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# **RUSSIAN FACTORY INSPECTION (1882-1918): CUI BONO?**

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## **Abstract**

This study deals with history of important state institution in late Russian Empire – factory inspection. Such aspects of institutional development as evolution of legislative regulations, growth of staff, and complication of functions (and particularly, mediation in labour conflicts) are scrutinized. This paper presents some results on Russian experience of labour law implementation seeking to determine and evaluate the role and efficiency of Russian factory inspectors in conflicting triangle of relations among state, industrialists and workers.

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## *Introduction*

Industrialization can be considered as one of the aspects of modernization process, that also includes political and economic rationalization, social structure differentiation, social involvement into political decisions, urbanization. It's obvious, that such significant socio-economic transition intensifies social tension that leads to social conflicts in different fields and owing to different reasons. In Russian context, some kind of predetermination took place, because of many long years of serfdom, which was abolished in 1861, but existed in different types of financial dependence (ransom duties) till the very end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. And social conflict gradually switched from peasant to industrial life. Conflict can be considered as a destructive phenomenon that throws into confusion, but at the same time social conflict can be regarded as an articulation of social intentions, as well as a real opportunity to threat some serious social diseases. It's worth-while to mention, that labour relations played an important role in situation, when serfdom was abolished, but new economy of free labour market had not formed yet. Labour law elaboration became also a mark of difference in economic policy in different parts of huge Empire<sup>1</sup>.

One would think that factory inspectorate was just an institution of secondary importance, but, in fact, factory inspection played an exceptional role as the only body for labour legislation implementation in Russian private industry. I argue that factory inspection can be considered as litmus paper for revealing the labour conflicts in industry.

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<sup>1</sup> Main examples of disparity between European Russia and borderlands are Poland, Finland, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. Because of different approaches to different territories the legislative intentions tried to take into account all these differences, but

Russian factory inspection, established in 1882 as a state institution serving the purposes of factory legislation implementation, statistical registration, and mediation in employees and employers relations, was one of the most evident legislative steps to regulate the conflicting relations between workers and industrialists. Since 1882 factory inspectors, accountable to Ministry of Finance (after 1905 to Ministry of Trade and Industry), became the active participants of everyday life in private factories. My current research deals with the investigation of real social impact that factory inspectors exerted in their mediation, and it's an attempt to estimate the real role of mediators in labour conflict.

Russian factory inspection was studied in Soviet as well as in European and American literature. However, in Soviet studies factory inspectors were considered for the most part as anti-workers power, and like factory police. It was universally recognised through Lenin's opinion that inspection was just a decorative agency, which mostly supported entrepreneurs in their conflicts with workers. In European and American papers Russian factory inspectors were described as an institution in its legislative aspect only.

Studying mostly the legislative foundations of factory inspection development, historians and social researches (A. Vovchik (1964), V. Laverychev (1972), Th. von Laue (1960), Fr. Giffin (1966), J.von Puttkamer (1996) focused their attention mostly on formal structure of institution and sometimes make an effort to find some political reasons that allowed inspectorate to survive under political pressure after first Russian revolution in 1905. But it's necessary to emphasize that most of researchers disregarded the real inspectors' impact on social life of

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at the same time they gave birth to new differences, that make the Imperial system much more complex and also to some extent uncontrollable.

workers as well as their role in labour conflict resolution, which is one of the main problems under investigation in this paper.

Three aspects of inspectorate were chosen to study. Firstly, institutional analysis of factory inspection is conceived as reconstruction of the mechanism of inspectors' work at every level of their jurisdiction, strengthening the focus on Saint-Petersburg and Moscow factory inspection regions. Secondly, research of the inspectorate staff consists in collecting a prosopographic database, that gives a possibility to reconstruct life-paths of inspectors, and then historical judgement can be stated about the traits of institution life, but not as an abstract object, but in personalities, and their social characteristics. And thirdly, mediation, stated as one of the main social functions of inspection, was examined quantitatively as well as qualitatively, e.g. research of archive collection of complaints and complaints statistics points to the fact of importance, but also of complexity of inspectors' mediation, showing some practical paths of labour conflict resolution.

#### *Russian factory inspection: milestones in history*

On 1<sup>st</sup> June 1882 Council of state approved the law, that settled labour hours limitation for underage workers, prohibited to give an employment to underage workers younger than 11 years old, and established an new institution, that was called 'factory inspection for underage workers'. At the same time one chief inspector and four district factory inspector positions became vacant. "Labour law of 1882 meant much of principle.- V.I.Tugan-Baranovskiy wrote.- Despite opposition Moscow factory-owners, the Government stepped on the road to protection of workers interests. Factory inspector this new figure in factory had to bring in new principles in relation of owner to workers". In

1882 there were only three factory inspectors who began to supervise factories and works in Russia. E. Andreev was chief factory inspector, but because of controversy in the Ministry, he left his post, and Ya. Mihailovsky became chief inspector (up to 1894, when his post was abolished). And two region inspectors started observations in 1882, they were Iv. Yanzhul (in Moscow) and P. Peskov (in Vladimir). Petersburg and Warszawa region inspectors assumed their offices only in 1884, when staff and region of inspection control was expanded to 20 persons for almost all European Russia. We may notice that Russian factory inspection at the very beginning was comparable with Finnish factory inspection, established in 1890 and included 3 inspectors also.

If in 1882 factory inspectors observed for interrelations of employees and underage employers, in 1886 the main law determined the rights and the duties of entrepreneurs and workers of all ages promulgated. Iv. Vischnigradsky became minister of Finance in 1887, and he didn't share ideas of his forerunner, concerning factory inspection institution he declared the necessity of its resubmission to Ministry of Internal Affairs. But suddenly, entrepreneurs spoke on this subject supporting status quo, although a few months ago they expressed their discontent of inspection itself. It was a first attempt to submit factory inspection to Ministry of Internal Affairs that would be a leitmotif of all ministries controversies.

S. Witte's reform was aimed to exert every effort to provide indispensable control for labour laws control. Witte, Minister of Finance, decided to increase staff of inspection, to extend its region of observation, and to change the structure of subordination. Inspection staff counted 18 senior inspectors, 125 factory inspectors and 10 candidates. Witte's reform touched also a professional structure of inspectors, if before this reform inspectors were professors and physicians or sanitarians, then after

reform technicians and engineers became factory inspectors. In 1899 special agency for factory inspection practice coordination were founded — Chief factory-and-works Office, that goaled to provide inspectors with special information and commentary on laws.

**Table 1. Number of factories and workers under factory inspectorate**

| Years | Factories | Workers   | Attendance (%) | Years | Factories | Workers   | Attendance (%) |
|-------|-----------|-----------|----------------|-------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| 1895  | 14 755    | 1 110 245 | *              | 1906  | 14 247    | 1 684 569 | 72,0           |
| 1896  | 16 380    | 1 180 456 | *              | 1907  | 14 048    | 1 718 145 | 77,3           |
| 1897  | 20 174    | 1 386 961 | *              | 1908  | 14 801    | 1 808 679 | 75,3           |
| 1898  | **        | **        | *              | 1909  | 14 930    | 1 804 782 | 79,0           |
| 1900  | 17 977    | 1 686 177 | 50,7           | 1910  | 15 721    | 1 951 955 | 79,7           |
| 1901  | 18 279    | 1 711 700 | 70,0           | 1911  | 16 600    | 2 051 198 | 83,1           |
| 1902  | 17 819    | 1 710 773 | 70,1           | 1912  | 17 356    | 2 151 191 | 81,5           |
| 1903  | 16 800    | 1 717 778 | 74,6           | 1913  | 17 877    | 2 319 577 | 79,0           |
| 1904  | 15 899    | 1 773 516 | 73,8           | 1914  | 18 235    | 2 314 293 | 76,4           |
| 1905  | 14 615    | 1 660 693 | 70,1           |       |           |           |                |

*Source:* Ob izmenenii shtata fabrichnih inspektorov. SPb., n/y, S.17; Svodi otchetov fabrichnih inspektorov [1900-1914]. SPb., 1902-1915.

\* No data. \*\* No complete data.

In 1903 V.von Pleve, Minister of the Interior, impacted relative independence of factory inspection, when he pursued policy of factory inspection subordination to governor-generals and governor, carried out a reform of labour law control, promulgated in “Temporary rules of procedure and limits of factory inspection submission to governors and internal structure modification of factory inspection”.

Before and during first Russian revolution the question of jurisdiction and submission of factory inspectors was an urgent one. Due to firm position of Vl. Kokovtsev, Minister of Finance, factory inspection remained a part of Finance Ministry. But after loud strikes in 1905, factory inspection was submitted to a new ministry, proposed by Witte — Ministry of Trade and Industry. Factory inspection staff counts about 250 inspectors in 1905, and its factory-and-work supervision spread to European Russia governments (see map in Appendix 1).

The development of next 10 years of inspectorate was quite stable (see Table 2, and Appendix 2), even during the years of First World War, when inspectors worked in the field of industrial mobilization. And just



after several months after October revolution, factory inspection was interdicted and later replaced by “true proletarian labour inspection”.

**Table 2. Number of inspectors and supervision district in 1900-1914**

| Years | Inspectors | Districts | Years | Inspectors | Districts |
|-------|------------|-----------|-------|------------|-----------|
| 1900  | 203        | 215       | 1908  | 223        | 233       |
| 1901  | 206        | 224       | 1909  | 217        | 230       |
| 1902  | 225        | 231       | 1910  | 224        | 232       |
| 1903  | 218        | 228       | 1911  | 228        | 231       |
| 1904  | 228        | 233       | 1912  | 226        | 232       |
| 1905  | 226        | 231       | 1913  | 227        | 266       |
| 1906  | 224        | 231       | 1914  | 201        | 214       |
| 1907  | 223        | 235       |       |            |           |

Source: Svodi otchetov fabrichnih inspektorov [1900-1914]. SPb., 1902-1915.

Thus, several periods of factory inspection’s institutional growth are marked out: 1882-1886 - formation of the institution; 1886-1894 – territorial and staff enlargement of inspection; 1894-1903 – S. Witte’s factory inspection reform; 1903-1907 – pre-revolutionary and revolution period, inspection subordination reform; 1907-1913 – normal functioning period and pre-WWI impact; 1914-1918 – period of war mobilization and two Revolutions. These periods depend much on the mainstream of Russian internal policy and legislation, mostly governed by Finance Ministry (after 1905 - Trade and Industry Ministry) and Internal Affairs Ministry.

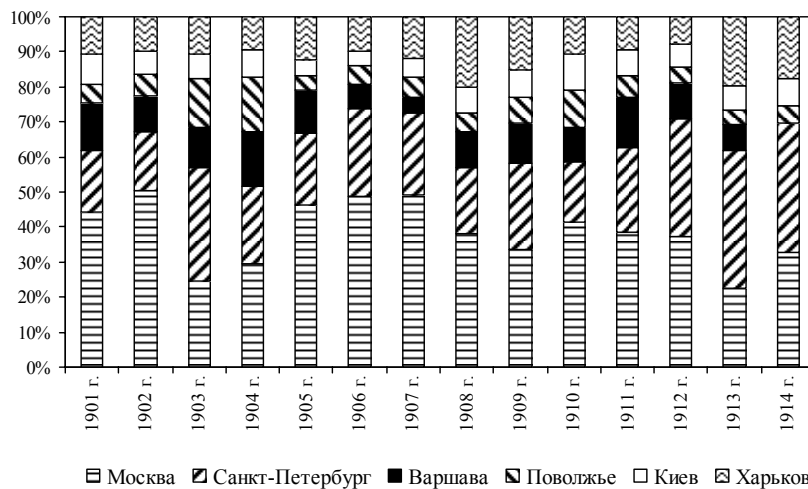
### *Labour Conflict and Mediation*

Labour conflict consists of many complex relations and participants; in our research we concentrate our attention to three main participants, namely (i) *workers*, (ii) *entrepreneurs* and (iii) *factory inspectors*. Applying to different sources, including archive materials, published statistics and memoirs, it’s possible to reconstruct the situation of permanent conflict between workers and entrepreneurs regarding the conditions of labour contract. But the very conflict did have two

alternative solutions: (a) *constructive*, when with inspectors meditative support some compromise settlement was found, (b) *destructive*, when both workers and entrepreneurs determined not to meet half-way, that came on to strikes and walkouts.

Mediation was the main function of factory inspectors, especially after Witte’s reform (1894). It’s possible to affirm that at the end of XIX century well-designed procedure of mediation was shaped, that consisted of complaints and requests presentation and factory inspectors’ final decisions on them. According to “Instructions to Factory Inspectors”, the very aim of inspectors’ mediation was to achieve a “peaceful” agreement between entrepreneurs and workers. Annual official statistics, presented by factory inspectors and generalised in Ministry (Svodi otchetov fabrichnih inspectorov [1900-1914]. SPb., 1902-1915), provide us figures that can give a solid base for measurement and conclusions on essence of labour conflicts, resolved by factory inspectors, and especially on the role of inspectorate in mediation. Every complaint or request was represented in explanation of its ground or cause. Every cause of complaint was separately registered and investigated, even if in one complaint there were many of causes.

**Graph 1. Workers-complainants in 1901-1914 (in 6 districts)**



*Legend:* Moscow, Saint-Petersburg, Warsaw, Volga region, Kiev, Kharkov.  
*Source:* Svodi otchetov fabrichnih inspektorov [1900-1914]. SPb., 1902-1915.

To inquiry the social impact of factory inspection mediation, we chose a combination of quantitative approach, studying statistics, and qualitative one, scrutinize archive collections of inspectors reports on their mediation in labour conflicts. As a results, it is quite possible that inspectors' mediation was a real alternative path to threat some serious social diseases caused by rapid industrialization. But at the same time there was no reason to expect a miracle of mediation in labour conflicts, because inspectors could only strive against broken laws and rules, but not to regulate different interests of workers and entrepreneurs.

**Graph 2. Number of causes of workers complaints in 1905-1910  
(declared to satisfied)\***



*Source:* Svodi otchetov fabrichnih inspektorov [1900-1914]. SPb., 1902-1915.

\* Number of causes exceeds number of complaints, because each complaint could indicate several causes.

In fact, inspectors' mediation could not stop strikes (particularly in 1905-1907), but it was helpful in an effort to maintain social stability. It's

worth to underline that inspectors were admitted experts in labour law questions and projected an image of defenders of fairness.

*Factory Inspection: cui bono?*

Labour law questions that factory inspectors were responsible to resolve had at least three interested sides: workers, representing labour, entrepreneurs, representing business, and, finally, state administration, representing government and tsar. It's obvious, that workers are the most interested side in this triangle scheme, because of inequality of bargaining power between employers and workers. In fact, not the majority of workers resorted to the help of inspectors, but only the most active and most miserable ones. Saying about entrepreneurs' interest in labour law regulation, it's necessary to size up the situation in industrial competition. Uniform legislation gave not only equality in industrialization for different firms and regions, but even sometimes it gave advantages for well-handled factories where it was possible to produce goods without violating laws (cf. Moscow and Saint-Petersburg regions). State administration tried also to participate in mediation as inspectors did, especially police sought to snatch mediation function to resolve labour conflicts by force.

Russian factory inspection studied throughout mediation and labour law implementation gives us an example of possible and realistic way of labour conflict to resolve. Factory inspectors became mediators between workers and entrepreneurs, and they were aimed to find a "peaceful" agreement in permanently conflict relations employees and employers. It's fairly to say that inspectors executed their functions well, but mediation was not enough to resolve labour conflicts, and there was no an instrument such as trade-union or some kind of state administration institution that could stop strikes, so numerous in 1905-07 and in 1917.

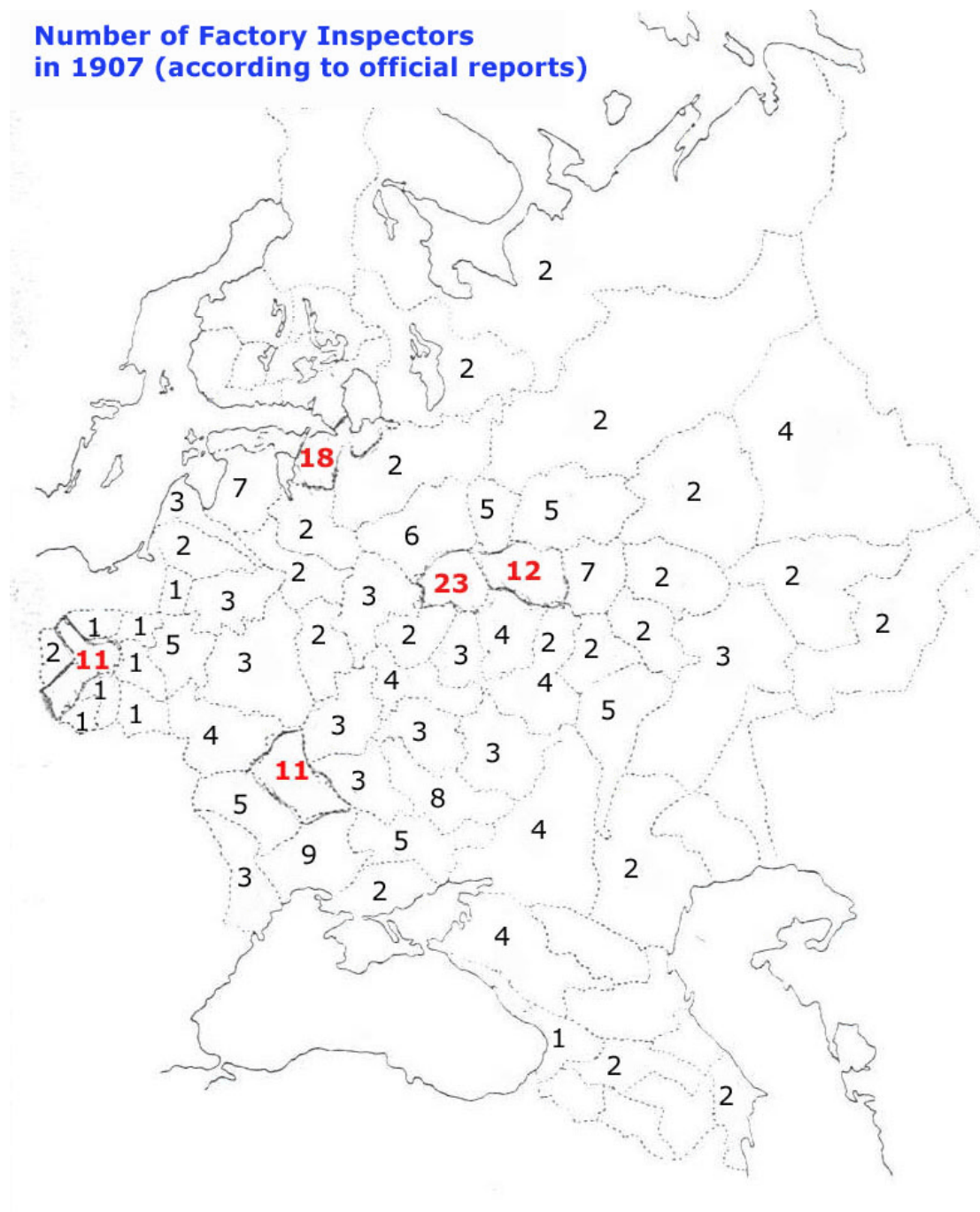
Anyway, the role of factory inspectors was really important possibility of state administration to answer a call of the day. And Russian factory inspectors impacted on workers' attitude to labour conditions, on entrepreneurs' attitude to workers, and also on public opinion. It was a important phenomena in Russian labour history of early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

History of factory inspection also reveals dichotomies that determined the internal policy, and receptivity of innovations by bureaucratic apparatus. These dichotomies are the following:

- Publicity ('glasnost') vs. secrecy (restricted report)
- Institutional independence vs. bureaucracy dependence
- Legislation process vs. legislation jerks

On example of factory inspection we can vividly trace the consequences of these dichotomies work, and it's worth to underline that these oppositions impacted very much not only inspectorate as an institution, but conditions of workers life, and also social stability in Russia.

Appendix 1 (map)



In each province (or government) the number of factory inspectors is indicated. Most 'controlled' provinces (marked red) are the following: Moscow (23), St.-Petersburg (18), Vladimir (12), Warsaw and Kiev (11 each).

Appendix 2

| Number of staff of Russian factory inspection with furnishing |                               |        |                 |                         |                   |  |  |
|---|-------------------------------|--------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| Main labour laws  | Ranks of factory inspectors   | Number | Year furnishing | Class by Table of ranks | Individual office | Sum total of provision for furnishing inspectors per annum | Average expenses on each inspector per annum |
| 12.VI.1884 (20*)  | Chief inspector               | 1      | 5000**          | V                       | +                 | 78500  | 3925   |
|   | District ('Okrug') inspectors | 9      | 3000            | VI                      | +                 |  |  |
|   | Inspector assistants          | 10     | 2000            | VII                     | -                 |  |  |
| 11.VI.1891 (36)   | Chief inspector               | 1      | 5000            | V                       | +                 | 126810   | 3522   |
|   | District inspectors           | 10     | 3000            | VI                      | +                 |  |  |
|   | Inspector assistants          | 25     | 2000            | VII                     | -                 |  |  |
| 14.III.1894 (143)   | Senior inspectors             | 5      | 3000            | V                       | For 10 inspectors | 489800   | 3495   |
|   |                               | 13     | 3000            | VI                      |                   |  |  |
|   | Factory inspectors            | 125    | 2000            | VI                      | -                 |  |  |
| 2.VI.1897 (165)   | Senior inspectors             | 6      | 4000            | V                       | For 26 inspectors | 702400   | 4108   |
|   |                               | 10     | 3600            | VI                      |                   |  |  |
|   |                               | 10     | 3000            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   | Factory inspectors            | 54     | 2500            | VI                      | -                 |  |  |
|   |                               | 40     | 2250            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   |                               | 51     | 2000            |                         |                   |  |  |
| 7.VI.1899 (257)   | District inspectors           | 6      | 5000            | V                       | +                 | 1040360  | 4048   |
|   | Senior inspectors             | 6      | 4000            | V                       | +                 |  |  |
|   |                               | 10     | 3600            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   |                               | 10     | 3000            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   |                               | 35     | 2500            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   | Factory inspectors            | 40     | 2500            | VI                      | -                 |  |  |
|   |                               | 60     | 2250            |                         |                   |  |  |
|   |                               | 90     | 2000            |                         |                   |  |  |

Source: Litvinov-Falinskii V., *Fabrichnoe zakonodatel'stvo i fabrichnaia inspektsiia v Rossii* [Labour legislation and factory inspection in Russia] (St.-Petersburg 1900; St.-Petersburg 1904), p. 301-302.

\* Total number of positions.

\*\* Including salary and funds for travel expenses and stationery.

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