

Movements against industrial pollution of the environment in the late Russian Empire (1870–1917)

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Industrial pollution of the environment is one of the most important ecological problems of the modern world, as well as one of topical subjects in environmental history. In Western Europe, this phenomenon had already become a part of the national agenda in the middle of nineteenth century. At that time, the pollution of water, air, and soil with toxic waste of mineral origin was a relatively new and insufficiently studied phenomenon that gave rise to an ambiguous reaction of society. Officials, experts, society representatives, and factory owners had to decide whether a compromise between the economic interests and the right of citizens to a clean environment was possible, what level of environmental pollution could be recognized as acceptable, and which methods to control it were most effective. This dialogue between government and different social groups formed foundations for a new environmental policy of the industrialized countries.

Among European historians, interest in the outlined subject appeared as early as the 1960s, on the eve of the emergence of environmental history, and remains high. However, the Russian Empire is still unexplored from this point of view. At the same time, Russia possessed great industrial potential and had significant influence on the development of world science and technology. Thus, my research project will aim to describe: 1) the main features of industrial pollution in the Russian Empire; 2) who protested against industrial pollution in nineteenth-century Russia, how, and why; and 3) how pollution of the environment influenced the formation and the specific features of Russian environmental policy. Answers to these research questions can be found in number of cases, when environmental harm caused by plants and factories attracted the attention of a wider public. The most promising among these cases are conflicts between citizens and owners of textile plants in the city of Lodz (1880–1897), Morozovs' Textile Manufactory in Tver (1880–1917), and a chemical plant of "Ushkov and Co." Association in Kazan (1893–1917).