* (Moscow: Zakharov, 1994); L. Holms, *Sotsial'naya istoriya Rossii: 1917–1941* (Rostov-na-Donu: Rostovskiy universitet Publ., 1994); D. Reyli, *Politicheskie sud'by rossiyskoy gubernii: 1917 god v Saratove* (Saratov: Slovo, 1995); G. Hosking, *A history of the Soviet Union* (London: Fontana press/Collins, 1990).

<sup>88</sup> *Reformy ili revolyutsiya? Rossiya 1861–1917. Materialy mezhdunarodnogo kollokviuma istorikov* (St. Petersburg: Nauka, 1992); “Rabochee dvizhenie i Pervaya mirovaya voina (o knige ‘Zabastovki, sotsial'nyy konflikt i Pervaya mirovaya voina. Mezhdunarodnyy aspekt’),” *Otechestvennaya istoriya*, no. 2 (1994): 203–207; *Rabochie i intelligenciya Rossii v epokhu reform i revolyuciy. 1861 – fevral' 1917 g.* (St. Petersburg: BLIST, 1997); *Rossiya i Pervaya mirovaya voina. Materialy mezhdunarodnogo nauchnogo kollokviuma* (St. Petersburg: Dmitriy Bulanin, 1999).

<sup>89</sup> *Pervaya mirovaya voina. Diskussionnye problemy istorii* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), 4–5.

<sup>90</sup> *Pervaya mirovaya voina: Prolog XX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1998); “Pervaya mirovaya voina i ee vozdeystvie na istoriyu XX v. Kruglyy stol,” *Novaya i noveyshaya istoriya*, no 4–5 (1994); *Rossiya i Pervaya mirovaya voina* (Saint Petersburg: Institut istorii RAN, «Dmitrii Bulanin», 1999).

cations that provided a more comprehensive overview of its history and also covered the economic, social, and political context of the war years.<sup>91</sup>

The memory of World War I in Russia has changed considerably since the Soviet Union's collapse among both scholars as well as the general population, both of whom have been paying greater attention to the subject. One indication of the Great War's return to the nation's collective memory is provided by the polls of the Public Opinion Foundation (*Obshchestvennoe Mnenie*). In a survey in 2000, none of the respondents included the war among the most important events of modern history<sup>92</sup> while at the time of the war's 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary public awareness of the role these events played in Russian history was considerable. In contemporary Russia, the "return of the memory" of World War I is linked to the rejection of Soviet ideology and rehabilitation of the values of Imperial Russia. As K. Pakhalyuk rightfully argues, one important factor was the government's increased emphasis on patriotism as the official discourse stressed heroism in the war's centenary celebrations, to promote "strong national statehood" and "effective management of the past."<sup>93</sup>

Despite the changing role of the war in the public memory over the past three decades, it still remains riddled with contradictions. Thus, while the 1990s saw a general trend towards integrating Russia into the space of European memory, in subsequent years efforts took a more nationalist one that put a greater emphasis on the heroic discourse. On 8 November 1998, for the first time since 1917, a monument commemorating the victims of World War I – "Reconciling the Nations" – was built on the site of the former Moscow City War Cemetery in Moscow. The opening ceremony marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the war and symbolically presented the Russian experience as part of the general European past, while also endeavoring to bridge the divide between the Soviet memory of conflict and that of the Russian émigré community.<sup>94</sup>

The revival of memory of the war also involved such events as the celebration of the 85<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brusilov Offensive in Moscow in 2001, opening ceremonies of war memorials, museums and exhibitions in 2004, which were conducted on a large scale in the period of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of World War I. On August 1, 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin solemnly unveiled a monument to the heroes of the First World War on Poklonnaya Hill,<sup>95</sup> and about 100 other monuments, obelisks, busts and commemorative plaques also appeared in 2014–18, while the website 'In memory of the heroes of the Great War' created, which now contains details about more than 10 million soldiers of the Russian army.<sup>96</sup> In 2013, the former "Anti-War Day" of 1 August was officially turned into the "Day of Commemoration of the Russian Warriors Killed in 1914–18." As S. Bykova's study has shown, contemporary Russian students

<sup>91</sup> Yu.A. Petrov, "Rossiya nakanune Velikoy revoliutsii 1917 g.: sovremennye istoriograficheskie tendentsii," in *Rossiyskaya revoliutsiya 1917 goda: vlast', obshchestvo, kul'tura* (Moscow: Politicheskaya entsiklopediya, 2017), 12.

<sup>92</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, "Oh, That! Myth, Memory," 84.

<sup>93</sup> K. Pakhalyuk, *1914–2017: Pervaya mirovaya voyna v prostranstve kul'turnoy pamyati sovremennoy Rossii. Nezabytaya 'zabytaya' voyna*, August 23, 2018, <http://gefter.ru/archive/22877>

<sup>94</sup> Aaron J. Cohen, "Oh, That! Myth, Memory," 84.

<sup>95</sup> "Otkrytie pamyatnika geroyam Pervoy mirovoy voyny," Kremlin.ru, accessed September 12, 2020, <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46385/photos>

<sup>96</sup> *Voyna, politika, pamyat'*, 519.



tend to see war as a universal human tragedy reflected in memorials, documents and other sources both in Russia and Europe, and as a lesson that has to be learnt.<sup>97</sup>

In the course of its evolution during the new century's first decades, Russian memory politics have again begun to diverge from the European model.<sup>98</sup> The causes of the Revolution and the socio-political situation of 1915–17 were often evaluated from the perspective of anti-Western conspiracy theories (Masonic conspiracy, liberal conspiracy and so on), which, though totally unfounded, were widely popularized in the mass media. Even though respected academics debunked these theories on many occasions, they are still voiced by some contemporary Russian historians.<sup>99</sup> As Oksana Nagornaia shows, despite the new anthropological perspective of Russian historical studies, the national memorial discourse that informs many museum projects, does adequately consider the war's "human dimension," and tends to stress its negative aspects. Nagornaia believes that the danger of such an approach, which sees the war from a nationalist perspective, discounts the profoundly anti-human nature of war as well as the sufferings of civilians, especially those of women, refugees, war prisoners, and the wounded.<sup>100</sup> However, this situation is not uniquely Russian and that the heroic discourse of World War I period is also prominent in memory politics of other countries during anniversary commemorations, arousing criticism from the academic community.<sup>101</sup>

### Conclusions

Unlike most European countries, Soviet politics of memory during the interwar period tended to downplay the Great War, and instead reinforced the myth of the Revolution to legitimize the regime and mobilize the masses for the new imperialist war. The Bolshevik government constructed the collective memory around the concept of "imperialist war" by invoking the terrifying recollections of former combatants of trench warfare and appealing to people's feelings of disillusionment and war weariness. Alternative discourses that challenged the official narrative were suppressed and suspected dissenters persecuted. Party and state authorities also maintained a close control over the memories communicated by war veterans.

Even though Soviet propaganda emphasized internationalism and included the narrative of the "imperialist war" in the metanarrative of the Revolution, military historians and political elites did study the Great War. In the USSR, the official discourse of the war and commemorations were shaped by the Communist Party's ideology while the memory of the war was expressed in various cultural formats. The state, however, sought to stifle any forms of dissenting "vernacular" memory and to mold collective memory according to the goals at hand.

<sup>97</sup> S.I. Bykova, "Osmyslenie opyta pervoy mirovoy voyny: evropeyskaya traditsiya v vospriyatii sovremennykh rossiiskikh studentov," *Nauchnyy dialog. Istoriya. Ekonomika. Pravo*, no. 8 (2014): 116–129.

<sup>98</sup> O.S. Nagornaya, "Muzealizatsiya Pervoy mirovoy voyny v Germanii i Rossii: Yubileinye vystavki mezhdru geroikoy i gumanizmom," in *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta*, no. 4 (2014): 37–43.

<sup>99</sup> See: Yu. A. Petrov, "Rossiia nakanune Velikoy revoliutsii," 15–16.

<sup>100</sup> O.S. Nagornaia, "Muzealizatsiya Pervoy mirovoy voyny," 43.

<sup>101</sup> *Voina, politika, pamiat'*, 468; Ya. A. Golubinov, "Stoletie Pervoy mirovoy voyny v Velikobritanii i izuchenie konflikta v shkolakh korolevstva," in *Prepodavanie voennoy istorii v Rossii i za rubezhom: Sb. st. Vyp. 2* (Moscow-SPb.: Nestor-Istoriia, 2019), 71.

In all combatant countries, the culture of memory about World War I evolved in the interwar period. Unlike Soviet Russia, among the victors – Great Britain and France – and the defeated Germans until the rise of the Nazi regime, the politics of memory was shaped not only by the state and its political elites but also by various elements of civil society.

In Soviet Russia, as in other powers that had fought in the war, memorial culture before 1941 was strongly influenced by the general feeling of disillusionment, albeit in different forms. There, the Bolshevik government condemned the “imperialist war” to advance its agenda with a rhetoric that resonated with the trench experiences of soldiers and people’s general weariness in the final stage of the war. As for Britain, France and Germany, this disappointment led to a “pacifist reaction” in the public memory. The disillusionment that grew out of the war was reflected in the fiction of the 1920s and 1930s, which often featured bitter and tormented war veterans. Despite the significant differences between the Russian and European traditions of memory during the interwar period, both societies saw conflicts over how to see the past, although among the latter these arguments took a rather specific form.

In the 1920s, the memory of World War I was still fresh and there were living witnesses. There was still a certain openness in Soviet society, which enabled information exchange with Europe. As a result, multiple discourses of memory co-existed and interacted with each other. However, by the 1930s, the state suppressed all forms of real or supposed dissent, including the “inappropriate” memories of the past.

After World War II, a new phenomenon in historical memory and politics of memory emerged in Europe as the two world wars began to “blend.” When the anniversaries of both conflicts coincided, their victims were commemorated together. Thus, the “message of memory” to younger generations was reactualized through rituals and shared European commemorations, which contributed to the creation of common European memory.

This did not happen in the USSR, where World War II or the Great Patriotic War, became the main object of sacralization, while World War I remained a symbol of unjust imperialist wars and predatory capitalism. Although representations of World War I were used in patriotic propaganda during the struggle against Nazi Germany and after 1945 military commanders invoked the heroism of Russian soldiers during the earlier struggle, the memory of the two world wars did not blend. Moreover, these wars were often contrasted, one being presented as “unjust imperialist” and the other, as just and patriotic. Nevertheless, after World War II World War I was not completely “forgotten,” but its meanings had no place in official commemoration, was relegated to the periphery of mass consciousness.

This changed at the turn of the century, as Russians now joined Europeans in paying attention to World War I and its role in the twentieth-century history, which they both marked by centenary commemorations and media campaigns. Despite the considerable differences in the ‘memory boom’ and the differences in memorial culture, a dialogue between Russian and European memorial traditions is much more feasible now. Over time, they may well join in a unified space of memory about the twentieth century’s greatest tragedy.

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