

Zhezkazgan in 1950-1980

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KEYWORDS Government. Industrialization. Industrial Economy. Steplag. Zhezkazgan

ABSTRACT This study is a research on the situation of the industrial system in Kazakhstan in the year 1954. The young Soviet state pursued a policy of industrialization of the country, as the Government became aware that the Second World War was inevitable. Millions of people from the Soviet State have passed through this industrial system; the prisoners were used as free labour for industrial purposes. In this regard, the industrial centers were established in places where there were deposits of natural resources, but it experienced a shortage of workers. This is clearly demonstrated in the history of the industrial system of Kazakhstan, on the territory of KarLag, Steplag and others. The situation in Kengir, (of which at the present time, it is referred to as Zhezkazgan City), in the year 1954 was the beginning of the collapse of Steplag. The government closed Steplag, which had already warped thousands of lives, in the year 1957.

INTRODUCTION

Socio-political life in the former Soviet Union was quite different in the year 1950. The USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) had an industrial system which was neither unique nor characterized for communist countries only. Each industry had its own history. Millions of people from the Soviet States worked in the industry. Most of them were peasants and had no qualifications, so it was very difficult for them to work. But the young Soviet government did everything possible to bring about industrial development. The young Soviet state pursued a policy of industrialization of the country, as the Government became aware that the Second World War was inevitable. Millions of people worked in factories for the industrial prosperity of their country. The majority of the population of the USSR were peasants, so many of them began working in the Industry of the country. Also, at this time the Government had spent a lot of money on scientific research, with the aim of finding minerals. One of the important places in the Industrial Development of the USSR was Kengir, as it had many minerals. Because of the rich deposits of copper, manganese and especially iron, the place was called Zhezkazgan, which can be translated from Kazakh as meaning "dig out some iron". In this regard, the industrial centers were established in places where there were deposits of natural resources, but, it experienced a shortage of workers. This is clearly demonstrated in the

history of Kazakhstani Industry on the territory of KarLag, Steplag and others.

The policies of the Soviet government in the 20-50s of the 20th century, and the industrial system obtainable at that time have been studied extensively, by both domestic and foreign historians.

The foreign historiography of GULAG (Main Administration of Corrective Labour Enterprises) distinguishes between three periods: Pre-war, "Cold War" and Modern periods.

In the West, the first evidences to be published about the Soviet Gulag prisoners, dates back to the pre-war period. The most famous was the book by Solonevich (1999), in which the Soviet enterprise system was represented as an institution similar in structure to that of the Soviet state. Undoubtedly, these early publications were very emotional and far from a carefully planned study. The World War II period weakened Western interest in the problems of Gulag to a certain extent.

During the "Cold War", the number of publications in foreign historiography was steadily on the increase. The witnesses of the events, who somehow managed to leave the USSR, as well as the evidence of the foreigners who visited the Soviet Union during the war, remained the main source of information. In the year 1945, in Rome, Polish officers Mora and Zvernyak published a book in French, titled "Soviet justice" based on their personal experiences, observations and a large amount of evidence given by

the witnesses (Ivanova 2006). One strength or advantage of that book was that it included the map of separate enterprises, alongside their production focus.

The first research paper on the subject was the book written by Dallin and Nikolayevsky "Forced Labor In Soviet Russia" (1948), published in the United States of America in the year 1947. Some researchers have used the State economic development plan of the USSR of year 1941, as their latest source of data collection for studying the forced labor. Fascists stole this document and then sent it to the USA.

During the "Cold War", the problem encountered by the Soviet concentration of Industry was popular among the researchers abroad, not only due to some scientific potential, but mostly, because of political considerations. In the 1950s, there appeared some publications which described the resistance in the Gulag (Vengrov 1957).

In the mid-twentieth century, the foreign authors moved from disparate publications to a more comprehensive research of the Gulag history. The focus was on the history of Industry that used forced labor, that is, forced labor system and the deportation of various social and ethnic groups of the Soviet people. The English explorer Conquest (1978) and historian-emigrant Nekrich (1978), raised the problem of deportation of some USSR nations in the 40s and their involvement in the forced labour system in their works (Negretov 1985). An additional representative of the west immigrant about Gulag's historiography is the book written by Solzhenitsyn "Gulag Archipelago", and published in Paris in the year 1973.

After the so-called "archival revolution", when the documents from the closed funds of the Russian archives became available, the western historians and economists continued to study both the repressive and productive aspects of the Gulag system in the Stalinist period, drawing from archival sources. The works of some authors such as Stettner (1996), Gestwa (2007), Sprauetall (2003), Harrisson (2002), Bacos (1994), Jacobson (1993), Werth (2007), Applebaum and Jensen (2005), Persson (2005), Hedeler (2008) and the likes of other authors described various aspects of the Gulag issues.

The challenges of providing decent living conditions for former prisoners in industrial systems and prisons were becoming complex, not

only in the Soviet Union (Guin 2015; Ditmarsch et al. 2015). The aim of this paper is to study the situation in the Zhezkazgan industrial system in 1954.

METHODOLOGY

The authors used archival documents, taken from the archives of the Zhezkazgan's Regional Department of Internal Affairs, and the Archives of the Zhezkazgan's branch of Karaganda region. The authors used comparative-historical method.

OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

One of the industrial centers that existed in the territory of Zhezkazgan was the so called Steplag (tr.: a camp in the steppe). The industrial system held a very strict policy towards its staff. The rate of daily output was the highest, internal regulations were the most severe, and living conditions for the workers were the poorest in Kazakhstan. Therefore, the staff tried to improve their working conditions through negotiations with their leaders, and sometimes, through demonstrations as they continued working in the industry.

The news of Stalin's death came to the open in the year 1953, bringing hope to the workers, and their desire to live in better conditions was awakened. Despite the efforts of industrial authorities to conceal it, the news easily travelled to the far distant steppe of the centre, returning hope to the heart of the staffs, as they anticipated the improvement in their conditions especially in their life and work.

The entire population of the Soviet Union had to work in good faith to win, and this time, it went down in history as "the difficult war years." After the Second World War, the workers began to hope that their working conditions would improve. After Stalin's death, the new government promised working relief and better living conditions. However, the administration of Steplag ignored those bills that defined how the people were governed. They believed that Zhezkazgan was very far from Moscow and nobody knew about their politics.

An evidence for that can be seen in the letter of Capiton Ivanovich Kuznetsov, one of the workers: "Among us there are no criminal offenders, murderers, corruptionists and the amnesty is not for us. Those who are being includ-

ed in the amnesty are, in fact, people dangerous to the society, the state: thieves, ordinary criminals, corruptionists, and the most degraded. The amnesty law released an echelon of harmful people to the community elements in spring, but after a month, 6 echelons of workers came, among them were also those who have been convicted previously" (AZhBDJ, F.-52, In.-2, C.-5). In fact, the Steplag archival data stated that in the year 1954, 600 workers were convicted twice or even more, 230 of those staffs were convicted for crimes within the enterprise (AZhBKR, F.- 498, In.- 35, C.- 7, P. 29).

The expectations were not justified and the discontentment among the workers did not subside, the effect was quite the opposite, and the tension reached the peak in intensity.

In order to defuse the exacerbated situation, the Bolshevik Party and the Soviet government took joint decisions. For example, under the Regulation of March 12, 1954 "On the improvement of labour enterprises work" and the Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU, by the decree of the Presidium of the USSR Supreme Soviet, the workers under the age of 18 years experienced relieved working conditions. In Steplag, the Decree of the year 1954 became the basis for reviewing 1,297 cases, 1,041 cadre under the age of 18 were released, 1,007 crew, who have lost their health, were also released. (AZhBKR, F. - 498, In. - 38, C. - 9, P. 20).

Dissatisfaction with the industrial system seemed like it was not going to decline. In Steplag alone, in the year 1954, there were 349 cases of discontentment; within a year 7,481 prisoners did not fulfill the labor standard (AZhBKR, F. - 498, In. - 38, C. - 5, P. 49).

On April 14-15, 1954, all the staffs of two industrial units who had been beaten half dead by the guards, because of alleged violations of the order, refused to go to work. The discontentment of the workers expressed in this manner, gradually turned into an armed clash with security guards.

Since the company's administration did not improve the working and living conditions of workers, among them discontentment erupted. On May 16, 1954, over 60 persons from 3 industrial units located in Kengir village, encroached into the territory of the other units. The administration tried to suppress this conflict by inviting military force. However, it was very difficult to suppress the rebellion. Even groups of guards

positioned between the industrial units, according to the order of industrial authorities could not stop the workers.

On May 18, the uprising turned into armed resistance, the workers started building barricades and fortresses in the industrial units. Special headquarters for controlling the uprising were formed, the head of it was the former Red Army officer Kuznetsov, along with 8 more people. The leaders were responsible for maintaining order and organizing protective measures. In order to communicate with the people outside the units, the rebels used balloons, spread leaflets; they also made weapons and even explosives. On May 18, during a rally devoted to the funeral procession of 18 prisoners, who became the first victims of the collision, Kuznetsov called on everybody to remain united in order to have a unified resistance. Despite the fact that the decree on his release came from Moscow at the beginning of the uprising, he did not leave his friends, rather, he stayed with them till the end.

The researchers who studied the uprising documents admitted that it was of organized nature. At the general meeting in the industrial centre, the rebels wrote a letter to the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Chief Administration of Industry, in which they put forward a claim on establishing a special commission to investigate the lawlessness that took place in the units. The rebels decided that they would not go to work, or obey the administration, until the arrival of the Commission.

Not quite long, the important Commission, including the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the USSR, Major General Egorov, the Head of Chief administration of Industry Lieutenant General Dolgikh, and the Senior officer of the USSR Prosecutor's Office Vavilov, arrived (Nikolaev 1997). Recognizing that the use of military force would yield no result, the Commission issued orders for the release of minors, and the prisoners with low state of health should be convicted for a short period. Yet, the commission did not review the cases of the prisoners illegally convicted under Article 58.

The strained relationship between the rebels and the official authorities were maintained for 40 days.

During the Kengir uprising, Zhezkazgan was visited by the USSR Minister of State Security, Serov, the USSR Minister of Internal Affairs, Kruglov, and the USSR Prosecutor General, Ruden-

ko, a member of the Presidium of the CPSU, Central Committee Furtseva. "I cannot give any guarantees (assurance) - Furtseva said during a meeting with the workers - but I have no doubt that there will be changes in your lives in the future." "Changes", mentioned were not slow to arrive. Realizing that the rebels would not agree to any persuasion, a decision was taken to crush the rebellion by force. This decision was discussed at the highest level. The former Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan, Ponomarenko, asked for permission to use military force against the rebels, a Political bureau of the CPSU Central Committee gave its consent (Nikolaev 1994).

On the 40th day of the uprising, May 26th precisely, 2 battalions of military guards comprising 1,600 people, 1 Division of Internal Security, a group made up of 98 people with specially trained dogs, and three fire trucks, raided into the workers' territory. The barricades of 5 T-34 armoured fighting vehicles, paved the way for the troops, while destroying the rebels' constructions.

During the suppression of the armed conflict, the unit officers and commanders often used service guns.

According to the testimony of survivors, several hundreds of people were killed during that period and the armed resistance was being suppressed. However, the official documents stated that the victims of an armed clash were 46 workers, 5 people were killed by the workers themselves, and 61 people received wounds of varying severity. Among the military, 40 people were injured. Material costs during the uprising accounted for 36,908 roubles, and losses from the refusal to work, accounted for 4,708,621 roubles.

5,200 participants in the uprising were to be punished, 400 people who played an active role in the uprising were imprisoned, and 1000 people who supported the rebellion (500 women and 500 men) were transferred to Magadanlag and Ozerlag.

Cases of the rebellious leaders were examined at the circuit sessions of the Supreme Court of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, between July 21 and August 8, 1955. The uprising leaders: Suchenkov, Keller, Ryabov, Knompus, Skirchuk and Ivashchenko were charged and sentenced to death under Article 58-3 of the RSFSR (The Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic) Criminal Code. The sentence was implemented on September 8, 1956.

The sentence against the uprising leader, Kuznetsov on August 5, 1955 was replaced by

25 years imprisonment by the decision of the Supreme Court of the Kazakh SSR.

Nevertheless, the rebellion had its consequences, which did not disappear without leaving a trace.

The news about Kengir reached Western Europe and the USA. Thus, during the transfer from Zhezkazgan to Mordovia (Dubrov industrial unit), some Ukrainian women secretly passed a letter written by the rebels abroad. This letter was published in the year 1956 in London. In the United States and Germany, the former Steplag prisoner, Hungarian Ferenc Varkony, who witnessed all these tragic events wrote and published a book. In the year 1956, in New York, there was a protest in support of the prisoners who took part in the Kengir uprising. The participants in the protest approached the U.S. President, Eisenhower, with a special letter (AZhBKR, F-52, In. - 2, C. - 6, P. 2).

The authors were made to believe that the harsh living conditions in the enterprise, resulted in the dissatisfaction of the workers. Overcrowding and malnutrition are major problems for prisoners, not only in the USSR, but also, in other countries (Guin 2015; van Ditmarsch et al. 2015).

CONCLUSION

The situation in Zhezkazgan (Kengir before 1954) in the year 1954, was the beginning of the collapse of Steplag. The government closed the Steplag, which had warped thousands of lives, in the year 1957. In June, 1954, the Steplag had 2,660 Russians, 9,596 Ukrainians, 2,690 Lithuanians, 1,074 Latvians, 290 Kazakhs and representatives of other nations that were part of the Soviet Union. Between the periods of year 1945 – 1947 in the prison of Industrialisation, there were Germans, Japanese, Chinese, Koreans and other nationalities of the states, who participated in the Great Patriotic War. One of the Steplag prisoners was the captain of the U.S. Army – African-American, who went in an armored fighting vehicle to the area occupied by the Red Army in Germany after the war.

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