

EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE INDUSTRIAL CITIES OF CENTRAL KAZAKHSTAN AT THE END OF THE SOVIET ERA

Kozina V. ^{*}, Yeleuhanova S. ^{**}, Dzhumabekov D. ^{**}, Uskembayev K. ^{**},
 Utebayeva A. ^{***} and Abdukarimova Zh. ^{****}

Abstract: The article is an attempt to reconstruct everyday life in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan at the end of the Soviet era, formally known as the period of “perestroika”. The materials of the sociological research made in 1987 formed the basis of the study. The research realization became possible in the beginning of the democratization of society, but it did not become public knowledge. The research included the testimony of residents of the industrial cities that were direct participants of the events (the Materials of the sociological research, 1989). Through the analysis of life of the common man, the authors tried to trace the transformation of the Soviet society at a critical stage of its development. The period of “perestroika” affected all aspects of human life and showed increasing difficulties in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan. The authors agree with those scholars who say that the people at this time were not particularly interested in politics and acknowledge that the majority of respondents was occupied with economic and social factors. The authors come to the conclusion that the shortcomings in the organization and operation of social infrastructure and food as well as food shortage in Kazakhstan were common and typical for all regions of the country at the end of the Soviet era.

Keywords: Central Kazakhstan, industrial town, “perestroika”, everyday life, deficit, Soviet people, respondent.

INTRODUCTION

Study of everyday life of people at different stages of historical development is one of the priority scientific directions. Despite extensive scientific literature published over the last decade, still there is no clear definition of “the history of everyday life” (Gestva, 2010; Daily, 2015; Polyakov, 2000). Life of the people in the Soviet period has a wide historiography. As for the study of everyday life in the period of “perestroika” only the first steps are made by scholars (Bogdanov, 2001; Klinov, 2014; Nechaeva, 2012; Yurchak, 2007). The object of everyday life researchers at the end of the Soviet era is mostly the problem of human survival in conditions of total deficiency. The problems of urban everyday life in Kazakh historiography as a scientific discipline, has emerged quite recently and only within the interests of

^{*} Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Karaganda State University of the Name of Academician E.A. Buketov, 100000 Republic of Kazakhstan, Karaganda City, Universitetskaya Street, 28

^{**} Candidate of Historical Sciences, Associate Professor, Karaganda State University of the Name of Academician E.A. Buketov, 100000 Republic of Kazakhstan, Karaganda City, Universitetskaya Street, 28

^{***} Master of Humanities, Senior Teacher, Karaganda State University of the Name of Academician E.A. Buketov, 100000 Republic of Kazakhstan, Karaganda City, Universitetskaya Street, 28

^{****} Master of History, Teacher, Karaganda State University of the Name of Academician E.A. Buketov, 100000 Republic of Kazakhstan, Karaganda City, Universitetskaya Street, 28

researchers (Asymova, 2013; Jalmagambetov, 2010; Abdrakhmanova, 2014). There is an urgently needed in generalizing works on various problems of everyday life in historical perspective, including the regional aspect. The daily live of people at the end of the Soviet era in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan has not been studied. In the Soviet period, urban agglomeration in Central Kazakhstan was the largest territorial and industrial complex of the USSR, the leading branch of which was the coal industry. It housed the industrial cities: Karaganda, Saran, Abay, Shaktinsk. Their planning was based on the location of production. Artificially created, they became the focus of all the painful contradictions of the Soviet system. The cities developed one-sidedly, the role of social factors has been underestimated, and this was the cause of many social problems of the plan. On the wave of democratization of the period of “perestroika” an attempt was made to study the problems in the organization of work of the enterprises in the development of the domestic needs of the Soviet people. The objective of the sociological research, which has revealed a lot of shortcomings in the organization of work in industrial enterprises, in the field of household needs, food, medical, merchant services, urban passenger transport, culture and leisure. Subsequent historical events – the collapse of socio-economic reforms, the collapse of the Soviet Union, postponed the decision of problems of industrial cities in Central Kazakhstan to an uncertain future. The authors are convinced that for a real understanding of contemporary issues of everyday life in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan, the objective assessment and understanding of the negative experiences of life at the end of the Soviet era is necessary.

METHODS

Methodological basis of the article was a set of theoretical and methodological principles and approaches of history and sociology of science. Historical-comparative, historical and typological, historical and systematic, historical and biographical methods were applied. The historical-comparative method allowed by comparing to identify general and special assessments in the social reality of individuals and groups in the cities of Central Kazakhstan; the historical-typological method allowed to allocate a certain group of citizens according to the similarity or differences of social and everyday practices. System method was applied in the examination of the problems of everyday life, as a whole via the related social system. Historical-biographical method made it possible to reconstruct and analyze the circumstances of everyday life of the population of industrial cities. Informal method and content analysis were applied when analyzing the material sample results of sociological research. The testimonies of residents of the industrial cities that were direct participants of the events were obtained from the interviews. The authors have used the method of macro-and micro-historical approaches to the study of everyday life of urban residents in Central Kazakhstan.

OVERVIEW OF THE ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

All the problems of everyday life in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan can be summarized in the groups.

- 3.1. The first group includes problems relating to professional employment. Narrow industrial specialization of industrial cities caused some imbalance between male and female employment, which was expressed by the dominance of the first one over the second one. The same reason became a limited scope of application of labor, when the motives of the choice of vocational activity were dictated by circumstances compelled. In Shakhtinsk, Saran, Abay a lot of people chose their profession by chance, due to the lack of other opportunities (31,7% of men and 25.8% of women); 24,6% of men and 15.6 % of women planned to work in another profession; 27% and 11.9 % wanted to get a new profession. In this situation, many people wanted either to increase their educational level, to study or to complete their studies without interrupting production (29, 6%) or to improve their skills (35, 3 %). But the lack of a network of schools (especially secondary, special, vocational, training) did not contribute to the realization of these aspirations.

In the survey, many people remembered the low level of mechanization of labor, the use of their labor was not in accordance with the specialty and qualification. Women reported poor hygienic conditions. Some respondents expressed a nostalgia for those times, remembering the possibility of receiving free education, lack of unemployment, social guarantees from the state. Employees' and students' stories about involvement in agricultural work were very emotional and contradictory. Memories of opportunities "to visit outside the city", "to get some fresh air", "to bring home free vegetables" remained in the memory of the respondents. The lived experience varies from positive "Oh, what time it was!" to extremely negative assessments.

As priority issues working people called inconvenient operational mode (29,1%). Almost every third working miner was not satisfied with the beginning and the end of the day – "it's too early to get up", "you come home late, when it is already dark, no time for family". Women were not satisfied with the duration of the lunch break, work schedule, number of days off. Here are some comments: "I was not satisfied with the duration of the lunch break – it was necessary to have time to buy food products that were "thrown" at that time – milk, sausage, etc.", "I need to meet the child from school, and to accompany and feed the other. The break was short", "I'm not satisfied with one day off. The family consists of 5 persons.

I don't know how to distribute the time: to wash, to cook or to clean the apartment?"

- 3.2. The second group concerns the problems related to domestic needs, the Essentials. Among the total deficit on everything, meat and dairy products were dominated products. All researchers of the period of perestroika agree with the saying of O. Kuratov "deficits in the late Soviet period is a narrative "voice of memory" (Kuratov, 2004). Respondents noted that this was the time of prosperity of hucksters, black marketeers", "cronyism", "everything was sold under the counter". These problems were typical for all Soviet cities of this period (Kushkova, 2009; Klinova, 2014; Romanov, Yarskaya-Smirnova, 2005). Respondents cited the disadvantages of commerce organization such as "inconvenient mode of operation", "poor range", "poor quality of goods, the lack of packaging" and "dull landscape of commercial premises", "rudeness and inattention of sellers", "scarce commodities speculation," etc.

- 3.2.1 However, these problems less attracted the attention of residents than the deficit. On memoirs of eyewitnesses, in the period of "radical reconstruction" of the economy in the country, the solution of these issues for most residents was not the main goal, because they were willing to endure the inconvenience, to sacrifice health, to waste time in the name of the main goal. The people were in expectation and hope of great changes.

Among the interviewers there was a male of 70 years. He hotly argued the advantages of the Soviet system "In the USSR we lived in abundance!". To improve the situation on the supply of essential commodities, urban residents had suggested to organise food fairs at the weekend, to exercise "record" on very short supply of goods , to regulate the working schedules of trade, not to violate labor discipline. The low quality of services of public catering enterprises was one of the greatest problems in Soviet everyday life. Every fourth said: "the range is monotonous and poor", "poor choice of dishes," etc. Three more positions should be noted in the list of shortcomings of the industry (according to the degree of decreasing share of responses): insanitary condition of the halls where meals were taken, the low culture of service (rude, miscalculation, deception), lack of public catering establishments (canteens, tea rooms, cafes). Concerns of the citizens of the difficulty of obtaining semi-finished products in the "home kitchen" deserves attention as well. People spoke about the need for diets and the availability of dietary dining rooms. But not yet resolved was the problem of regular supply of trade of meat and meat products,

was it possible to speak about the creation of normal conditions and opportunities for making semi-finished products to production? This conclusion is consonant with the work of S. Karnaukhov. He describes the paucity of so-called food basket of the Soviet people during the period of “perestroika” (Karnaukhov, 2007).

- 3.2.2. The second place problem was the work of city passenger transport - “failure to comply with the schedules of the traffic and the long intervals between its expectations.” Small proportion of responses that indicated the serious overcrowding of buses during rush hours (2,7 %) is puzzling , while the witnesses of those years during the conversation mentioned this factor as very important – “the bus is impossible to climb”, “the buses are overcrowded,” “in the rush hour it is impossible to leave,” etc. People expressed displeasure insanitary condition of transport and salons: “it is too cold in buses “, “winter transport is not always heated”, “ stops are not declared “, etc. Third of respondents were concerned about the state of intercity roads.
- 3.2.3. The next group includes enterprises and organizations of consumer services. Service life in the industrial cities of Central Kazakhstan offered the following services: tailoring and repair of clothes and footwear, audio-video gear, appliances, vehicles, chemical cleaning cloths, hair salons laundries, baths, showers, car. Such elements of a market economy as cooperatives and shuttle business appeared in the life of the population of industrial cities in Central Kazakhstan in the period of “perestroika”. The implementation of a policy of “privatization” has led to the fact that service life has passed into private hands. In connection with the total deficit, unemployment and low income of the majority of population, household services were in great demand. Because of the total deficit people were forced to use the services of companies, making and repairing clothes and shoes. Here are some words about the existing level of quality of carried out orders of the population, “poor range of fabrics, low qualification of masters”, “sewed so that it is impossible to wear”, “stole fabric”, “the high cost of services,” etc.

Contemporaries confirm this situation – “it is well now, a lot of goods, a lot to choose”, “ it was not easy to dress fashionable in those years, we needed blat”, etc. Work of enterprises on repair of audio-video gear, appliances, vehicles, chemical cleaning clothes is also noted by respondents as negative.

Satisfaction of physiological needs related to personal care also was the sore spot of urban everyday life. The greatest response – organization of

work for the hairdressers: the lack of salons (24,3%), low qualification of masters (8.4 per cent), queue (17.2 per cent). Every third pointed to the need to expand the network of baths, showers, laundries.

The rental of certain groups of consumer goods periodic or intermittent use could help to mitigate the problem of shortage of goods. The responses meet a negative assessment of this category of household services: a “narrow range of goods, long queues, poor quality of rental items”, “offer to hire the old device,” etc. Rental service was not popular. All these services were of high cost and instability. Thus, the service sector is characterized by the following aspects: low quality of work (36%), delayed execution or non-compliance (21%), inadequate to the needs of the logistics industry (24%).

- 3.2.4. The last generation of Soviet people experienced great economic difficulties and psychological order. The decline in living standards led to reduced life expectancy and poor health of the population. Eyewitness accounts and memoirs of contemporaries characterize the health sector, despite the declarative nature of free health care, negatively. The leader among the disadvantages of medical institutions is a poor quality of care. 35% of respondents have not experienced relief (not to mention getting rid of ailments) after the appointment and conduct of courses of treatment. The reason is the condition of the material base of the industry: lack of medical facilities in different fields (hospitals, polyclinics), the absence or shortage of diagnostic equipment, medicines, surgical linen, syringes, systems for internal injections, dressings, etc. Respondents suggest: “in hospitals are dirty”, “bed linen is not fresh”, “bad food”, etc.

The sharp decline in already weak logistical capacity of the health system led to a nearly complete halt to the construction of new medical facilities and major maintenance of existing ones.

- 3.2.5. In sociological research, there were a number of tasks for the study of labour conditions, welfare and recreation of the inhabitants of the cities. One of them was to identify opinions about specific deficiencies in the institutions of culture, recreation, sport and receiving positive suggestions on ways to improve their functioning. As for free time four questions were asked in the questionnaire: (1) What should be done to the best vacations in the institutions of culture, recreation and sport? (2) Name the shortcomings in the work of usually visited institutions of culture, recreation and sport. (3) What changes for the better occurred in recent years in the work of municipal institutions of culture, recreation and sport? (4) What measures should be implemented to improve young

people's leisure activities? The most significant number of responses was received to the question about the shortcomings in the work of cultural institutions and sports – 52%. The answers to the remaining three questions were split almost evenly – 16-17%. Analysis of all responses received, gives a certain slice of the public opinion about the organization of leisure in the cities and work of each separate cultural institutions, it allows to speak about their popularity. For example, according to statistics, in Karaganda, the field of leisure of citizens was submitted pretty solid: 3 theatre, 43 stationary film projectors (with cinemas), which can simultaneously be served more than 15 thousand people. 31 clubs, 51 library, 3 parks, 5 stadiums, 920 playgrounds and fields, 29 ski resorts, 7 swimming pools worked in the city. For only one day sporting institution is able to serve more than 39 thousand people, and 7,5 thousand people may come to the movies, theatres, clubs, circus at one session. According to the testimony of the same statistics, few people visited these places. What's the deal? After analyzing the responses, we were able not only to identify the main shortcomings in their work, but also to identify the most popular ones.

The most popular place for townspeople are cinemas (59%). The greatest number of claims expressed in terms of service and the condition of the cinemas. Respondents write about the uncomfortable, dirty halls, the constant confusion with the tickets, the poor performance of buffets. 22% of the answers contain criticism of the repertoire: “movies are rarely updated”, “uninteresting foreign film are often demonstrated”, “no good documentaries”. 14% of respondents cited the low quality of movies. 7 responses out of 10 relate to the extremely low level of culture work of cinemas with the audience. Often, the viewer comes to a dirty cinema, hopelessly trying to eat at the buffet, then argues with a person, who has a ticket to the same place, and, ultimately, watches uninteresting movie which is performed with cliffs and noise effects of unknown origin. Claims to the repertoire of theatres take the first place on the issue of deficiencies in the theaters (third of the responses). One respondent gave a very negative assessment: “disgusting repertoire”, “trash”. It should be noted that the theaters were not a favorite place for townspeople, a centre for the promotion of theatrical achievements and masterpieces of drama. For the townspeople of that time it was also important that “buffets worked not in a proper way”, “it was difficult to get a ticket on a good show”, “lack of cheap tickets”. The main disadvantage of library work was unsatisfactory condition of book collections: “it was hard to get popular book”, “difficult to get periodicals and newspapers”. Thus, the libraries did not fulfill their direct functions to provide readers with the necessary literature. In 1983 the city circus was opened in Karaganda. This was a positive phenomenon in the cultural life, but it did not escape criticism in its address. Complaints about the programs were on the first place (45%). According

to respondents, the programs were “monotonous”, “actors do not demonstrate a high level of skill”, “interesting circus troupes rarely come on the tour “. Another third of the responses mentioned low service culture: “Such a beautiful circus, and the service is atrociously bad”, “bad work of buffets” .

On the question about the work of stadiums, gymnasiums, swimming pools, almost every second replied that there were a small number of such institutions in towns . Others point out “the bad condition of facilities”, “lack of ventilation”, “inconvenient time”, “lack of equipment”, “little sections, especially for the older age groups, family practice”.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of materials of sociological surveys of residents of industrial cities in Central Kazakhstan showed that attention to the problems of everyday life of ordinary people was first shown in the late Soviet era. This was due to the fact that the Soviet leadership understood the dependence of the success of economic reforms on the conditions and lifestyles of people. Despite the tumultuous political processes, the Soviet people were engaged with economic and social factors. The polls were held with the worsening of food and industrial goods supply in terms of total trade deficit. This is evidenced by the responses of those years and the memories of residents of the industrial cities that were direct participants of the events. The deterioration of the situation manifested itself in all spheres of everyday life in the late Soviet era: in the organization of work in industrial enterprises, in the field of household needs, food, medical, merchant services, urban passenger transport, culture and leisure. Shortcomings identified in the organization and operation of social infrastructure are typical for many regions of the country. The authors recognize that the article does not reflect all anomalies of socialist reality. Working on the grant “History of urban everyday life in Central Kazakhstan as a factor of social tension and deviant behavior in the second half of the twentieth century (1946-1991, ” we hope to gain new results in the future.

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