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Functioning of the Social Policy Mechanism in Modern Russia

Boretsky Evgeniy^{a*}, Egorova Maria^a, Cherdanceva Irina^a

* Corresponding author: Boretsky Evgeniy, eboretsky@mail.ru

^aNational Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Lenina avenue, 30, Tomsk, Russia, eboretsky@mail.ru, +7-(983) 342-8700

Abstract

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The problem of the transition of Russia from the socialist way of life to the market economy is formulated. As a result, Russia has suffered from the violation of the intergenerational continuity of the social practices. People do not have time to adapt an essential set of socially acceptable and effective practices to address their life problems. In this context, the role of the state social policy and its effective functioning is increasing. The paper discusses the directions of the social policy in Russia. The major social problems to be addressed by the state and the shortcomings of the social policy mechanism are identified. Based on the analysis of the obtained information, some measures are developed to significantly reduce the level of a particular problem of the social policy. In addition, the recommendations are developed to improve the effectiveness of social programs in Russia.

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1. Introduction

The market economy is evidently associated with the social differentiation. Being the independently functioning entity, the market is unable to provide social guarantees to the community since the key goal of individuals is to make a personal gain rather than to improve the life of the whole society. In this connection, the state must act as a protector for disadvantaged segments of the society.

2. Research questions

The social policy plays a key role in the progress of any state, irrespective of its level of development (Weber, 1949). However, its scope may vary widely. A distinctive feature of Russia is that more than a half of its population is socially dependent in one or another way. In this content, the

task of the state is to select the most needy families or entire regions to provide them with the most complete and comprehensive support, since, according to the Constitution, Russia is the social state, and its policy is aimed at creating conditions for the worthy life and the free development of every citizen (Decree of the RF President of May 07, 2012 No. 597).

The social policy is often understood as the state support of socially vulnerable groups or reduced to social protection and social security of the population (Mishra, 1981). Such an attitude is shared even by public officials and narrows the content of the social policy. As a result, the state minimizes its responsibility for the welfare of the society and focuses only on the most acute problems. Another, broader, approach to understanding the social policy interprets it as a system of targeted government measures and actions aimed at regulating relations between different social groups and, therefore, enhancing the social welfare, improving the quality and standard of living (Rimlinger, 1971).

The importance of the social sector is great not only due to its huge impact on the economy (Titterton, 2006). Its primary purpose is to fully satisfy material, cultural and spiritual needs of citizens, to ensure their comprehensive and harmonious development. This is the strategic and ultimate goal of any civilized state.

3. Research

The existence of the society's needs for achievement of social goals and the indirect satisfaction of such needs by the state through its economic and political activities do not mean a targeted social policy. The social policy as a purposeful activity aimed at achieving social goals is implemented by the state only with the appearance of its social functions, i.e. only when the state takes direct responsibility and commitment to satisfy social needs of citizens (Cook, 2013). When the social policy is understood as a purposeful activity of the state aimed at implementing its social functions, it should be recognized that the social policy is possible only with the appearance of its specific social functions. By linking the social policy to the social functions of the state, we suggest that the development of the state's social functions is the basis for structuring its social policy. The evolution of the state from the simplest to the most complex forms is accompanied by transformation of the social policy and its structural elements (Averin, 2009).

In terms of the economic system, the social policy plays a dual role. Firstly, with the economic growth, accumulation of the national wealth and creation of favourable social environment for citizens become the main purpose of the economic activity. In this sense, the social policy is the concentration of goals associated with the economic growth, while all other aspects of the economic development are considered as means for implementing the social policy (Galkina, 2012).

Secondly, if the social policy as a driver of the economic growth is not accompanied by growth of the prosperity, people lose their incentives to efficient economic activity. At the same time, a higher level of economic development means higher requirements for people, culture, physical and moral development. In its turn, this requires the further development of the social sector.

The state implements its social functions through social institutions at different organizational levels. These may not be government agencies. The subjects of the social policy include competent public authorities (or institutions) that develop the social information field and legal framework,

provide a material support or in-kind forms of assistance (social services) to those who need them to the extent of the approved federal or regional guarantees.

The social policy aims to regulate primary distribution of income by means of social transfers and subsidies in combination with the taxes which are necessary for funding of these services. Therefore, the low-income community is able to increase its share in consumption of goods, to make it more fair and decent. Certainly, transfer of a part of income from some persons to others should be organized in such a way that people do not lose the incentive to achieve higher income, and assistance should be provided only to those who really need it. A community receiving transfer income should have a freedom of choice in consumption. Therefore, assistance should be provided mainly in cash.

With the rapid transition from the socialist way of life to the market economy, Russia has suffered from the violation of the intergenerational continuity of the social practices (Inozemtsev, 2010). People do not have time to master an essential set of socially acceptable and effective practices to address their life problems.

The social policy must mitigate negative effects of the social inequality, socioeconomic disturbances in the society. The social functions assigned to the state are implemented through a system of legislative and executive authorities at the level of the Federation, subjects of the Russian Federation and municipalities.

At this stage of development, the need for strengthening the state's role in the management of social relations has arisen. At the present time, the social functions of the state should acquire a special significance. The social functions of the state are strengthened due to the current social processes and the state's focus on a human as a purpose of functioning and development.

4. Results

Over the past decade, the social problems of Russia have not almost changed: people still suffer from the lack of income, higher prices of food, utilities, etc. The problem of drug and alcohol abuse remains acute: thousands of people in the country die from drugs and alcohol from year to year. The country still cannot cope with corruption. Another problem is the spread of HIV/AIDS and tuberculosis (Federal Law of the Russian Federation of December 28, 2013 No. 442). High rate of drug and alcohol abuse result in disruption of families and the growth of "social orphanhood" (Number of Orphans in the Russian Federation). Thus, the following problems can be identified: poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, HIV infections, tuberculosis epidemic, social orphanhood, and social problems of today's youth. In addition to the problems directly related to the social status of citizens, one of the major problems of the social policy is the weaknesses of its regulating mechanism. Such weaknesses disadvantages include:

- poor legal framework. For example, it is required to calculate the total income of all persons registered in the same household, rather than income of only those who really live there. This infringes interests of residents whose distant relatives or friends are registered in their household but actually live at another place. If the total income exceeds the minimum subsistence level per a registered person, a needy person is not eligible to receive a social security benefit.

- difficulties in interaction with social security authorities. This is explained by the large number of applicants for benefits and insufficient capacity of relevant authorities. For example, their office hours are completely not suitable for employed persons. Moreover, they do not receive visitors on some days.

- bureaucracy. An applicant has to collect a great deal of documents to prove his or her eligibility for social assistance. The collection period may take several weeks.

- corruption. This problem applies not only to social policy, but, nevertheless, it cannot be ignored.

Taking into account these problems of the social policy and its regulating mechanism, we can offer the following recommendations to resolve the situation:

Alcohol abuse. A great number of people suffer from diseases caused by alcohol consumption. Most of them have been addicted to alcohol even prior to the age of majority. Therefore it is necessary to pursue the aggressive alcohol policy, from a kindergarten and throughout a person's life.

- Educational institutions should organize trainings for parents to help them properly explain to their children the harm caused by alcohol.

- To conduct educational talks with employees.

- To launch an advertising campaign showing the effects of alcohol consumption to make it less attractive and prestigious.

- To prohibit sale of alcoholic beverages to anyone under the age of 21. At the same time, to make the punishment for illegal traffic of these products as tough as possible.

- To limit purchase of alcohol beverages at sales outlets to a certain amount per year.

Drug abuse As well as alcohol, drugs are usually consumed by teenagers who do not have a sufficient control by their parents and the community. Therefore, in order to avoid increasing the number of those who try illegal drugs for the first time, it is necessary to organize different leisure time activities for young people and to make them accessible to all social segments.

- To launch a comprehensive advertising campaign showing the effects of drug abuse.

- To keep a record of addicted persons and, if possible, to isolate them in special medical centres.

- To make the punishment for drug trafficking much tougher.

Poverty. The boundaries between different segments of the society cannot be completely removed, but it is possible to provide opportunities for people to start their own business. For this purpose, it is necessary to simplify the registration and reporting rules.

- A very important step is to introduce punitive measures against individuals or corporations involved in price speculations, as well a strict control of retailers' pricing policies.

- Establishment of student volunteer movements for helping disabled persons and retirees will not only improve the quality of life of these people, but will give a rise to new generations having a sense of duty and understanding the basic values of life.

- By fostering the development of agriculture and limiting the urbanization, the state will provide the opportunity for the working-age population to be self-sufficient. Although the government offers free land plots in remote areas of the country, it is necessary to develop infrastructure to make such proposals attractive.

Tuberculosis. Although the problem of tuberculosis still persists, it is more acute for persons serving a prison sentence rather than for a major part of the society. The source of this problem is the poor

living conditions of prisoners. The probability of infection significantly increases with a term of imprisonment. It is extremely unprofitable for the state to expend much money on maintenance of penitentiaries, especially in the difficult economic situation. Therefore, a number of steps can be proposed to solve this problem:

- Prisoners serving sentences for petty crimes should be freed from restraint, but limited in movement and given a specific job where they have to work until the end of their sentence.
- Small farms should be established near places of detention to provide the opportunity for prisoners to produce food for themselves.

HIV infection. On the one hand, this problem is associated with drug abuse when the infection is transmitted through blood. On the other hand, the source of HIV may be unprotected sexual contacts with an infected person. Since isolation of infected persons is impossible, it is proposed to establish special centres throughout the country to distribute single-use syringes and contraceptives to all people.

- Schools must hold special sessions to inform about possible ways of HIV infection, consequences and necessary measures to reduce risks.

Social orphanhood. The solution of this problem is associated with strict control of alimony payments by judicial authorities, as well as expansion of social programs for needy families. Different benefits should be provided to foster families. In order to attract sponsorship, is proposed to increase tax incentives to individuals and organizations that are engaged in such a support.

Youth policy. The welfare of youth is proposed to be improved by through a series of measures:

- to increase the number of kindergartens;
- to organize various free interest groups and clubs;
- to held various contests and competitions at every level of education;
- to restrict children and adolescents from shocking information in Internet;
- to improve the image of secondary vocational schools;
- job security after completion of the study.

A number of activities are proposed to solve the problems associated with the regulating mechanism of the social policy.

Poor legal framework. This problem can be solved by adopting the experience of other countries: a special commission should visit households to check a situation and make its decision.

Difficulties in interaction with social security authorities this problem can be solved by establishing links between social authorities so that responsible employees can do most of the work. This will significantly speed up the decision-making process.

The problem of corruption can be solved by a stricter control of corporations' cash turnover and income of executives.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the elimination of these problems will lead to a more effective implementation of the social policy in Russia. This makes it possible to improve the standard of living and, therefore, to ensure a more intensive growth of the population.

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