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ECONOMIC RECONSTRUCTION IN THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST AFTER THE CIVIL WAR (1923-1926)

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Abstract: The article considers one of the little-studied periods in the history of the Russian Far East, i.e. the restoration of the national economy of the eastern part of the Soviet Union after the civil war (1923-1926). Using the historical-genetic, comparative-historical and problem-based chronological methods, the author of the article has analyzed the national economy of the Far East after the Russian Civil War, considered measures for its restoration and plans for the socialist transformation starting from 1926. The author has also revealed the role of the Soviet authorities and their leadership, in particular the head of the Far East Ya.B. Gamarnik.

Keywords: civil war, industry, Far East, national economy, New Economic Policy, market, plans, directives, Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee, Far Eastern Economic Meeting, Far Eastern Economic Council, Far Eastern Planning Committee.

INTRODUCTION

For decades, the historical studies of most Western European countries have been changing their scale. As a result, scientific works moved away from global problems and started to pay more attention to the history of cities, streets, quarters, houses, families, etc. The relevant scientific literature refers to this phenomenon as

"local history". In the context of this study, scholars consider the economic development of regions or, speaking in the Soviet terms, the "national economy" of certain territories.

On November 14, 1922, the People's Assembly of the Far Eastern Republic proclaimed the Soviet rule over its territory. On November 15, 1922, the Bolshevik government in Moscow adopted a decree abolishing the Far Eastern Republic and merged it with the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Baksheev et al., 2020). After that, the local authorities faced the problem of restoring the Far Eastern national economy that suffered considerable losses during the Russian Civil War. However, the economic crisis was not the only obstacle to improving the lives of people in this region. After the abolition of the Far Eastern Republic, a major part of its territory was annexed by the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic but was uncontrolled by the Soviet authorities for several years (Baksheev, 2011).

While considering scientific works on the restoration of the national economy of the Far East after the Russian Civil War, we should mention theses written by S.V. Bezgin (2010), S.S. Tsukanov (2011) and D.V. Lebedeva (2010). They analyzed both the role of the Soviet executive authorities and the New Economic Policy in the restoration of the national economy. A.T. Mandrik (2007; 2008), L.I. Gallyamova (2012; 2018) and L.N. Dolgov (2007) studied a difficult period in the economic history of the Far East after the Russian Civil War.

The memoirs of A.I. Mikoyan, V.M. Verkhovnykh, M.B. Kuzenits, M.I. Rachkov and A.G. Yakimov (1978) contains information about the Far Eastern activity of Ya.B. Gamarnik, who successively held the posts of the Chairman of the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee, the Far Eastern Regional Executive Committee and the Secretary of the Far Eastern Committee of the Bolshevik Party from 1923 to 1928. These sources represented one of the first attempts to retrieve information about the person who was later called the "enemy of the people". After Ya.B. Gamarnik's tragic death in 1937, his name was erased from the Russian history and was brought back from oblivion only in the 1960-70s, like those of many Soviet leaders of the 1920s-30s.

METHODS

While studying these issues, we used the following methods: historical-genetic, comparative-historical and problem-based chronological. The historical-genetic method allows revealing features and functions of the national economy of the Far East after the Russian Civil War and demonstrating the cause-and-effect relationships of its changes, the specifics of restoration and further development. Using the comparative-historical method, we disclosed general and specific features of the restoration of the Far Eastern economy at different periods under consideration. Thus, the article highlights specific socio-economic conditions of the Far East if compared with the rest of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. At the same time, the activities of the Far Eastern executive authorities are presented within a real historical process determined by socio-economic changes at both national and regional levels. Through the problem-based chronological method, we identified the problems that existed in the national economy of the Far East in a certain period.

RESULTS

The state of the national economy in the Far East after the Russian Civil War

The tragic events of 1917-1922 almost destroyed the economy of the Far East. The Russian Civil War demolished not only its national economy but also undermined human resources (for example, the population of Khabarovsk decreased from 52,000 to 30,000 people). According to L.N. Dolgov, the total losses of the Far East during this period amounted to about 80,000 people. Many rural settlements were annihilated. There were few cities in the Far East and one of them almost disappeared. From 2,107 houses in Nikolayevsk-on-Amur, only 40 houses survived the war. Its port with all the infrastructure, industrial enterprises, a power station and a telephone exchange were destroyed (Dolgov, 1996). It is also difficult to overestimate the damage caused by the export of material assets abroad.

In 1923, the number of workers in gold mines decreased from 35,000 to 10,000 people if compared with the pre-war period (Bezgin, 2010). The local rail transport was also destroyed. More than a half of cars were non-runners, while 213 steam locomotives needed major repairs and could not leave the depot. According to the Far Eastern Economic Meeting (1923), the value of all products, including the cost of labor, was 43.5% of the pre-revolutionary value. The mass of goods dropped to 36.1% if compared with the figures of 1913. According to the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee, the damage from the Civil War amounted to 603,407,009 rubles and 83 kopecks in terms of gold. During this period, the Far Eastern fishing industry lost about 112,550,000 rubles, the Russian customs – 28,000,000 rubles, the Amur Shipping Company – 35,000,000 rubles, the Ussuriysk Railways from Khabarovsk to Nikolsk-Ussuriysk (currently, Ussuriysk) – 692,085 rubles in terms of gold. Cultivated areas decreased by 42.3% (Bezgin, 2010).

On April 15, 1923, the local authorities conducted a comprehensive analysis of the regional industry. Their overview proved the catastrophic state of the Far Eastern economy (Tsukanov, Ornatskaya, 2010). The most developed industry turned out to be wood processing. As of January 15, 1923, only three plants still operated in the Far East (except for the Primorye region). The rest of the industries were removed from operation. Only one match factory continued to work in the Amur region and all plywood manufacturing plants were closed. The Verkhneudinsk plant was the only glass production industry that functioned in the region, but its furnace needed repair. In general, it produced wine glassware and bottles for mineral water. The Starnov brother's pottery ceased to operate in Primorye. The Bryansk and Spassky cement plants were in the same state (Galitsin, 2014).

The metalworking manufacturing industry of the Far East was represented by the following five plants:

1. The Verkhneudinsk plant retained its material base, supplies of various metals and fuel;
2. The Khabarovsk armory was put on hold and kept the minimum number of workers;
3. The Blagoveshchensk mechanical plant had survived the war and was provided with raw materials. In 1922, it started to receive orders and its workforce increased from 40 to 70;
4. The mechanical plant in Blagoveshchensk did not function and was not nationalized;

5. The Far Eastern mechanical and shipbuilding plants were partially mothballed in Vladivostok (Galitsin, 2014).

The food industry and light industry also experienced some changes. All mills were exempted from the control of the Far Eastern Industrial Bureau and transferred to the jurisdiction of regional revolutionary committees. In connection with the alcohol monopoly, Nikolaevsky, Innokentievsky and "Ocean" wine distilleries were put into operation. Churin & Co. and Bogdanov factories stood idle. The only meat canning factory in Vladivostok did not function. However, three tobacco factories and two tanneries continued their operation (Galitsin, 2014). During the Russian Civil War, fishing throughout the Far East was controlled by Japan. The Japanese entrepreneurs contributed about 40,000,000 rubles to the fisheries of the Okhotsk-Kamchatka region. The Japanese leased 490 sea fishing spots and put 213 of them in operation in 1922. In 1922, 83 river plots and 25 sea fishing spots were leased by the Russian citizens, but they were actually a part of Japanese enterprises (Mandrik, 1994). The fisheries of the Nikolaevsky region were also under Japanese control. As a result, the Amur population was deprived of the opportunity to provide for their own needs. The whole fish catch was sent to Japan (Gallyamova, 2012).

At the beginning of 1923, coal mining was conducted in four regions: the Zabaikalsky region (four mines), the Amursky region (two mines), the Primorsky region (the Suchansky state mines and several private ones) and the northern part of Sakhalin that was occupied by the Japanese troops. The first two regions belonged to the "Gosugol" coal trust, which controlled six mines. The most efficient mine was Chernovsky since it produced 445,828,644 lb of coal in 1922. However, the existing equipment could have increased its production to 900,000,000 lb per year. The technical equipment of this mine was in quite a good state, but other mines were in poor conditions. The lack of railway lines and years-long coal burning made the whole industry commercially unfeasible. Thus, a small amount of coal was exported even though Suchansky coal was of good quality and could become one of the valuable export items (Gallyamova, 2012).

By 1923, the Soviet state had lost its control over gold mining and private gold mines ceased to exist. Different committees that seized mines facilitated the uncontrolled export of gold without paying taxes to the state. In 1922, gold mining amounted to only 1,139 lb and 2 oz throughout the Far East. Moreover, the state mined mechanically 219 lb and 11 oz, private mines – 137 lb and 9 oz and prospectors – 21 lb and 11 oz. The larger part of gold production in 1922 was attributed to the Trans-Baikal Territory (524 lb and 12 oz) (Bezgin, 2009).

Most equipped gold mines did not belong to the state. It controlled only 11 mechanized mines under two enterprises – the "Drazhrud" and Uldegidsky hydraulics. Private entrepreneurs developed 338 mines on a territory that corresponded to 24.5% of the area of all the mines before the revolution. It was impossible to increase the efficiency of gold mining using state funds, therefore the industry was recovered through the attraction of funds from the Russian and foreign capitalists (Baksheev et al., 2018).

The decline in the industry caused the growth of unemployment, which amounted to 28% at the beginning of 1924. Given the state of the national economy, the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee could not eradicate this problem. However, the local authorities were interested in retaining qualified personnel in the territory; therefore, they continued to organize summer public works that were typical of the Far

Eastern Republic. According to the plan of 1923, 5,000 of skilled workers and up to 1,000 of unskilled workers should be attracted to these activities. The relevant estimates showed that this project would have cost 100,000 rubles in terms of gold (Bezgin, 2007). Summarizing the above-mentioned facts, we should note that the Far East was in difficult economic conditions at the beginning of 1923.

Measures for restoring and developing the national economy of the Far East

The Far Eastern Republic preserved the structure of a market economy throughout its existence. On March 1921, the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic introduced similar "rules of the game" into the national economy, which made it easier for the latter to annex the Far Eastern Republic in November 1922.

In 1922, the newly formed Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee faced the main task, i.e., to develop labor forces with limited funds, while maintaining the state control over the economy. To help the local authorities, planning-directive and administrative-economic institutions were established to manage the economic life in the region: At the end of November 1922, the Far Eastern Economic Meeting was formed (including the Far Eastern Industrial Bureau) to control state and municipal industry, as well as transport; On December 4, 1922, the Far Eastern Economic Council was formed as the supreme economic body managing the economic life of the region. It elaborated long-term plans for the development of industry, capital construction, export and import, as well as the resettlement of people from European Russia to the Far East; On April 7, 1923, the Far Eastern Planning Committee began to function as part of the Far Eastern Economic Meeting. It consisted of several departments: industrial, agricultural, financial-economic, transport and regional. Similar planning committees were established in provinces and districts of the Far East (Baksheev, 2020a). The above-mentioned institutions conducted activities in several interrelated areas.

Nationalization. In 1923-1926, enterprises were nationalized on the following grounds: Their owners left the country; The enterprises nationalized back in 1918; Non-functioning enterprises owned by foreigners; Profitable light industry operations; Large enterprises that have great economic importance; The Far Eastern branches of enterprises previously nationalized in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic; The enterprises whose owners did not fulfill the tasks set for them; The list of nationalized enterprises comprised the Khabarovsk power plant, the Blagoveshchensk match factory, the Suchansky and Chernovsky coal mines. Alongside the strengthening of the socialist sentiments in industry, private enterprises were forced out of this economic sphere.

1. The creation of semipublic joint-stock companies, including private enterprises and state institutions with the leading role of the state.

2. Concessions (the right to issue) were subject to national rather than local interests. Due to the unawareness of people's commissariats in Moscow about the real situation in the Far East, the situation left a lot to be desired. The Far Eastern Concession Committee had the right to conduct negotiations and prepare draft agreements, whose final approval was made by the government. The general approach was to attract concession capitals to the Far Eastern black and timber industries while fulfilling the main condition, in particular to process products on site. From 1923 to 1925, 11 concessions were established on similar terms (Tsukanov, 2010).

3. The protection of state interests and fight against theft. On December 15, 1922, the Far Eastern Revolutionary Committee adopted a decree "On the Far Eastern fishery and hunting". According to this document, all agreements, contracts and concessions for fishing concluded before the reunification of the Far Eastern Republic and the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic was canceled. However, the Russian citizens could rent industrial sites under certain conditions. A procedure was established for the sale of internal (only for the Soviet citizens) and external (with the involvement of foreigners) fishing spots (Gallyamova, Mandrik, 2018). Since the USSR had only one border guard ship in the Far East "the Red Pennant" ("Admiral Zavoiko" till 1923), it was almost impossible to protect its own economic interests. This circumstance was used by those countries that had a sea fishing fleet and were dissatisfied with the innovations (Gallyamova, Mandrik, 2018).

4. The exploration of natural and production resources. To attain this end, the Far Eastern Planning Committee was accompanied with a cabinet of the national economy. The latter should unite the research carried out by scientific, economic and other institutions. Under provincial planning committees, local history sections were established to combine the work of institutions and individual citizens aimed at studying natural resources and their rational use (Gallyamova, Mandrik, 2018).

5. The training of qualified workers through restoring the former vocational schools (from January 1923) and creating new factory apprenticeship schools.

6. The fight against the domination of private trade. To fulfill this goal, the Far Eastern People's Committee of Internal Trade was established. The People's Commissariat of Trade prepared the necessary goods and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture provided seed grain. On January 16, 1923, a protectionist policy was introduced into the region, which imposed a duty on the import of some foreign goods and prohibited the import of the others. In other words, the free port regime was canceled again. According to the local authorities, these measures were supposed to protect state trade from the competition of foreign goods and develop production in the Soviet Far East (Dolgov, 2008).

Despite some shortcomings, the comprehensive implementation of the program for restoring the national economy had revived economy in the USSR as a whole and the Far East in particular by the end of 1925. For example, the Far Eastern industry achieved 95.2% of the pre-war level between 1925 and 1926. It is worth mentioning that different industries recovered in different ways. In 1925-1926, the gross output of gold mining was 41.7% of the pre-war level and that of handicraft industry provided 80% of the pre-war amount. In 1926, cattle breeding and crop farming reproduced the indicators of 1916 (Sanachev, 1993).

From 1923 to 1926, there was a steady increase in export operations with fish, timber and coal. Their profit was 5,650,000 rubles in 1923-1924; 9,762,000 rubles in 1924-1925; 13,960,000 rubles in 1925-1926, which amounted to 30% of the entire Far Eastern industry (Sanachev, 1993). Based on objective conditions, the extractive industry preserved its significance. Although the state involvement in these enterprises was not the same. For instance, the Soviet state controlled 8% of the timber industry, 55% of fishing, 25% of gold mining, 97% of coal mining, 52% of manufacturing and 21% of cooperatives. By that time, the extractive industry had been restored by 83% and processing one by 59% (Baksheev, 2020b).

A statistical analysis demonstrates that 1925 was the last year of restoring the Far Eastern economy. According to contemporaries and scholars, 1926 was the first year

of the socialist construction that marked a new era in the life of the Far East. The reconstruction of the national economy and the transition to planning economic principles conditioned the adaptation of the Soviet administrative-territorial division (Novikov, 2018). Ya.B. Gamarnik played a significant role in the restoration of the Far Eastern national economy and its further development. Giving a report at the 15th All-Union Conference of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in 1926, Ya.B. Gamarnik suggested a concept for the development of the Far East. His biographers claimed that his idea partially coincided with the concept of P.A. Stolypin (Gamarnik, 1978). The main theses of his report are as follows:

Firstly, large investments were required for the industrialization of the region, but a professional distribution of funds could compensate these costs in the shortest possible time. It mainly referred to the development of state gold mining. Taking into account the needs of Japan, it was proposed to conclude agreements on the export of the Far Eastern coal and oil; therefore, it was necessary to increase their extraction. Secondly, Ya.B. Gamarnik recommended developing rice production. At that time, rice was bought in foreign countries. In 1926, 14,000 hectares of rice were sown in the Far East where this crop had been never grown before the revolution (with a yield of more than 6,400 lb per hectare) (Stasyukevich, 2013). To develop production, it was necessary to allocate some funds for the construction of an irrigation system. In this context, the Soviet citizens needed to get ahead of the Japanese who asked to transfer the Far Eastern rice paddies to them on a concession with the subsequent export of the product to Japan (Baksheev et al., 2019).

Thirdly, Ya.B. Gamarnik criticized the People's Commissariat of Trade, the People's Commissariat of Finance and the Supreme Economic Council for the lack of knowledge about the Far East, which leads to the wide transfer of fishing spots on a concession and the complete disregard for the development of national enterprises. Fourthly, Ya.B. Gamarnik proposed to resettle people from other densely populated regions of the USSR to the Far East, which would help to avoid unemployment in these regions and would facilitate the settlement of the sparsely populated Far East (Baksheev, 2013).

During the development of agriculture, experts analyzed soil, climate and typical crops in each region of the Far East to form recommendations. The Trans-Baikal Territory almost abandoned the commercial production of wheat and rye due to the soil unsuitability. As a result, this region was reoriented to cattle breeding (to supply the entire Far East with meat). The Amur region became a reliable breadbasket for the Far East and a stable supplier of wheat, millet and buckwheat. The Primorye region and the Khabarovsk region were engaged in rice growing, for which the "Dalris" ("Far Eastern Rice") trust was created. The latter supplied rice not only to its region but also to the central regions of the USSR. Gardening was supported and promoted with a particular emphasis (Stasyukevich, 2013).

Within the timber industry (1926-1927), old sawmills were restored, and new sawmills built, which allowed the Far East to export up to 200,000 cubic meters of wood and provided much wood for the internal needs of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (Bezgin, 2009). To develop the Soviet fishing industry, the "Rybtrest" ("Fishing Trust") trust was established. The cooperative network of "Tsentrosoyuz" was also involved in fishing. The Soviet citizens began to push the Japanese away from their waters (Mandrik, 1994). For the needs of gold mining, the "Dalzoloto" ("Far Eastern

Gold") trust was created to promote mechanized state enterprises and fight against private miners (Bezgin, 2009).

If the Far Eastern workers had not been interested in the restoration of their own enterprises and the economy of their region, this process would have never occurred. An example of how the Far East reacted to the restoration of industrial facilities is the history of the Daldizel (Far Eastern Diesel) plant in the 1920s known as the Khabarovsk Armory. After the Russian Civil War, its very existence was threatened. The Armory passed under the jurisdiction of the Far Eastern Industrial Bureau and then the Governmental Executive Committee since the enterprise was unprofitable, had a large debt to workers and employees and lacked funds, raw materials and fuel. Thus, the Armory was denied loans in the face of its temporary shutdown. In the end, the plant continued to work (Gallyamova, Mandrik, 2018).

In January 1924, workers and employees of the Armory held a meeting in response to the shutdown order and issued a document stating that improving production, increasing labor productivity and plant efficiency would help to become self-sufficient. Under these conditions, it was unnecessary to close the enterprise as the plant did not use any additional subsidies but raised funds on its own during its renewed operation. To improve both state and personal welfare, the workers demanded to keep the plant functioning on a self-supporting basis (Gallyamova, Mandrik, 2018).

In addition, economic reconstruction would have been impossible without a clear program, which had to be in line with the overall state course and local specifics (Baksheev, Filimonov, Rakhinskii, 2019). The specifics of the Far East is conditioned by the following facts: the absence of war communism with its complete centralization and state monopoly on production and distribution. The Far Eastern peasantry did not experience food appropriation and industrial enterprises were not subject to general nationalization. There was free competition among state, cooperative and private enterprises.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the restoration of the national economy in the Far East after the Russian Civil War between 1923 and 1926, we should state as follows: The economy of the Far East laid in ruins from 1917 to November 1922 and there were no real prospects for overcoming the crisis in the years to come; The state presence in the sphere of production and trade was inferior to the private and cooperative sectors in all respects; The Russian Civil War strengthened the solid position of foreign capital in the Far Eastern economy, especially in its private sector; Due to the joint actions of the entire population of the Far East, a number of main industries had been restored and reached the pre-war level by 1926. By 1926, the national economy had been completely restored both in the USSR and in the Far East. After that, the socialist construction began, which marks a fundamentally new era in the history of the Far East.

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