

Living and Working Conditions of the Rural Population of Karakalpakstan during the Second World War

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Abstract: The article is devoted to the living and working conditions of the rural population of Karakalpakstan during the Second World War. It highlights the main aspects of the everyday history of the Karakalpak people during the Second World War, such as everyday life, food, clothing, occupation, study, rest, wedding, songs, rituals, habits, illness, etc. The article is based on archival materials. On the basis of archival materials it highlights the hard labour of the Karakalpak people in the rear to provide the Red Army soldiers. Their difficult living conditions during the war years are examined on the basis of oral testimony of eyewitnesses of that harsh life in the rear of the Second World War.

Keywords: rural inhabitants of Karakalpakstan, grain, rice, agricultural sphere, alfalfa, U.Tleubergenov, cotton fields.

On the eve of the war there was a certain calm in rural life. In the agricultural sphere, the unification of dekhkans into collective farms was completed: in 1938 there were 696 collective farms, uniting 48370 collective farmers with a cultivated area of 100.6 thousand hectares[1]. Archival documents stated that 'before the war the population lived a quiet, peaceful life of a narrowly agricultural and fishing country, there was no overcrowding of the population, in general and in particular overcrowding in any particular places. There was almost no migration of population.'"[2].

The number of rural residents of Karakalpakstan, according to the census of 1939, was 411900 people (217171 men and 194729 women), which was 87.7 per cent of the total population[3]. The prevalence of rural inhabitants in the population structure of the republic was conditioned by the nature of land use and people's daily practice, taking into account their national and domestic peculiarities. The implementation of zoning, the main task of which was to simplify the structure of administrative division in accordance with the level of economic development, national composition, population size, etc., further aggravated these peculiarities. After that, the four-stage administrative division system (oblast - uyezd - volost - village) was replaced by a three-stage system (okrug - rayon - village). The new system of administrative division simplified the administrative structure of the oblast.

The 1930s saw the development of agriculture, especially cotton growing, which contributed to the gradual revival of the region's industry, especially the cotton ginning industry. The restoration and reconstruction of the cotton ginning industry of Karakalpakstan took place in the most difficult conditions caused by the economic and cultural backwardness of the region, its remoteness from major industrial centres, and the acute shortage of managerial, administrative and economic and working staff. Poor knowledge of local natural resources and economic

conditions, shortage of material and monetary resources created additional difficulties in the restoration and reconstruction of industry.

Large investments in agriculture and related industry began to be made only after the Republic joined Uzbekistan. Thus, in the pre-war years and the war years in the agriculture of Karakalpakstan even more attention was paid to the development of cotton growing: new lands were developed, the area under cotton increased (from 54 thousand hectares in 1940 to 9080.2 thousand hectares in 1945)[4].

However, the situation in the daily life of the rural population was difficult. It was aggravated when in the late 1930s the government began to fight against the collective farmers' private farms, which had originally been the main source of subsistence for the dekhkan family. Thus, on 27 May 1939, a resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and the USSR Council of People's Commissars 'On Measures to Protect Public Land of Collective Farms from Squandering'[5] was adopted, which pointed out the illegal expansion by squandering and plundering of public land of collective farms in favour of the collective farmer's personal farm. After that, measures were taken to measure the land areas that were at the personal disposal of collective farmers and to seize 'surplus', with each collective farmer in cotton-growing areas having to work a minimum of 100 labour days.

Secondly, the government of the republic took a number of measures to resettle rural residents into collective farm settlements, in accordance with the resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Bolsheviks) and the USSR Council of People's Commissars 'On the Resettlement of Collective Farmers' Yards Living on Former Plots of Farm Land Use into Collective Farm Villages' of 27 May 1939, thus concentrating rural residents into so-called "collective farm settlements". However, in the conditions of our republic this work was not completed. By the decision of the Soviet of People's Commissars of the KKASSR and the regional committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Uzbekistan, the work of settling farmsteads into collective farm settlements was entrusted to the People's Commissariat of Karakalpakstan and district organisations. On 9 September 1939, People's Commissariat of Karakalpakstan drew up a planning project for the construction of 142 collective farm settlements by 20 March 1940, but only 82 settlements were built on time. The situation was particularly unfavourable with regard to the work on joining farmsteads into the existing economic and housing centres of collective farms. These activities had to be carried out by the districts[6].

Thirdly, in the years before the war serious attention was paid to the observance of labour discipline in collective farms, since labour discipline in collective farms had weakened considerably due to the above-mentioned decisions of the government, and dekhkans were not materially interested in the rise of social production. This was emphasised in the May plenum of the Party Central Committee (1940), after which mass agitation and propaganda and practical work on the implementation of the resolution of this plenum began. However, the effectiveness of this work was negligible. The interest of rural residents in the final result was noticeably reduced, labour discipline was not observed, and the quality of work decreased. Thus, despite the efforts of the Soviet-Party bodies, on 6 October 1940 the plan for cotton procurement in the republic was fulfilled only by 22%. The main printed organ of the governing bodies of the republic 'Kyzyl Karakalpakstan' wrote that this was the result of low labour discipline among collective farmers and the lack of a determined struggle against violations of the Charter of the agricultural artel[7].

From the beginning of 1941, the personal economy of rural residents was again subjected to various taxes. For example, on 5 January 1941 the Council of People's Commissars of the KKASSR adopted a resolution 'On the levy for the needs of housing and cultural and domestic construction from the population engaged in agriculture in 1941 in the KKASSR'[8]. In general, for 1934-1940 years 5 such decrees were adopted. According to this resolution in 1941 from each collective farmer who did not have non-communised sources of income, collected 8 rubles,

for those collective farmers who had any other income (from homestead plots, livestock and poultry, etc.) the amount of the so-called 'rural fund' was from 29 to 36 rubles. The amount of the fee depended on the territorial and administrative location and living standards of the population. The highest amount (36 roubles) of the 'rural fund' was imposed on rural inhabitants belonging to collective farms of Turtkul, Shabbaz and Tamdy districts. Collective farmers of Kegeyli, Khojeli and Chimbay districts were taxed 34 rubles each, Kipchak and Muynak districts 32 rubles each, Nukus and Kuibyshev districts 30 rubles each, and Takhtakupyr, Kungrad and Karauziak districts 29 rubles each. The residents of Turtkul, Nukus, Chimbay, Muynak settlement and other urban formations, who were engaged in agriculture, were also subjected to 'rural kultsboro'.

The 'rural taxes' were also collected from private farms, and the amount was 12-20 times higher, depending on the criteria. For example, single-person farms were divided into two categories - those without and those with working livestock and other income. Those classified in the first category paid 100 rubles each, while those with rural residents paid 175 rubles each, regardless of the district. At the same time they had to be collected during the months of February to March, i.e. when all the stocks of the farm were exhausted and only what was saved for sowing remained. At the same time, in the spring, self-assessment, inspection of collective farms' annual reports and continuous tax accounting were carried out. That is, while the state allocated almost nothing to the rural population, which survived mainly by subsistence farming, it imposed numerous taxes and obliged them voluntarily and compulsorily to participate in the purchase of state loan bonds and in cash-and-cash lotteries, at the same time requiring them to surrender grain and rice to the state according to the plan. All this was ensured under the proper control of the Soviet-Party organs.

For example, on 26 November 1940 the Council of People's Commissars of the KKASSR and the regional party committee adopted a resolution on bread procurement, indicating that collective farmers and sole proprietors handed over to the state only 53% of bread and demanded to strengthen the leadership of party and soviet bodies in bread procurement[9]. With the outbreak of war this control was even more intensified that, for example, collective farmers of the Turtkul district had already by July 1941 bought up the entire volume of the state loan allocated to them for cash [10]. In order to pay taxes and other levies, collective farmers often had to resort to selling on the market a part of the harvest received on their personal homestead plots, reducing their own consumption.

In the years before the war, in order to implement the decisions of the parties and the government, the Soviet-party apparatus often took drastic measures, prosecuting all those who did not observe the general established order and violated the Charter of the agricultural artel. Repressions started against rural residents, for example, Oteniyazov Paluan, a resident of the collective farm named after Stalin of Khalkabad aulsovet of Kuibyshev district, was brought to court for picking 10-12 kg of cotton a day, often not going out to pick cotton and not letting his daughter go to the field. Bakhyt Kikishev, a resident of the 10th aulsovet of Khojeyli district, was tried for not going out for agricultural work during 1940 and forbidding his family to do so. Brigadiers and heads of collective farms were also prosecuted for failing to fulfil planned assignments or falling behind the schedule of the raw cotton delivery plan.

The cotton picking campaign became a battle front, the authorities urged to involve everyone, even children and the elderly, in cotton picking. Labour veteran U. Tleubergenov recalled that after the 5th grade, the aksakals of the village, having consulted, began to involve them in agricultural work as a timekeeper: 'Every day we were obliged to submit a report to the board of the collective farm for the work done during the day. The distance to the board was 8-10 kilometres. We covered this distance every day, walking almost 20 kilometres a day. Labour discipline was very strict, nevertheless, the results of sowing cotton, yields of alfalfa, rice and other crops were low'[11]. Plenipotentiaries of the Soviet-Party bodies urged to involve everyone in this work, even the elderly. For example, noting the lag in the plan of cotton

harvesting collective farms of the 'Gonebagzhap' village of the Turtkul district, it was pointed out that in the collective farm named after Frunze 'there are 379 people, of whom according to the plan on the field should go out 193, but if we add "invalids", "sick", "old", this figure will increase even more.

The Second World War entered the lives of the peaceful people of the villages of Karakalpakstan through the harsh, frightening truth of Sovinformburo reports and summonses from military enlistment centres. In addition, the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR 'On the working time regime of workers and employees in wartime' of 26 June 1941 introduced mandatory overtime: the working day for adults - up to 11 hours with a six-day working week. In other words, the invasion of the USSR by Nazi Germany caused an even stricter labour discipline. As Pirzhan Seitov and Nauryz Zhapakov testify, the role of the upper echelons of management increased. The mechanism of specific, detailed management, which had been in place before the war, began to operate with even greater tension. The system of plenipotentiaries became widespread. In auls and kishlaks extraordinary bodies - political departments of MTS and state farms - were again created. Militarisation provided for unconditional fulfilment of the plan-order, disciplinary responsibility for its violation, introduction of barracks regime if necessary.

With the outbreak of war, the life and working conditions of the rural inhabitants became even worse. The material condition of rural labourers depended to a large extent on the income of collective farms and the volume of harvest from the household farm. However, due to the fact that with the beginning of the war a considerable part of the collective farm harvest was given to the state as compulsory supplies, payments to peasants for labour days were small. Therefore, the only salvation for collective farmers was their subsidiary plots, which had shrunk in size after the above-mentioned government decisions. Collective farmers sowed mainly wheat, rice, corn, sesame, beans (mung beans), millet and a number of traditional cereals in their plots, which formed the family's stock, some of which were sold at bazaars. Some cereals were ground into flour (wheat, dzhugary) in traditional small hand mills (digirman), the millstones of which were rotated manually. In each village there were ovens (tandyr) for baking bread. When organising the work of collective farms, the government tried to organise centralised bread baking in collective farms. Thus, on the eve of the war, the Republic had 47 bakeries at the disposal of the Respotrebooyuz (Respotrebooyuz), 23 of which were rented from collective farms with a daily bread baking capacity of 97 tonnes. In addition, there were another 23 own tandyr bakeries and 124 rented from collective farmers with a daily throughput capacity of 50 tonnes[13].

With the outbreak of war, the bonds of the State Loan of the Third Five-Year Plan (1938-1942), issued in early 1941, were formalised as war loans - these are debt obligations issued by the state to cover the costs of fighting by the armed forces[14]. With the beginning of a broad campaign to raise money for the Defence Fund, villagers surrendered these bonds along with gold valuables, cash and warm clothes. Thus, up to September 15, 1941, in Turtkul district, bonds worth 200730 rubles, 98226 rubles in cash, gold and silver things and ornaments[16] were delivered to the Defence Fund[15]. Or the collective farmers of the collective farm '1 May' and Nukus village council named after Lenin [15] received bonds in the amount of 200730 rubles and 98226 rubles in cash. In the autumn of 1941 Nukus aulsovet named after Lenin signed up for a cash and duffel lottery in the amount of 2000 rubles, contributed 1050 rubles in cash to the Defence Fund[17].

The villager was required to work tirelessly in order to fulfil and exceed the planned tasks. As veterans' memoirs in periodicals testify, collective farmers picked cotton during the day, opened the guza-pai in the evening, dried it in yurts and dugouts to deliver it to cotton stations in the morning. Labour veteran U. Tleubergenov recalls that during the war years 'people went to the kaza from early morning, ploughed the land with oxen harnessed to the yoke, ploughed the land by hand, sowed cotton, sorghum, rice, alfalfa, barley. When the harvested crops were turned in, they went back to work. There were no good shoes, clothes, bread and foodstuffs. 'Sherim etik'

from rain and snow soaked and fell from the feet. To keep the boots on their feet they tied them with ropes made of kendir. Many went out to work barefoot." [18]. 'Old men, women, children - all went out to the cotton fields, and during the cotton harvest in late autumn,' he recalls, 'they collected unopened, petrified bolls of cotton, opened them until night, forged the cotton, and handed them over in the early morning. In summer, we would go to mow alfalfa in the early morning, so if we mowed in the sun, the seeds could simply scatter. When they returned from the field, they worked on their farm, had dinner with what they had and went out to mow rice until 2-3. In general, people of that time spent 18-20 hours out of 24 hours of day and night in the fields in work and labour" [19].

From the beginning of the war, the shortage of labour force increased at an accelerated rate. Therefore, classes in schools were disrupted and pupils took external examinations. Veterans, housewives and students returned to the collective farm fields. For example, in the Turtkul district was organised 'Sunday' to pick cotton, which was attended by 10434 people, the entire amount earned that day (39745 rubles) went to the Defence Fund [20].

Due to the shortage of workers, in the autumn of 1941, pupils and students were involved in cotton picking. Thus, Academician S. Kamalov recalls that in the autumn of 1941 because of the war for the first time students were taken out to pick cotton. Since then, students have been going out in the spring to weeding and in the autumn to pick cotton [21]. This confirms K. Kamalov, indicating that in the autumn of 1942, a month and a half after the beginning of studies, the secretary of the regional committee O. Tatybaev came to the institute, held a meeting and sent students to pick cotton [22].

In 1942, teenage school children were also massively involved in agricultural work. At first they began to be used for weeding in the cotton fields, in the summer for mowing wheat and picking ears, and in the autumn for picking cotton. For example, newspapers of that time wrote that pupils of the incomplete school named after Stalin in the Kungrad district used them for weeding in the cotton fields. Stalin school of Kungrad district during summer holidays actively participate in the cultivation of cotton and harvesting of grain crops, actually helping the collective farm" [23]. From Shabbaz it was reported that 200 school students were engaged in agricultural work, of whom 97 pick wheat ears and the rest cut stalks. In the collective farm 'Obkom' of the Kalininsky aulsovet of the Kuibyshev district 302 schoolchildren went to the fields, in the collective farm 'Kyzyl Asker' - 56 pupils, they worked 1-2 norms on cotton fields. Labour days were written out to them, as, for example, in the collective farm 'Komintern' of 10 aul of Kungrad district, schoolchildren Karima Zhumabaeva, Mazlumkhan Taspolatova and others were written out from 27 to 34 labour days.

On 13 April 1942, the USSR Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks (Bolsheviks) adopted Resolution No. 508 'On Increasing the Compulsory Minimum of Labour Days for Collective Farmers'. It stated that 'in order to carry out all agricultural work on collective farms in a timely manner, thereby ensuring that collective farms receive a high harvest and further development of animal husbandry, and collective farmers receive higher natural and monetary incomes from labour days, as well as in order to provide the country and the Red Army with sufficient food, which is especially important in the situation of war with the German invaders', the number of labour days was set at 150 for cotton-growing areas, although for other agricultural areas of the SSSR.

It was established that 'in order to ensure the performance of agricultural work in all periods - tillage, sowing, care of crops, haying, harvesting, as well as care of animals, to establish that of the mandatory minimum of labour days each collective farmer and collective farmer must work at least 30 labour days in collective farms of cotton districts before 15 May, 45 labour days from 15 May to 1 September, 45 labour days from 1 September to 1 November, and the remaining labour days can be worked after 1 November'. The resolution stated that the Soviet-Party apparatus in the field had the right to increase or decrease the number of labour days to be

worked by periods of agricultural work for individual districts (depending on local conditions) within 20%.

There was also a mandatory minimum of at least 50 labour days per year for adolescent members of collective farmers' families aged 12 to 16. If a collective farmer failed to fulfil the established minimum without a valid reason, he faced criminal punishment in the form of correctional labour work for a period of up to six months with 25% of his income withheld in favour of the collective farm. In case of malicious refusal to fulfil the instructions set by the authorities, he was expelled from the collective farm and deprived of his homestead plot[24].

In May 1943 the political departments of machine and tractor stations and state farms were liquidated. Since 1944, the struggle for strengthening the agricultural artel, for the restoration of democratic forms of management, which in many collective farms had been forgotten, intensified.

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