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Activities of State Authorities to Overcome Unemployment in the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s

Abstract. *The purpose of the article on the basis of archival sources and scientific heritage of domestic scientists analyzes the experience of practical activities of state authorities to solve the problem of mass unemployment of the population of the Ukrainian SSR in the 1920s. The research methodology is based on the fundamental principles of historical research: historicism, consistency, objectivity in the selection of facts and documents. Among the special methods used in the study should be called problem-chronological, historical-systemic, historical-typological. The scientific novelty of the article is to reveal the features of state policy and the activities of state authorities to overcome the unemployment of employees through the system of compulsory state social insurance. Conclusions. Having finally seized power in Ukraine, the Bolshevik leadership publicly declared the need to create an effective system of social support for especially vulnerable segments of the population. Of course, declarative slogans did not reflect real intentions and opportunities. Under the conditions of a debilitating civil war and economic devastation, it was quite natural to see a massive increase in the number of unemployed and a drop in the living standards of the population. This was especially exacerbated with the transition to a new economic policy. In the early 1920s a number of legislative initiatives were adopted to mitigate the unemployment situation. It was about the introduction of compulsory unemployment insurance at the state level. Insurance premiums paid by employers and employees were to become the financial basis for the payment of benefits to the unemployed. The implementation of this state policy on the ground relied on labor exchanges. However, excessive bureaucracy and a limited number of such institutions could not sufficiently solve this problem. The lack of funds for material support of the population was particularly acute, so the government was forced to look for alternative options: public works, in-kind assistance or the provision of various benefits. Active industrial construction, which began at the end of the 1920s, led to an increase in the demand for labor. In such conditions, the Party-Soviet leadership took a course to eliminate unemployment by administrative means, not recognizing as unemployed those workers who refused the job offered to them.*

Keywords: *social policy, unemployment, labor exchanges, new economic policy, social insurance.*

Formulation of the problem . An important task of the social policy of the independent Ukrainian state is to ensure the employment of the population. However, due to various socio-economic factors, as well as a full-scale invasion, the number of unemployed people in the country has been steadily increasing in recent years. This social phenomenon causes social tension, lowers the general standard of living of the population, and increases the level of crime in society. Given this, the experience of implementing state programs to protect the unemployed in the 1920s, which were

aimed at improving their living conditions and directly overcoming this negative phenomenon, can be applied in the process of solving current problems related to unemployment.

The purpose of the article is to study and analyze the main measures of state authorities aimed at overcoming unemployment in Ukraine during the 1920s.

Analysis of sources and recent research. The problem of overcoming unemployment is extremely urgent and has attracted the attention of many scientists. Publications of Soviet historians devoted to political, socio-economic processes in the USSR of the 1920s were mainly ideological in nature. However some of the monographic of research left your trace in science thanks to significant factual material systematized in them. The main aspects of the employment problems of the population in the 1920s found their coverage in the scientific investigations of modern researchers: O. Melnychuk, (Melnychuk, Kuzminets, 2004; Melnychuk, 2005; Melnychuk, 2006), O. Movchan (Movchan, 2008; Movchan, 2009), O. Murashova (Murashova, 2015; Murashova, 2019), R. Prylypka (Prylypko, 2012), L. Prylutska (Prylutska, 2007), A. Ryshkova (Ryshkova, 2009), O. Rozovik (Rozovik, 2011), etc. The source base of the research consisted of both unpublished and published documents and materials.

Presenting ideas of research. After the occupation of Ukraine by the Bolshevik forces, one of the first tasks declared by the new government was to resolve the issues of employment of the population. It is clear that this was partly a tactical step aimed at gaining the support of the population and, accordingly, consolidating the positions of the current government. On December 11, 1917, the Central Committee of the Russian Federation and the RSFSR approved the regulation "On unemployment insurance." It was noted that persons who, before losing their jobs, earned three times the average salary will not receive the appropriate assistance. Material support relied on employers, who had to pay appropriate funds to the All-Russian Fund for the Unemployed (Decrety, 1957, s.480) .

However, during the period of "military communism" and in the conditions of general compulsory labor, the concept of unemployment temporarily lost its meaning, and therefore the need for state support disappeared. In accordance with the provisions of the RSFSR RSFSR "On Social Security of Workers", adopted on October 30, 1918, assistance was provided mainly to representatives of the party apparatus, Red Army soldiers and members of their families (Pomoshch, 1922, s.21).

In Ukraine, the introduction of social insurance in the event of unemployment took place on February 1, 1919. At that time, the material support of the relevant categories of the population relied on employers, who had to pay insurance contributions to local coffers in the amount of 4% of earnings. However, the practical implementation of assistance to the unemployed in the conditions of the existence of compulsory labor and the precarious position of the Soviet government was not implemented. However, working conditions did not meet any standards. The mobilized had problems with housing, clothing, food and hygiene. Work was not properly paid in accordance with the labor obligation (Itkin, 1929, s.23).

Dissatisfaction with forced labor pushed the population to evade such tasks. The population resorted to demonstrations and protest strikes, as well as labor desertion. A significant percentage of dissatisfied people were unfit for work, which was reported at the Kharkiv Provincial Congress of Labor Committees. On January 31, 1921, the RSC of the USSR adopted a resolution "On labor desertion and the organization of combating it", which provided for criminal liability for evading labor duties in the form of arrest for a period of 2 weeks or correctional labor in penal labor units for up to 6 months (Movchan, 2008, s.307).

Unemployment as a mass phenomenon was revived in Ukraine immediately after the transition to a new economic policy. The main factors that contributed to the emergence of an excess workforce were: the liquidation of state-owned industrial enterprises, the reduction of institutions, the return of qualified workers from the front, the weak development of the private sector (Didenko, 1962, s.275).

The first steps to overcome unemployment were taken in 1921. On April 19, the RSC of the USSR approved a resolution according to which workers were given the opportunity to move from one enterprise to another if it was caused by domestic or family circumstances. On November 22, 1922, the government also adopted a resolution on the introduction of a labor tax to replace compulsory labor. According to the Code of Labor Laws adopted in 1922 (KZpP), which dealt with the free employment of labor, the labor tax was applied only in cases of fires or natural disasters (Freiman, 1930, s.32).

The employment system during the NEP was implemented under state control through intermediary organizations - labor exchanges. A person looking for a job went through the registration procedure and received a corresponding certificate. It was necessary to re-register periodically. However, people often encountered difficulties when applying for unemployment status. It was necessary to have with you an appropriate package of documents from the previous place of work. A significant part of the workers did not have them with them due to objective circumstances. They were

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mostly peasants or refugees from the starving provinces. In some cases, HR employees did not have the necessary documents either. The administration of enterprises deprived the account books of persons suspected of participation in strikes. Similar measures were used in the case of absenteeism (Koire, 1930, s.13).

Trade union members were primarily employed (according to the Labor Code). The unemployed had the right to refuse the offered job, justifying their decision. If there was no valid reason, such persons lost their financial support for a month, but their place was kept. If they refuse again, they will be permanently removed from registration. The procedure for obtaining unemployment status was quite complicated. Long queues, bureaucratic red tape, limited number of relevant institutions caused sharp dissatisfaction among the population. Bribery and nepotism were a typical phenomenon.

It should be noted that when registering on the exchanges, the unemployed were not always guided by employment motives, but took this step because of payments. For this reason, the government introduced the so-called "purges", with the help of which unscrupulous persons were identified. During 1922–1923, about 60% of registered (Movchan, 2008, s.309).

Statistical data indicate mass unemployment in Ukraine at the beginning of 1922. Thus, as of January 1, 1922, 19,831 unemployed people were registered. In April, their number was already 35,227 (TsDAVO F. 2623. Spr. 824, ark. 62).

According to the reports of the 3rd All-Ukrainian Conference of Trade Unions of Ukraine, the active increase in the number of unemployed occurred in the second half of 1922. The greatest increase in the number of unemployed was observed among representatives of intellectual labor (317%), service personnel (132%), and industrial workers (119%).

On October 1, 1922, 90,000 people were registered at labor exchanges. As of September 1, 1923, their number was 127,000 (Lyvshits, 1929: 5). According to the conclusions of L. Prylutska, as of August 1, 1924, about 200,000 unemployed people were registered in the register of labor exchanges in the USSR, in 1926 - 326.7 thousand. Later, with the development of industrial production, the number of unemployed will decrease: 1927/28 - 226.7 thousand; 1928/29 - 243.3 thousand; 1929/30 - 170 thousand; 1930/31 - 110.5 thousand people (Prylutska, 2007, s.47).

Starting from the second half of the 1920s, about 8,000 people from the village were registered at labor exchanges every year. In general, the share of workers in the agricultural sector among the unemployed was 28%. Characterizing the composition of the unemployed by profession, it was found that 40% were representatives of intellectual labor, 25.7% of industry, 11.8% of service sectors, and 21.7% of civil servants (Shatan, 1929, s.90).

Active development of industrial facilities required construction workers. To this end, through the branches of the Central Institute of Labor and the system of course training, the unemployed had the opportunity to master the professions of masons, concrete workers, and locksmiths. During 1928–1929, about 8,000 specialists were trained (Materialy, 1929, s.191).

A significant percentage of the unemployed were women. If by 1917 the vast majority of them were engaged in household management, then in the 1920s women's work was increasingly used in various branches of production. Women were motivated to find employment by financial hardship, because the husband's salary was often not enough to fully support the family, and also by the influence of Bolshevik calls for equality. According to the data of the All-Union population census of 1926, the number of unemployed women was 165,500 or 50.6% of their total population. The development of industrial construction stimulated women to master labor professions and work in the industrial sector.

The Soviet government developed a number of measures to reduce unemployment among underage girls. According to the order of the People's Commissariat of Labor, they were sent to courses to master working professions, special women's teams were organized to provide them with labor assistance. From October 1, 1928, a fixed wage of 16 krb was established for month (Kozak, 1929, s.36).

The development of industrial construction at the end of the 1920s somewhat changed the situation on the labor market. Along with the active demand for labor force, the majority of those registered on labor exchanges increasingly refused the work offered to them. The state introduced administrative methods to solve this problem. In October 1930, the People's Commissariat of Labor issued a resolution "On the immediate referral of the unemployed to work and on the termination of the payment of cash assistance to them." According to its provisions, the unemployed who refused to work lost the corresponding status and financial support. Later, the unemployment committees were replaced by the Labor Training and Supply Board.

Organization of the process of material support for the unemployed has become an important problem. In the conditions of a rather difficult financial and economic situation of the state, its solution was seen in the introduction of social insurance against unemployment. This practice has already been actively used in most Western European countries. In Ukraine, it was initiated by the Decree of

the National Council of the Ukrainian SSR dated November 11, 1921. According to the provisions of this document, the right to financial support was enjoyed by former hired workers who were on the register of labor exchanges.

The difficult financial situation of the state forced the administrative bodies to limit the categories of persons who had the right to receive assistance. The Commissioner of the People's Commissariat of Social Security, together with the People's Commissariat of Labor, issued an instruction of the Southern Bureau of the Central Workers' Compensation Committee dated May 24, 1922, according to which only qualified specialists were subject to insurance. Other categories of workers and employees could apply for assistance only if they had three years of continuous work experience at the enterprise. Exceptions were disabled persons of IV-VI groups, if they were awarded a disability pension, as well as representatives of mental work. According to the instructions of the Main Department of Social Insurance of the USSR adopted on June 18, 1923, minors, women with children under the age of 3 or single women with children under the age of 14, and demobilized Red Army soldiers were subject to social insurance.

The instructions of the Central Committee of the USSR dated September 28, 1926 clearly defined the list of persons deprived of the right to receive material assistance. These were former officers of the White Army, members of the royal house, gendarmes, and religious figures. The government gave priority in serving the representatives of the proletariat. Therefore, the security system did not extend only to persons who had additional income, but also to representatives of the social elites of the pre-revolutionary period (Melnychuk, 2005, s.118).

It is worth noting that certain categories of rural workers also enjoyed the right to receive insurance benefits. They included hired workers of industrial-type peasant farms and collective farms. Those of them who did not have their own farms received material support. Unemployment benefits were paid to them only for 3 months in the amount of 4 krb., or 6 months during one period of unemployment (Melnychuk, 2009, s.184).

Assistance to the unemployed was paid from the special fund "B". Employers transferred funds to him in the form of insurance contributions. The Union leadership of social insurance determined their size. At the initial stage, according to the resolution of the RSC of the Ukrainian SSR dated February 10, 1922, their amount was 2.5% of the wage fund, and from March 1, 1923, it was reduced to 2%. Fines for violations of labor legislation were another way of replenishing the unemployment fund. In order to transfer financial payments to private enterprises, the social security authorities, following the recommendations of the Soviet leadership, had the right to set preferential tariffs for state-owned enterprises. (CDAVO. F. 348. Spr. 2524. ark.8) .

There was a catastrophic lack of insurance funds, which in a certain way affected the payment of benefits. According to the instructions of the GUS of the USSR on May 25, 1922, its amount was set in accordance with the minimum wage for skilled workers and from 1/3 to 3/4 for other categories of workers . The right to benefits was given to Red Army soldiers and minors. But even such conditions were sometimes unacceptable, so help was often received in the form of food, free lunches or at the expense of paying for communal services.

The amounts of cash payments changed from time to time, which was caused by inflation and a significant increase in the prices of goods. Qualified workers, party officials and Red Army men had the primary right to receive material payments. For these categories, cash payments amounted to 1/2 of the value of the budget set in the State Plan, for others - a third.

The monetary reform of 1924 made adjustments to the assignment of material payments. In April 1924, by a resolution of the Central Administration of Social Insurance of the USSR (Susstrakh of the USSR), the amount of assistance for the first category of unemployed was determined in the range of 7.5–10 thousand rubles, for the second – 5–6.5 thousand rubles. For agricultural workers, it was expected to decrease by 15%.

The improvement of the financial situation of the social insurance system contributed to the growth of benefits. If in 1923 the average monthly allowance for the unemployed of the 1st category amounted to 3–4 thousand rubles, then in 1924 it increased to 9 thousand rubles. At the same time, payments in kind were actually canceled, however, in some cases, they could be used as payments to peasants who did not have insurance experience. In order to eliminate the equalization system, in February 1925, the Union Council of Social Insurance emphasized that when determining the amount of material assistance, the average monthly earnings of the worker should be taken as a basis, setting its share for the unemployed of the first category at 30%, the second at 20%.

The payment calculation system underwent changes in June 1927. Since then, the amount of cash payments no longer depended on the employee's length of service and average earnings. They were calculated according to the tariff band, which was determined by the place of residence of the unemployed person (Novoe, 1927, s.4).

On the basis of the petition of the People's Commissariat of Labor (NKP) dated March 29, 1928, the unemployed of the 1st category were assigned benefits from 12 to 27 kr., the second - from

9 to 20 kr., the third - from 7 to 15.5 kr. The main criteria for division into categories were the employee's qualifications, salary, and social status. In addition to the basic cash assistance, payments to dependents of the unemployed were provided, amounting to 15 to 50% of the average salary.

The legislation clearly defined the cases in which payments were terminated. Basically, it was an unjustified refusal to work offered by the labor exchange or failure to attend it without valid reasons.

The highest percentage of unemployment benefits was intended for the first category - builders, clerks, metal workers, textile workers, and food workers. The representatives of the art sphere belonged to the second category.

It is worth noting that the amounts of monetary payments in practice did not correspond to those specified in the regulatory documents. For example, the social insurance budget recorded that the amount of assistance was supposed to be 64% of the salary, but in reality the unemployed received from 11 to 43% (depending on the category and tariff rate) (Zabelin, 1930, s.58).

In view of this, the Soviet government was forced to solve the tasks by implementing other forms of protection for the relevant category of the population. In September 1922, the All-Ukrainian Committee to Combat Unemployment was created. This structure, through collectives of the unemployed and public works, allocated funds that were used for job assistance to the unemployed. Control over their rational use relied on the labor exchange (Didenko, 1962, s.286).

The most common type of labor assistance in the early 1920s was community service. Their introduction was quite rational from both economic and political considerations. In this way, a significant number of unemployed people were involved with minimal capital investments. Economic efficiency consisted in the fact that the worker received support from the state while working for it. At the meeting of the Ukrainian Economic Council held on November 8, 1922, a decision was made to introduce public works in Ukraine. As L. Gordienko notes, this initiative belonged to trade unions and labor bodies (Gordienko, 1973: 94). Persons who were involved in public works received certain benefits. They were provided with free medical care, hot lunches, discounted railway travel, the possibility of receiving bread for family members at a discount or free of charge, they were charged double wages for work on weekends and holidays (Loburets, 1971, s.48-55).

As of 1922, about 1/3 of the unemployed were involved in the public works system. Their number gradually increased: in December 1923 – 5.5 thousand people, in January 1924 – 5.8 thousand, in July 1924 – 6.2 thousand.

However, since the end of 1924, this aid system has lost its importance due to the difficult financial situation of insurance agencies. The management considered it expedient to transfer the relevant costs to the state. After long negotiations, a compromise decision was made, according to which the social insurance transferred funds in the amount of insurance benefits for each worker. In order to control their rational use of the NCP, the USSR checked the lists of those involved in public works (Feingold, 1925, s.9-10).

Another form of support for the unemployed was benefits in kind. On March 27, 1921, the All-Ukrainian Commission for the Improvement of the Welfare of Working People, including the Unemployed, was established at the VUCVK. It included representatives of trade unions, Soviet and economic bodies. The main tasks of the commission were: allocation of funds for material support of workers, improvement of their living conditions, creation of public baths and laundries, development of the public catering system (Dydenko, 1962, s.266).

According to the resolution of the RSC of the Ukrainian SSR dated September 26, 1922, the unemployed had the right to the following benefits: free medical care and communal services, provision of fuel, half the rent. On January 24, 1922, the National People's Congress together with the VUCVK adopted the "Procedure for granting the unemployed the right to use communal services." The right to the relevant benefits was given to those categories registered on the labor exchanges who received unemployment benefits. According to this document, they were issued special vouchers for which they could: use up to 5 liters of water from the water supply system free of charge during the day, 4.5 kW. electricity monthly, as well as twice a month to visit the communal bathhouse (Ryshkova, 2009, s.201).

In the specified period, the practice of training and the practice of retraining workers for the purpose of their employment at enterprises where there was a shortage of workers in certain professions became widely used. Thanks to these measures, during 1926–1929, about 25 thousand people got a job (Dovgopol, 1971, s.62).

There were also other types of support for the unemployed: provision of places in dormitories for their accommodation or overnight stays, creation of crèches for children and allocation of separate places in orphanages. Statistical data show that the largest number of homes for the unemployed was concentrated in large cities: Kharkiv had 600 people, Odesa had 500, Kyiv had 450, and Katerynoslav had 200. Here it is worth noting that the overnight rooms were practically unfit for living in terms of sanitary indicators.

During the period of active industrial construction and, accordingly, the increase in demand for labor, the state took a course for the final elimination of unemployment. To reduce the number of unemployed people was supposed to introduce a 7-hour working day and a 7-day working week, collectivization of agriculture, etc. Stricter requirements for obtaining the status of unemployed were introduced administratively. Instead of monetary payments, labor or in-kind assistance was provided (Dovgopol, 1971, s.5).

Conclusions. Therefore, the introduction of market mechanisms in the economy during the period of the new economic policy caused unemployment, which became especially massive in cities and became a problem for the state that needed an immediate solution. With this in mind, the registration of the unemployed and the payment of benefits to them at the expense of insurance funds were introduced. Since insurance budgets were limited, the authorities began to introduce alternative types of assistance - labor (participation in public works and collectives of the unemployed) and in-kind (improvement of living conditions, development of the public catering system). In the conditions of the transition to industrial production, when the demand for labor increased, the state administratively stopped paying cash assistance to the unemployed.

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Діяльність державних органів влади щодо подолання безробіття в УСРР у 1920-х рр.

Анотація. У статті на основі архівних джерел та наукового доробку вітчизняних науковців проаналізовано досвід практичної діяльності державних органів влади з вирішення проблеми масового безробіття населення УСРР в 1920-х рр.. **Методологія дослідження** ґрунтується на основоположних принципах історичних досліджень: історизму, системності, об'єктивності в ході відбору фактів і документів. Серед спеціальних методів, використаних у дослідженні, слід назвати проблемно-хронологічний, історико-системний, історико-типологічний. **Наукова новизна** статті полягає у розкритті особливостей державної політики та діяльності державних органів влади щодо подолання безробіття найманих працівників через систему загальнообов'язкового державного соціального страхування. **Висновки.** Остаточно захопивши владу в Україні більшовицьке керівництво публічно заявило про необхідність створення ефективної системи соціальної підтримки особливо вразливих верств населення. Звісно ж декларативні гасла аж ніяк не відображали реальних намірів та можливостей. В умовах виснажливої громадянської війни та економічної розрухи цілком закономірним стало масове зростання чисельності безробітних та падіння життєвого рівня населення. Особливо це загострилося із переходом до нової економічної політики. На початку 1920-х рр. було прийнято низку законодавчих ініціатив, спрямованих на пом'якшення ситуації із безробіттям. Йшлося про запровадження на державному рівні обов'язкового страхування від безробіття. Страхівні внески, які сплачували роботодавці та наймані працівники мали стати фінансовою основою для виплати допомоги безробітним. Реалізація означеної державної політики на місцях покладалася на біржі праці. Однак, надмірна бюрократія та обмежена кількість таких установ не могли у достатній мірі вирішити цю проблему. Особливо гостро відчувалася нестача коштів для матеріальної підтримки населення, тому уряд змушений був шукати альтернативні варіанти: громадські роботи, натуральна допомога чи надання різного роду пільг. Активне індустриальне будівництво, що розпочалося наприкінці 1920-х рр., зумовило зростання попиту на робочу силу. В таких умовах партійно-радянське керівництво взяло курс на ліквідацію безробіття адміністративним шляхом, не визнаючи безробітними тих працівників, що відмовлялися від запропонованої їм роботи.

Ключові слова: соціальна політика, безробіття, біржі праці, нова економічна політика, соціальне страхування.

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