

“Alien elements” in the social structure and everyday life of city population in Northern Kazakhstan in the 1920s (as exemplified by Akmolinsk)

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Abstract. The article examines the legal status of “alien elements” in the social structure and everyday life of cities in Northern Kazakhstan as exemplified by Akmolinsk in the second half of the 1920s. The authors provide the analysis of broad historiographic basis which includes Russian and Western European scientific literature about the specificity of studying everyday life of Soviet cities. The main historical sources are archive records which characterize methods used by “nonvoters” to return their rights: delations and applications to public authorities. The authors come to a conclusion that disfranchisement exerted a significant influence upon man’s social rank, his offspring and relatives. This is an indication of totalitarian regime establishment in the Soviet Union.

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Introduction

Soviet everyday life remains a little-studied issue as opposed to the political history of the country. Social history helps to understand how ordinary people lived in the era of totalitarian regime formation when the government represented by the Party and party leaders overall influenced the society.

The aim of this article is to study the social rank and everyday life of people who were disfranchised due to their unreliable social origin. Such people as well as their relatives had a special position since they did not have right to be trade union members and civil servants. The article examines this problem by the example of people lived in Akmolinsk (currently Astana – the capital of the Republic of Kazakhstan) – one of the biggest city in Northern Kazakhstan. The materials from the State Archive of Astana, some evidences and reminiscences served as the source for investigations.

The study of historical past directly though its subject, i. e. man, became the ground for a new field in historical science – the history of everyday life. General theoretical papers on this field include the transactions of A. Schuts [1], P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann [2], A.V. Cicourel [3], C.J. Geertz [4], F. Braudel [5], A. Ludtke [6] and others. F. Braudel suggested changing the direction of historical research and turning from purely event political history, general mechanisms of economic development and ethnographic portraying of everyday life to the complex analytical study of psychological, demographic and cultural topics in historical terms.

Russian historiography holds a special place in investigating everyday life. It is presented by such names as Yu.A. Polyakov [7], V.B. Zyromskya [8], L.P. Repina [9], A. Sokolov [10], S.V. Juravlev [11],

I.M. Savelyeva and A.V. Poletayev [12], etc. In their transactions they study general and methodological aspects of the history of everyday life. Besides, they retrace various approaches towards examining man in all his interactions and situations – in society and family.

The study of city everyday life became one of the leading fields in modern historical science. This interest is explained by radical changes that took place in the sphere of people’s lifestyle in the 20th century. The majority of these people were not only eyewitnesses but also participants of these transformations – migration to cities, change of occupation and lifestyle. Such researchers as N.N. Kozlova [13], G.G. Kornouhova, [14] and M.S. Juleva [15] made a great contribution to the study of people’s socio-cultural portrait, material security, public feelings and everyday life in Soviet cities and villages on the wide basis of sources analyzed. The research paper of N.B. Lebina [16] deals with the history of everyday life in Soviet city, namely the norms and abnormalities in 1920-1930 which included the stratification of society to “one of us” and “aliens”.

The big contribution to the study of Soviet everyday life in the context of social structures belongs to American researchers. Sh. Fitzpatrick [17] was the first who conducted a complete analysis of everyday life in Soviet city in the 1930s. The author considered such aspects as deficiency, food supply, family problems and Soviet holidays. Russian everyday life in the first years of Soviet government was studied by C. Kaier and E.Naiman [18].

Methods

In the article, the following general scientific methods are used: analysis, synthesis and

mathematical-statistical method. Special methods used in the article include comparative analysis, historical typology, problem chronology and historical systematization. The theoretical basis of the article is formed by works of American and Russian historians who contributed much to the development of everyday history.

The authors used the synthesis of macro-historical and micro-historical approaches. The macro-historical approach reflects the changes in the socio-economic, political and spiritual development of society, while the micro-historical approach makes it possible to retrace the influence of many macro-events on the character of everyday life, i.e. lifestyle, interpersonal relationship, etc.

Main part

While studying the everyday life of Soviet cities, one should take into account that the society was not homogeneous. Depending on the status of a city, wide different people lived there. They had different occupations and social background. It was social background that became a basis for party purges and determined the “reliability” of one or another person. So, party members and all the population were checked for compliance with certain requirements.

One of the forms of identifying a “one-of-us” or an “alien” was the procedure of disfranchisement. The archives store the samples of Soviet questionnaire filled in during recruitment. It always contained the question: “Were you disfranchised? When and what for?” Such people were designated by terms “nonvoter” or “socially alien element” – an unofficial designation for the disfranchised citizen of the USSR in 1918-1936 according to the Constitutions of 1918 and 1925. The All-Union Census of 1926 showed that the population of the USSR made up 147.027.915. The disfranchised people made up 1.040.894 (1.63% of the total number of voters). Traders and intermediaries accounted for 43.3 % of them. Then followed priests and monks – 15.2%; people with unearned income – 13.8%; former tsar’s officers and other officials – 9%. Adult (over 18 years old) members of nonvoter’s families also were disfranchised. They made up 6.4%. In 1927, the number of disfranchised people reached 3.038.739 (4.27% of voters). By that moment, the number of traders among nonvoters reduced up to 24.8%, and the number of priests reduced up to 8.3%, while the number of family members with impaired rights increased up to 38.5% [19].

The population of Akmolinsk was not an exception. Here, the people who were disfranchised in the first place included priests, former traders and government officials who began their career before

the revolution. The “alien elements” detected were debarred and discharged without trial, usually by delations. In their turn, nonvoters appealed to the Party for the reconsideration of their cases. They collected various references concerning their previous occupation suspecting a mistake. Thus long-term trials, claims and new delations began. Although, they rarely resulted in positive way.

The city archive contains the case of Konstantin Nikolayevich Azeyev who was disfranchised. Mr. Azeyev was a literate person and worked as an accountant-economist in the Akmolinsk District Department of Local Economy up to October, 1928. He collected a list of various documents which confirmed that he had been disfranchised illegally. Thus he notes in his application: “The reason of my disfranchisement is the fact that I had to get a position of accountant in private commercial partnership “Stepnyak” due to the absence of vacancies for my profession. ...I was recorded as a co-owner on a par with the main participants. ...This partnership did not have its own capital. It existed for a short period of time and was liquidated at the end of 1925”. Besides, in his application he stated information about his length of service as an accountant and emphasized that he always was a hired employee. Azeyev speaks about his illegal exclusion from the trade union “Transportnikov” and gives “The Explanation of the All-Union Central Trade Union Council # 30 of February 19, 1927 on Disfranchised Trade Members” according to which “... trade union organizations shall not apply sanction against those people including dismissal” [20, fol.2].

In spite of provided facts, the motion was denied, again referring to the actions of the trade union. There is an extract from the meeting record # 6 of the Akmolinsk District Election Commission # 2 of February 2, 1929: “Be it hereby resolved that: since Azeyev stopped trading in 1925, he lives a life of work being in the service for government institutions and enterprises. But he still did not show in practice his loyalty to the Soviet government. When he was disfranchised, he did not get support from the trade union (only those former traders who were active and loyal to the Soviet government could count on this support), but on the contrary – he was excluded from this organization. Thereby the motion is to be denied” [20, fol.1]. So, nonvoter got into a vicious circle: he was excluded from the trade union and dismissed because he was disfranchised, and he could not restore his rights because he was excluded from the trade union.

Deletions were widely spread. In order to prove his innocence, Tishbay Ablev, who was disfranchised for his trading, draws the attention of the Akmolinsk City Council to the following: “In

March of this year, during the haying, the City Council disfranchised me due to the following reasons: my second name is identical with one tradeswoman's second name. But neither I nor my wife has ever been in trade. I always was a farm labourer. I have a number of documents confirming this. The tradeswoman who has the same second name as me (Khadicha Abileva) lives on the street Uchilishchnaya, 25" [21, fol.27].

The fact that delations were encouraged in Soviet society is testified by positive findings # 3 of the Akmolinsk City Council of May 18, 1931 concerning the motion of Tishbay Abilev: "Be it hereby resolved that: since Tishbay Abilev was not a trader but a labourer, the Resolution of the City Council of March 14, 1931 is to be canceled, and Tishbay Abilev's elective franchise is to be restored" [21, fol.7].

Priests and people who were close to religion were disfranchised massively. Thus, the application of Galim Agleulin concerning his elective franchise was denied by the Almolinsk City Council of Workers, Peasants and Red Army. Mr. Agleulin was considered "a minister of religion" in spite of the fact that the Mosque Council gave him a reference # 2 in September 1931. This reference confirmed that he had worked in a mosque for hire from 1917 till May 1931 as a watchman with only technical duties [22, fol.2].

The disfranchisement was connected with purges in schools and all system of education which removed alien elements. The state archive of Astana stores the correspondence of the District Department of Public Education of May 5, 1929. It contains basic instructions for purges in the region: "Currently, you have to conduct preparations for the purge which consist in detecting alien elements and training those who can replace such workers" [23, fol.33].

In response to the appeal of the Party to conduct mass purges among both teachers and students according to their background, local authorities began to form lists of people to be dismissed. In their turn, letters from students started to come to school organizations. Students desperately tried to save their reputation and good name of their parents. Thus they began to study the biography of their parents. This was especially paradoxical after Party's calls for the elimination of illiteracy. Now students did not have the opportunity to complete their education due to the unfavourable background of their parents.

Applications of students and their parents full of despair are of great interest. For example, there is an application to the school committee of Kiyevskoye Village (Revolutsionnaya Volost') by student Natalya Telitchenkova: "I hereby request to accept my offer. My father is disfranchised. I don't know, maybe his

vote is restored. But maybe you have another reason, I don't know it. My father is nonvoter. I want to study. Please do not reject my request" [24, fol.2]. The visa is: "to be expelled".

Another example is the letter of Aleksandr Mikhailovich Pugin to the Teachers Council of the Budenovskaya Seven-Year School of January 31, 1929: "In view of the fact that... my daughter Nadezda Pugina is in the expelling list as an alien element, I consider it my duty to state that: 1. I have never been neither trader nor exploiter and never had unearned income; 2. I do not have any property; 3. I am the son of an employee, my father was a secretary in Kazakh volosts; 4. I myself am an employee, I work in various institutions since 1897 up to the present day. Service is the only source of subsistence for me". Further in his letter, the claimant explains that before the revolution he worked as an office secretary in district administration. Local officers recorded him as a former police servant by mistake, because the police was a subdivision of the administration. Mr. Pugin asked the school leaders not to expel his daughter until the circumstances are clarified. Although this fact evidently did not have any effect, as there is a visa on the document: "To be expelled as a daughter of alien element (former police servant)" [24, fol.3].

Teachers were also checked according to general instructions. In September 1928, a special commission was established. It was to check the social origin of teachers and their attitude to the Soviet government. At the meeting on September 6, 1928, this commission made a decision concerning several persons. Thus, second-stage school teacher Aleksandr Krasnoshtanov was dismissed as an alien element for the Soviet government and active participant of Kolchak reaction; secretary of the District Department of Public Education Kononov was dismissed as a former White Guard officer and active participant of peasant uprising suppression in Atbasar District in 1919; head of Soviet School # 2 Alexey Shukhov as an alien element for the Soviet government and the participant of the counter-revolutionary movement [23, fol.110].

One of secret letters of March 1930 to the Department of Education contains the following delation: "Our educational personnel are still littered by socially alien people. For example, two teachers work in Prirechenskoye Village (Revolutsionnyi Region). One of them is the daughter of former White Guard officer Volosnikov. Another is the daughter of an inveterate kulak Andreev who is now condemned for agitation and has a prison term. Both teachers carry on agitation that nobody has food in the district and many families died from hunger in Akmolinsk. They also have a hostile attitude to the Soviet

government. They do not take part in public work in the village” [23, fol 67]. The facts about their origin were confirmed, and they were dismissed.

Conclusion

As we can see, the disfranchisement in itself was not a great problem in life. But it caused appreciable practical consequences. In fact, the restriction on rights concerned not only the right to elect and be elected. Nonvoters did not have opportunities for education and important positions. So, they could not be people’s court assessors, defense attorneys, warrantors or guardians. They did not have right to draw a pension or unemployment allowance. They could not become members of trade union and thus they were not allowed to enter the governing body of industrial enterprises and organizations. Nonvoters did not get ration cards or they got them by the lowest category. That is why they had to buy food at high prices.

Findings

In general, the above materials show that political purges occurred in distant regions of the Soviet Union. They directly influenced person’s position in society. The study of the party policy as a way to affect social guidelines and the behavior models of certain persons and social groups in the context of everyday life in city has its prospect and waits for researches in the framework of Soviet everyday life.

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