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«Beat the Communists»: the mood of the unemployed population of the Siberian region according to the OGPU of the USSR

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Abstract. In the 1920s, the Soviet state faced a very serious socio-economic phenomenon – mass unemployment, caused by a number of reasons. Throughout the 1920s, the number of unemployed people grew annually, and by the end of the period under review, it reached 1.7 million people. In 1929, the situation became even more acute due to the collectivisation that began in the country and, as a consequence, the aggravation of the food problem and another massive influx of peasants into the cities. By the end of the decade, unemployment had become stagnant. In 1927, the state took some measures that created obstacles for certain categories of the population in their search for work. The rejection of economic factors in regulating the labour market in favour of administrative methods, food, material, domestic and other difficulties turned the multimillion-dollar reserve army of labour into a disloyal group of people, which was characterised by protest behaviour, which became acute in certain regions of the USSR. In addition, according to OGPU employees, labour exchanges posed a particular danger, as they concentrated large crowds of people daily. To prevent various kinds of protests, the unemployed were under special attention of the OGPU bodies, whose responsibilities included, among other things, informing about the moods of people without work. For this purpose, the Chekists monthly compiled memorandums about the moods, statements, and ideas of this target group. This work introduces for the first time into scientific circulation an operational summary dated June 15, 1929, stored in the State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region in the fund of the Labour Department of the Executive Committee of the West Siberian Regional Council of Workers', Peasants', and Red Army Deputies. The purpose of the work is to show the moods and behaviour of the unemployed in the Siberian region in mid-1929, i.e., during the first five-year plan, when for the first time in the 1920s, the demand for labour exceeded its supply, but the problem was not overcome. Based on the memorandum, which provides rich material for study, an attempt is made to identify the spectrum of public moods, to consider the cumulative factors that influenced the formation of the moods and behaviour of the unemployed in the Siberian region. Due to the published memorandum, it is possible to analyse the attitude of the unemployed population towards the country's leadership, towards the activities carried out in the country, including collectivisation, models of protest against the authorities, etc. It is concluded that the unfavourable situation of the unemployed, including the lack of food, the absence of jobs, earnings, the need for registration by labour exchanges, and reforms, led to various conflicts with labour exchange employees, clashes and fights with police officers, and riots. Among the people, ideas about uprisings against the Soviet authorities were popular, and calls for military struggle against the communists spread. Such moods in the Siberian region, according to the OGPU, were widespread.
Keywords: unemployment; unemployed population; industrialization; five-year plan; labor exchanges; trade unions; report; OGPU; Siberia

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«Бей коммунистов»: настроения безработного населения Сибирского края по сведениям ОГПУ СССР

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Аннотация. В 1920-е годы Советское государство столкнулось с очень тяжелым социально-экономическим явлением – массовой безработицей, вызванной рядом причин. На протяжении 1920-х гг. численность незанятого населения росла ежегодно, а к концу рассматриваемого периода достигла 1,7 млн человек. В 1929 г. положение еще более обострилось ввиду начавшейся в стране коллективизацией и как следствие – обострение продовольственной проблемы и очередной массовый приток крестьян в города. К концу десятилетия безработица имела застойный характер. В 1927 г. государство приняло ряд мер, которые чинили препятствия для некоторых категорий населения в поисках работы. Отказ от экономических факторов регулирования рынка труда в пользу административных методов, продовольственные, материальные, бытовые и другие трудности превращали многомиллионную резервную армию труда в нелояльно настроенную группу людей, для которой было характерно протестное поведение, приобретающее острый характер в отдельных регионах СССР. Кроме того, особую опасность, по мнению сотрудников ОГПУ, представляли биржи труда, так как здесь ежедневно концентрировалось большое скопление людей. Для предотвращения различного рода выступлений безработные находились на особом внимании органов ОГПУ, в обязанности которых входило в том числе информирование о настроениях людей, не имеющих работы. С этой целью чекисты ежемесячно составляли докладные записки о настроениях, высказываниях, идеях этой целевой группы. В данной работе впервые вводится в научный оборот оперативная сводка от 15 июня 1929 г., хранящаяся в Государственном архиве Новосибирской области в фонде отдела труда Исполнительного комитета Западно-Сибирского краевого Совета рабочих, крестьянских и красноармейских депутатов. Цель работы – показать настроения и поведения безработных Сибирского края в середине 1929 г., т.е. во время первой пятилетки, когда впервые за 1920-е годы спрос на труд превысил его предложение, однако проблема не была преодолена. На основе докладной записки, которая дает богатый материал для изучения, сделана попытка выявления спектра общественных настроений, рассмотрения совокупных факторов, влиявших на формирование настроений и поведения безработных Сибирского края. Благодаря публикуемой докладной записке можно проанализировать отношение незанятого населения к руководству страны, к мероприятиям, проводимым в стране, в том числе на коллективизацию, моделях протеста

против действия властей и т.д. Делается вывод, что неблагоприятное положение безработных, в том числе недостаток продуктов питания, отсутствие рабочих мест, заработка, необходимость регистрации биржами труда, реформы приводили к различным конфликтам со служащими бирж труда, столкновениям и дракам с сотрудниками милиции, дебошам, среди людей были популярны идеи о восстаниях против советской власти, распространялись призывы военной борьбы с коммунистами. Подобного рода настроения в Сибирском крае, по данным ОГПУ, имели массовый характер.
Ключевые слова: безработица; незанятое население; индустриализация; пятилетка; биржи труда; профсоюзы; докладная записка; ОГПУ; Сибирь

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«Коммунистерді ұрып-соғу»: КСРО ОГПУ мәліметтері бойынша Сібір аймағының жұмыссыз тұрғындарының көңіл-күйі

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Андатпа. 1920 жылдары Кеңес мемлекеті өте күрделі әлеуметтік-экономикалық құбылысқа – бірқатар себептерден туындаған жаппай жұмыссыздыққа тап болды. 1920 жылдар бойы жұмыссыздар саны жыл сайын өсіп отырды, ал қарастырылып отырған кезеңнің соңына қарай ол 1,7 миллион адамға жетті. 1929 жылы елде басталған ұжымдастыру және соның салдарынан азық-түлік мәселесінің шиеленісуіне және шаруалардың қалаларға тағы да жаппай ағылуына байланысты жағдай одан да қиындай түсті. Онжылдықтың соңына қарай жұмыссыздық тоқырауға ұшырады. 1927 жылы мемлекет халықтың жекелеген санаттарының жұмыс іздеуіне кедергі келтіретін бірқатар шараларды қабылдады. Еңбек нарығын реттеудің экономикалық факторларын әкімшілік әдістердің пайдасына қабылдамау, азық-түлік, материалдық, тұрмыстық және басқа да қиындықтар көп миллиондық резервтік еңбек армиясын КСРО-ның жекелеген аймақтарында өткір сипатқа ие болған наразылық мінез-құлқымен сипатталатын адал емес адамдар тобына айналдырды. Сонымен қатар, ОГПУ қызметкерлерінің айтуынша, еңбек биржалары ерекше қауіп төндірді, өйткені мұнда күн сайын көп адамдар шоғырланады. Әртүрлі шерулердің алдын алу үшін жұмыссыздарға ОГПУ органдары ерекше назар аударды, олардың міндеттеріне, сонымен қатар, жұмысы жоқ адамдардың көңіл-күйін хабарлау кіреді. Осы мақсатта чекистер осы бағыттағы топтың көңіл-күйі, мәлімдемелері, идеялары туралы ай сайынғы есептерді құрастырды. Бұл еңбекте Батыс Сібір облыстық жұмысшы, шаруа және қызыл

әскер депутаттары кеңесі атқару комитетінің еңбек бөлімінің қорында Новосібір облысының мемлекеттік мұрағатында сақтаулы тұрған 1929 жылғы 15 маусымдағы жедел түйіндеме алғаш рет ғылыми айналымға енгізілді. Жұмыстың мақсаты – 1929 жылдың орта шеніндегі, яғни 1920 жылдары жұмыс күшіне сұраныс алғаш рет ұсыныстан асып кеткен, бірақ мәселе шешілмеген бірінші бесжылдық кезіндегі Сібір аймағындағы жұмыссыздардың көңіл-күйін, мінез-құлқын көрсету. Зерттеуге бай материал беретін баяндама негізінде қоғамдық көңіл-күй спектрін анықтауға, Сібір аймағындағы жұмыссыздардың көңіл-күйі мен мінез-құлқының қалыптасуына әсер еткен біріктірілген факторларды қарастыруға әрекет жасалды. Жарияланған баяндаманың арқасында жұмыссыз халықтың ел басшылығына, елде болып жатқан оқиғаларға, оның ішінде ұжымдастыруға, билік органдарының әрекеттеріне наразылық үлгілеріне және т.б. көзқарасына талдау жасауға болады. Жұмыссыздардың қолайсыз жағдайы, оның ішінде азық-түлік тапшылығы, жұмыс орындарының жоқтығы, табыстың жоқтығы, қызметкерлердің әртүрлі еңбек айырбастау қажеттілігі, еңбек айырбастау қажеттілігі туралы қорытынды жасалды. Полиция қызметкерлерімен алмасулар, қақтығыстар мен шайқастар, тәртіпсіздіктер, Кеңес өкіметіне қарсы көтерілістер туралы идеялар халық арасында кең таралған, коммунистерге қарсы әскери күреске шақырулар таратылды. Сібір өлкесінде мұндай көңіл-күй, ОГПУ-дың мәліметі бойынша, кеңінен таралған.

Түйін сөздер: жұмыссыздық; жұмыссыз халық; индустрияландыру; бесжылдық жоспар; еңбек биржалары; кәсіподақтар; есеп беру; ОГПУ; Сібір

Introduction

As is known, the Soviet government faced a growing army of unemployed population in the early 1920s. Throughout the decade, this figure continued to grow. If according to official statistics in 1921 there were about 100 thousand unemployed people in the country (Rogachevskaya 1973: 76-77), then by 1929 this number had increased seventeenfold and reached 1.7 million people (The National Economy of the USSR 1987: 11). By the end of the 1920s, the number of unemployed people in the Siberian Territory approached about 80 thousand, which was approximately 5% of the total number of those who were not employed (Kekalova 1984: 81), with particularly acute issues manifesting themselves in Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Barnaul, Biysk. The proportion of unoccupied population in the region and throughout the country was roughly equal at 0.9% and 1%, respectively (Kekalova 1984: 87).

Unemployment had a stagnant, chronic character. During the second half of the 1920s, the duration of stay on labor exchanges (including temporary employment periods) could reach from six to twelve months, while the average length of unemployment since leaving the last job before registering at the exchange amounted to 12.2 months. Moreover, this phenomenon had an all-Union nature rather than being characteristic only of any specific region (Potapova 2021).

Methods and Materials

The issue of the labor market and unemployment in the USSR has been thoroughly studied within Soviet historiography, but these works are ideologically biased, and specialists' conclusions often contradict each other, requiring reassessment and modern evaluation.

Furthermore, this topic is multifaceted and multivariable, encompassing social, economic, and political spheres of society. Some aspects have not yet been addressed by researchers so far, specifically the sentiments of the unemployed and their struggle against a lack of jobs and means of subsistence.

In the documentary part of the article, we publish a report prepared by Deputy Head of the OGPU Directorate for the Siberian Region, V.N. Garin, and Chief of the Information Department of OGPU, G.A. Lupekin, dated June 15, 1929. It was approved by the authorized representative of OGPU INFO Pavlov. This document is stored in the State Archive of Novosibirsk city in the fund of the Labor Department of the Executive Committee of the West-Siberian Regional Council of Workers', Peasants' and Red Army Deputies1 and introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

Historiography

The historiographic review of the problem of unemployment in the USSR represents a complex topic that cannot be covered within one article or even a small study. However, it is possible to identify the main stages of research development on this issue:

The first stage covers the 1920s. At this time, the first scientific approaches emerged when Soviet power faced a mass release of the labor force due to civil war and economic devastation. Research during those years was mainly focused on studying the scale of the phenomenon and searching for ways to eliminate unemployment. Notably, official ideology denied the existence of massive unemployment, emphasizing only the temporary difficulties of the transitional period.

The second period includes the 1930s through mid-1950s. During this phase, works appeared justifying the absence of a large-scale labor market under conditions of a planned economy. Many researchers believed that centralized distribution of labor resources effectively solved the employment problems of the population. Nevertheless, there exists a significant body of archival documents indicating the presence of hidden unemployment and the episodic nature of forced migrations and deportations as methods for addressing personnel issues.

During the third stage (late 1950s to early 1980s), there was a noticeable reduction in open unemployment levels thanks to Khrushchev's and Brezhnev's economic reforms. The problem of hidden forms of unemployment continued to exist. This aspect remains poorly studied by historians because access to state security materials was restricted until the end of the Soviet era. The question of how unemployed individuals themselves reacted also remains unresolved due to a lack of documentary evidence.

The modern stage (from the beginning of the 1990s to the present day) has been marked by the gradual opening of previously closed archives, including documents from state security agencies. This allowed deeper exploration into regional specificities of unemployment, its dynamics, and manifestations. Monographs and dissertations dedicated to individual regions and groups of people who became victims of structural changes in the Soviet economy have begun to appear.

Thus, despite considerable achievements made by contemporary researchers, gaps remain in studying regional peculiarities and the social psychology of Soviet unemployed workers. These areas require further analysis and systematization of available sources.

Results

Throughout the 1920s, the state implemented several measures aimed at reducing the number of unemployed; however, they proved ineffective. Starting from 1927, the USSR began transitioning to a command-administrative economic system, necessitating significant changes in mechanisms for regulating the labor market, forming personnel for Soviet industry, and other related processes. To a significant extent, thanks to this development, the employment situation underwent a fundamental change because demand for labor exceeded supply during the first five-year plan. Nevertheless, one shouldn't assume that under conditions of prolonged, chronic unemployment, labor demand was fully met. For example, during July-September 1927, employment services in Siberia received job applications from enterprises for 28,735 employees, but only managed to fill 25,672 vacancies, leaving 3,063 positions unfilled, representing 10.6%. Such a situation can be explained by shortages of skilled personnel, people's refusals to relocate, low wages, and harsh working conditions, among others. Therefore, despite exceeding labor demand over supply, the problem of unemployment persisted.

The presence of a reserve labor force throughout the 1920s generated numerous problems, including material-living, financial, food-related ones, etc. The Soviet government believed that high unemployment rates were the primary cause of widespread poverty among the population. Poverty, material and food difficulties, labor market reform, as well as measures carried out by the Soviet authorities in rural areas at the end of the 1920s, contributed to an increase in public dissatisfaction, including among the unemployed population, leading to the emergence and spread of anti-Soviet sentiments. Consequently, state security agencies closely monitored this particular segment of society. Starting already in the early 1920s, secret reports began to include special sections where Cheka officers reported on the living conditions, attitudes, beliefs, and grievances of the unemployed members of the population. Reports consistently mentioned their «depressed mood» and emphasized that «the growth in numbers of unemployed constitutes a serious matter because their ranks provide fertile ground for anti-Soviet propaganda» («Top Secret»: Lubjanka-Stalin on Country's Situation 2001: 866–867). Additionally, OGPU officers recorded that labor exchanges posed particular danger since they daily attracted large crowds of angry, unemployed masses. Based on data collected at labor exchanges across the Siberian region, the memorandum presented in the documentary section of this study was compiled.

Memoranda concerning unemployment and political attitudes of those without jobs start appearing in Central Security Agency documentation already in the early 1920s. Typically, such reviews documented total national and regional figures of unemployed, highlighted increases or decreases in their numbers, described their material-living circumstances and prevailing moods. These materials were prepared based on memos submitted monthly by territorial branches of OGPU to Moscow headquarters. Presented herein is one such memo dated June 15, 1929, drafted by the OGPU Branch Office for the Siberian Region. This multi-page overview is broken down into individual paragraphs. Generally speaking, these types of documents are uniform, although paragraph count and content might vary. Occasionally, Cheka officials focused on perceptions of important political events by the unemployed.

Each note commenced with detailed quantitative indicators of unemployment derived from labor exchange records. Here, figures representing numbers of unemployed were given, compared between different periods, trends toward increase or decrease were outlined,

statistics on dismissals from labor exchanges and reasons behind such decisions were included alongside categories of unemployed. Following this came additional sections. The published document consists of 12 paragraphs covering: condition of unemployment, political mindset of the unemployed, aggressive actions, riotous tendencies and counterrevolutionary calls, overall characteristics of political moods among the unemployed, grievances stemming from material inadequacy, complaints linked to food difficulties, resentment towards governmental policies enacted in rural areas, grievances among the unemployed arising from delays in construction projects commencement, attacks directed at communists, antisemitism, grievances expressed by the unemployed regarding irregularities in labor exchange operations.

To: Besenevich and Solovyov

Top Secret

Confidential Memo
on Unemployment and Political Mood of the Unemployed in the Siberian Region
June 15, 1929

State of Unemployment

The total number of registered unemployed individuals across the seven Regional Labor Offices (Novosibirsk, Omsk, Irkutsk, Tomsk, Krasnoyarsk, Barnaul, Biysk) as of June 1st this year amounts to 38,693 people, which represents a decrease compared to the previous period by 6,737 people.

The reduction in unemployment can be attributed to several factors:

1. A relatively broader deployment of seasonal and construction work activities.

2. Re-registration campaigns conducted in certain areas that resulted in fewer recorded cases of unemployment (in Barnaul alone, re-registration revealed 526 «ghost» entries).

3. Removal from records due to repeated refusal of job assignments (in Novosibirsk alone, over 1,000 people were removed from registers for refusing employment offers during May).

A notable trend during the reporting period is a significant increase in the composition of new arrivals among the ranks of the unemployed. These include workers arriving from rural regions seeking temporary employment opportunities tied to seasonal works, as well as those migrating from Central Russian cities facing food supply difficulties.

According to data provided by Sibtrud, the following cities have seen an influx of newly arrived migrants from rural areas taken into account in May: Tomsk, Novosibirsk, Biysk, Omsk, and Krasnoyarsk. Total: 1,253 persons

In terms of the overall structure of the current unemployed population, the predominant group consists of unskilled laborers and low-level service personnel (over 15 thousand people).

The Mood Among the Unemployed

The mood among the unemployed in May, when compared with previous periods, has been characterized by particularly heightened tension. This exacerbation is primarily explained by two key factors:

Continued Influx of New Workers: There has been a sustained inflow of new recruits at the Labor Offices who are still awaiting job placements. This situation arises due to the incomplete implementation of both seasonal and public works projects, leading to delays in assigning these new entrants to available jobs.

Food Supply Difficulties: Additionally, ongoing challenges related to food supplies have significantly worsened the conditions faced by the unemployed. These difficulties further compound their already precarious situation.

Manifestations of Aggressive Actions

On May 17th, at the Barnaul Employment Office, an unemployed individual named Mikhailovsky I.A. (professionally employed as a clerk, son of a property owner) gathered around himself a group of other unemployed individuals and began breaking into the office while shouting:

«Comrades! We won't receive any decent work here because there's only filth sitting inside. Let's pull them out, they need a good shaking up so they'll give us jobs faster. Enough of drinking our blood!»

Under the influence of his agitation, a group of about ten unemployed people attempted to break down doors but were dispersed thanks to the intervention of law enforcement officers.

At the Novosibirsk Employment Office on May 27th, an unemployed person named Yuliev caused a commotion and assaulted a police officer who approached him.

Similarly, another unemployed man, Fedyanyin M.E., appeared in the Head of the Employment Bureau's office on June 13th with complaints regarding long queues during registration processes. He cursed profusely and struck the bureau head twice with his fist.

Pogrom Sentiments and Counterrevolutionary Calls

Alongside this, existing materials highlight intensified pogrom sentiments and calls for attacks against Labor Exchanges, instigation of riots, uprisings, etc., originating from some elements within the hostile and anti-Soviet faction of the unemployed in various cities such as Omsk, Barnaul, Kuznetsk, and Novosibirsk.

Although manifestations of this nature do not characterize the general sentiment among the observed mass of unemployed, they nevertheless remain indicative.

On May 9th, in the city of Kuznetsk, during a specially convened meeting of the unemployed concerning hooligan behavior – including window smashing, threats towards employees of the Labor Exchange, etc. – an unemployed worker named Aksenov S.T. (a former member of the VKP(b) until 1927, mechanically expelled, originally peasant, professional carpenter) addressed the gathering saying:

«We waste millions of rubles on useless constructions like the Telbes construction site without achieving anything useful. Trade unions have become bureaucratic organizations that completely ignore the needs of the unemployed. If you come wearing bad shoes, you're denied employment. It's time we take power back into working hands.»

During Aksenov's speech, members of the audience chanted slogans including:

«Dissolve the Union!». «That's right! They're fat and happy while we're starving from unemployment».

At the Barnaul Labor Exchange, an unemployed worker named Garin, recently returned from the Caucasus region and a skilled masonry craftsman, was noted inciting others through statements such as:

«The Communists have brought us to such misery that life seems unbearable. There's no work, bread prices are sky-high, yet we've tolerated it all too passively. It's high time we revolted just like last year's events in Semipalatinsk and the Caucasus. On the day after the uprising, bread immediately became available for workers, along with jobs. Let's follow suit, or else they'll continue tormenting us».

On May 28th, at the same Barnaul Labor Exchange, Zhukov A.I., an unemployed builder affiliated with the Construction Union, addressing a group of approximately forty fellow unemployed individuals, exclaimed passionately:

«We won't achieve anything by standing idly here at the exchange. We must organize ourselves and destroy this institution altogether. Then we'll march straight to government offices and confront authorities directly, demanding jobs. If they refuse, we'll stage an organized protest against Soviet rule until our demands are met. Leaders will emerge naturally – they're waiting for us to act first».

Present during this conversation, Petryayev, a construction worker and former volunteer soldier under Kolchak's army, remarked:

«That makes sense. Had my circumstances deteriorated as badly as others', I'd have rallied capable men to start destroying the Exchange. Soon enough, we might be forced to resort to violence».

In Omsk, unsuccessful attempts by specific individuals among the unemployed to rally support for organized action during the May Day demonstration – under slogans like «Give Us Food and Work» – continue to spark sympathetic comments from some groups of unemployed. Alongside this, declarations calling for a «NEW REVOLUTION», «UPRISING», destruction of Labor Exchanges, etc., persist.

Notable examples include open discussions and remarks such as:

«The Leninets' preparation failed because they rushed things. If they'd acted more carefully, May Day would've seen bloodshed. Lack of unity among leaders was also crucial, though GPU didn't miss its opportunity. Still, it's hard to defend against such actions – sparks remain dormant now». (Unemployed Terniakov Ya.)

«It's time for a fresh revolution. We've endured their rules long enough. When everyone joins together, there's nothing to fear – authorities can't arrest everyone!» (Unemployed Nikitin)

«Let's eliminate this Labor Exchange once and for all. Imagine placing machine guns outside Gorteatr theater and firing indiscriminately: one round aimed at the Exchange, then another toward the City Council – it'll cleanse everything properly». (Painter, surname pending verification, speaking amidst full agreement from fellow unemployed workers).

Another remark captured during a discussion emphasized:

«There remains only one option left – to rise in rebellion and seize control. Only then will we secure jobs. Otherwise, years spent walking aimlessly lead nowhere. One participant questioned: 'But how can we rebel with bare hands?' Another responded reassuringly: 'Don't worry! With proper organization, resources will materialize».

Since early May, walls inside the Biisk Labor Exchange have consistently displayed antirevolutionary graffiti, including messages like:

«Beat communists». «Down with Soviet Power». «Give back the power to the people».

Investigations established that these writings originated from an unemployed woman named Skorobochatova A.K., whose motives are being investigated to determine external influences.

Instances of pogrom-like attitudes are also evident among the unemployed at the Novosibirsk Labor Exchange, especially since the recent large-scale removal of registrations due to refusals to accept offered work positions.

One instance involved an unemployed carpenter named Plotnikov expressing frustration:

«It's time to act decisively. We're tired of enduring. Even if prison awaits, eliminating corrupt officials is essential. As long as nobody starts acting, silence prevails».

Demobilized farmer Ivanov expressed similar sentiments:

«They've dismissed me from the register. How much longer will they mock us? Sooner or later, the end will come, leaving nothing behind. Let's finish off everyone responsible—what difference does death make?»

On May 29th, a group of 100 unemployed workers dispatched to a timber factory for loading railway sleepers refused to perform assigned tasks upon arrival. Upon returning to the Labor Exchange, this group demanded alternative work arrangements accompanied by loud protests and shouts:

«They're deceiving us, swindlers! We should raze this place to the ground!» (Dudaev)

«We could easily subdue them. Attack these paper-pushing communists, beat them!» (Baryshev)

An unemployed worker named Krylov pointed at the Section Manager for casual laborers, yelling:

«Attack him! Drag him here! We'll show him what he deserves. Bring the manager out of his office!»

Through swift measures implemented, the incident was resolved peacefully.

General Characteristics of the Political Attitudes of Unemployed People

In general, the negative sentiments among unemployed individuals over the past period have been characterized by a noticeable increase in discontent due to several factors:

1. Harsh living conditions caused by overall material insecurity and food shortages, as well as rising costs of living.
2. Measures implemented in rural areas that put pressure on wealthier segments of the peasantry.
3. Delayed commencement of construction work.
4. Actions taken by Communists, administrative officials, and trade unions.

In addition to these widespread grievances, certain tendencies towards anti-Semitism are partially reflected in the attitudes of the unemployed, along with dissatisfaction regarding specific shortcomings in the functioning of labor exchanges and neglect from their staff members.

It is important to note that all manifestations of discontent expressed by the unemployed typically carry an extremely sharp tone and are also frequently accompanied by equally harsh criticisms directed against Soviet authorities, the party, and communists.

Numerically summarized, the predominant negative moods among the unemployed during this period can be represented by the following table, accounting for the most characteristic judgments and reactions observed across five cities in Siberia – Omsk, Novosibirsk, Irkutsk, Barnaul, and Biysk.

Pogrom Mood and Revolutionary Calls	Dissatisfaction Due to Material Insecurity	Discontent Over Food Shortages	Dissatisfaction With Government Measures Implemented in Villages	Dissatisfaction With Late Start of Construction Work	Dissatisfaction With Communists and Administrative Officials	Dissatisfaction With Trade Unions	Dissatisfaction With Trade Unions	Total
51	63	42	59	38	28	15	15	307

Dissatisfaction Due to Material Insecurity

Complaints and dissatisfaction arising from material insecurity dominate the mood of the unemployed and take on a mass character. The content of these grievances reflects significant depression bordering on despair, which in some cases leads the unemployed to talk about suicide or rebellion.

The most typical and characteristic facts related to this issue include the following statements:

«Life is miserable. Living like this is torture, not life at all. I wish there was an uprising soon; it couldn't make things worse». (Omsk)

«This life has become pure torment. If things continue like this, one might consider committing suicide or attacking those who cause our suffering». (Barnaul, jobless worker KONOPLYANNIKOV)

«It's almost a year since I've had no work, and the Labor Exchange hasn't assigned me anywhere, even for a single day. A commission investigated my situation; I'm starving, possess nothing but what I wear. They don't send me to work because they say I'm not a union member. But where am I supposed to join a union when I'm only 19 years old, went to school, then lived temporarily with a craftsman? They say we need to fight prostitution, yet they're driving us into it themselves. My mother is 70 years old, receives an 8-ruble pension, and supposedly 'two people live' off her. That's called giving opportunities to young people, yes indeed, but not through work, rather through prostitution. Freedom isn't leading to life, it's leading to death by hunger». (Irkutsk, jobless worker TARAKANOVA)

«There's no work in the village; men have been ruined, and we're given no bread. I came to the city thinking I'd find employment somewhere. Here I've been wandering around for three weeks now, working only three days total. Starve to death already, that's how bad life has gotten, just pure agony. It's all because everywhere different scoundrels sit and mock us». (Barnaul, jobless worker KONOPLYANNIKOV-batrak)

«It's impossible to find work; unemployment grows every day. Life under Tsarism was much better». (Omsk, jobless worker FEDOROVA)

«Living becomes unbearable while the government keeps promising America-like prosperity and comforting us with socialism. Just wait, they say, we'll electrify the country and everything will be fine. Are you telling us to die until then? They've struggled for twelve years and achieved nothing. What lies ahead, God alone knows». (Irkutsk, jobless worker SKURATOV)

Discontent due to food supply difficulties.

The presence of food supply problems significantly worsens the material situation of unemployed people (especially in connection with rising prices for food and essential goods), causing acute dissatisfaction among them, which is closely linked to general dissatisfaction with Soviet power and the Party. Some groups of the unemployed continue to explain their food difficulties by referring to bread exports abroad.

«Not only do they not give us work, but they don't even provide bread. And at the market, it's impossible to buy it because of high prices when there's nothing in our pockets». (Barnaul)

«There is no bread, and queues everywhere. What kind of authority is this? It's been eleven years already, and they still can't improve people's lives. Newspapers write that the industry is developing, sowing areas are increasing, but there's still a lack of bread. They distribute only six kilograms per person, and there is no work either. It was pointless for the people to overthrow Kolchak—we could have lived quietly without such hunger now». (Barnaul)

«Before we had plenty of bread, but now there's none left. These scoundrels sent everything abroad, taking away every last bit. As a result, those overseas live well while we're starving here. Our government claims they're not exporting any grain, but that's all lies, pure deception. Scoundrels, deceiving the people in every possible way. When will these sufferings end?» (Novosibirsk)

Dissatisfaction with measures taken by the authorities against villages

In most cases, according to the majority of unemployed individuals, the causes of existing food shortages lie in measures aimed at pressuring village elites. This leads to widespread peasant sentiment among the unemployed, especially among new recruits arriving from rural areas. Such moods are further fueled by active propaganda conducted by certain anti-Soviet elements within the ranks of the unemployed and mainly come down to the following points:

«Every year they confiscate bread from peasants, imprison them unjustly, sell off property earned through hard labor, yet there's still no bread available, and city workers go hungry. Oh, how sickening has this authority become to the people! When will we finally throw it off?» (Barnaul, non-party member Dervenev speaking before a group of unemployed persons; one listener added after his final words: «This will happen when we grab all communists by the throat».)

«In newspapers, they claim that farmers increased their crops this summer, but in reality, the opposite happened: farmers were forced to reduce plantations since all their grain was seized forcefully. The current situation will soon lead to mass famine». (Biysk, non-party member Vorobyev)

«Farmers today refuse to cultivate large fields, limiting themselves to planting just one or two acres. Rural life is completely ruined. Next year, an even greater number of impoverished peasants will flood into cities, standing in lines at employment exchanges. However, this will be beneficial as united with them, we'll boldly fight those who brought us to this state». (Omsk)

«The Soviets aren't merely hated by the unemployed and workers but also by peasants, particularly the latter, whom they've robbed bare and organized obscure communes and collectives living off worker profits». (Omsk)

«Nowadays, farmers reduced crop cultivation, so next year's bread shortage will be much worse than it is now. Once there's no more bread, workers and peasants will confront Soviet power, and foreign powers won't miss this opportunity to intervene». (Omsk)

«Under this regime, peasants don't live normal lives—they suffer oppression on wealthy landowners ('kulaks') and gradually ruin middle-class peasants ('serednyaki'). Poor people remain hungry. Sadly, workers aren't stepping up to defend peasants. City workers should insist on holding joint congresses of workers and peasants to demand an end to such cruel treatment towards villagers». (Barnaul, non-party member Bredin, demobilized farmer)

«If Soviet power continues its policy of grain procurement, urban hunger will increase daily. The main supplier of bread is prosperous peasants, who've been utterly ruined. Middle-class peasants grow only enough for personal consumption, poor peasants produce nothing themselves, remaining hungry, and many of them are lazy, unwilling to work. Alas, what victory did our government achieve, breaking everyone's back? We must protect peasants from this plunder, otherwise, we face inevitable death by starvation». (Barnaul, non-party member Chudinov)

«The situation in villages nowadays is unacceptable. Agricultural production is collapsing, and livestock cannot be expanded because improving one's circumstances would make one appear rich («kulak»). By next year, almost nobody will be able to farm or eat. Each day brings new challenges. Our leaders simply can't understand that the better-off the population becomes, the stronger the state benefits». (Novosibirsk, non-party member Kondratyuk)

Discontent of the unemployed due to the delay in the deployment of construction works.

The delayed opening of seasonal construction work and insufficiently intensive pace of the current year's construction deployment across almost all districts of the Siberian region naturally causes even greater resentment among the unemployed, especially those from unskilled laborers working in construction. The judgments and reactions of these people are characterized by the following statements:

«It has become impossible to live under this government. Summer is passing, but we remain jobless while officials walk around with their briefcases, bloated from luxury, not caring about how the unemployed live or bothering to open up jobs. Either they don't have a budget ready, materials are missing, or central authorities haven't approved anything. You're supposed to stand at the employment office, grinding your teeth, it's not even worth going home. When you come back, your wife complains that everyone's barefoot and hungry. It's a disaster. Everyone is dissatisfied with Soviet power. This authority only holds on through the communists. If there's another poor harvest this year, workers will smash everything and reject this power because now we're worse off than when we lived under the tsar».

«June is approaching, yet many administrators aren't thinking about starting work because all institutions are filled with former bureaucrats who deliberately delay the start of construction projects. Meanwhile, communist heads sit idly, oblivious to what's happening around them, ignoring the fact that thousands are starving, waiting for a chance to earn some bread. Why did the bourgeoisie use to begin work as soon as snow started melting? No, it seems like communists can't manage the country properly. They'll probably push things so far that workers will be forced to make another revolution out of hunger».

«What's going on here? Spring has passed, but construction work hasn't begun. And there's also a shortage of bread, which makes it impossible to buy it at the market. I might as well lie down alive in my grave. Clearly, no amount of criticism or self-criticism will help. It looks like this regime was created with such irreversible chaos that we'll never see any relief. Peasants were stripped of grain, and workers are starving».

Attacks on Communists.

Material insecurity causes the unemployed to have an extremely hostile and jealous attitude towards communists in general.

In the previous exposition, these unhealthy sentiments of the unemployed were already noted. In addition to them, the following facts about the opinions of the unemployed deserve attention:

«There is no difference between what was before and now. Who lived well earlier – it was capitalists, they tyrannized us, rode over our backs, so even now, under Soviet power it's the same, who lives well? Workers? Not at all. A small group of communists live well, while we are worse off than anyone else. We are unemployed as if we're strangers. Nowadays, all party members occupy good positions, receive high salaries, what's stopping them from living well and agitating among our kind, saying that comrades, this is your power, you should help each other, etc. Generally speaking, I can't bear looking at them. Earlier, there were no queues like today, when you stand for bread all day long and still might not get any. Before, at least we didn't starve, there was plenty of bread, but now life is miserable and sometimes we go hungry for several days. And yet they're telling us that equality and brotherhood must prevail, but where's the equality when our department heads – party members – receive 200-300 rubles, while workers earn only 30 rubles and live somewhere in a basement with their families, whereas communists occupy three or four rooms, that's how luxurious they live. No, there's no way we'll ever live well, we've suffered before and now there's no joy». (Biisk, b/r. GUNYOV).

«All communists are selfish people, they defend only their own interests, don't pay decent wages, provide everything for themselves, and fill our minds with nonsense. Take any communist out of them, put him in our shoes as unemployed, let him walk around here for six months, then he would speak differently because they've never been unemployed during the entire period of Soviet rule, haven't lived in bad conditions – that’s why they find the current regime so great, they support it wholeheartedly, and live comfortably, while our brothers suffer». (N.Sibirsk).

«Soon we'll have to take up rifles and start beating communists because there's no more living with them and nothing good will come from them». (N.Sibirsk).

Antisemitism.

A partial spread of antisemitic tendencies among the unemployed due to dissatisfaction with their situation has been observed mainly in N.Sibirsk and Irkutsk cities during the reporting period.

In this case, particular attention deserves the following statement by unemployed PETELINA in the premises of the Irkutsk Big Labor among groups of unemployed individuals:

«We need to beat every Jew. At first, I supported Soviet power, but now I've realized that this government is Jewish, there are no honest communists, they're all self-seekers, thieves. I

endured it, but now my strength is gone and I'm not afraid of prison or anything, let them shoot me, I'll stop suffering».

The rest of the antisemitic judgments and conversations of the unemployed are similar to the following:

«In the past, Jews held good positions – in estates, various administrations – they oppressed our kind, and now it's exactly the same. Those who got promoted or became officials are Jews. In general, communists lack brains, which is why they trust cursed Jews so much, while our kind sit hungry year after year without seeing the light at the end of the tunnel». (N.Sibirsk.)

«You won't see a single Jewish unemployed person on job exchanges. They're all settled in warm places in the center, they don't want to come here, and if hundreds of Jews arrive here, none of them will go to the exchange, they'll all secure good jobs». (N. Sibirsk).

Discontent Among Unemployed Due to Malpractices at Job Exchanges.

Materials from the reporting period indicate abuses by some employees of the Irkutsk Job Exchange: PANNEVIN, SHEVCHENKO (Heads of Sections) and Secretary of Labour Protection LEPETISHEVA (all non-party members), who allow sending unemployed persons not according to queue order but based on personal discretion, arranging employment for acquaintances and anti-social elements. The commission established at the Job Exchange, consisting of unemployed individuals, either skillfully circumvents or itself indulges in favoritism in certain cases. Head of the Job Exchange ZOLOTUKHIN does not engage at all with issues related to assigning work to the unemployed, entrusting this task entirely to the aforementioned Section Heads.

These irregularities significantly affect the mood of the unemployed and cause sharp dissatisfaction and complaints against B.T. staff, characterized as follows:

«Nepotism and favoritism remain as strong as ever. The queue for job assignments is violated by the Job Exchange. Those who resigned later have already received jobs, while we keep waiting». (B/R TOLMACHEVA).

«The Job Exchange exists or doesn't exist since those working there get jobs through connections». (b/r GAVRONSKIY).

«Any criminal element and former people work, but we cannot wait for a job forever. Even if you manage to find one, you're not allowed in, while party members are given preferential treatment». (b/r SHEVCHENKO)

«There's chaos at the Job Exchange, and personal connections play the main role. They do it cleverly, leaving no room for criticism. To divert suspicion, they created a commission made up of unemployed individuals supposedly to check the correctness of job assignments, but who are these commission members: 1. PATENT – son of a tailor, works with his father. 2. PULEVSKI – landlord, not a union member, etc., who are these unemployed people? 3. ZORYATSKI – serves in the metalworkers' collective, etc., who are these unemployed people? It turns out that the Job Exchange formed a commission from the very people it needed, its own cronies. If someone took hold of this Job Exchange and shook it up, getting rid of half of its personnel»". (B/R LAPTEV – locksmith).

June 1929

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU Special Department for South Caucasus Region

(GARIN)

No. …….. Novosibirsk Chief of the INFO Department (LUPEKIN)

VERIFIED: AUTHORIZED OFFICER OF THE INFORMATION DEPARTMENT (PAVLOV)[1]

Conclusion

Thus, the report provides rich material for study. Based on it, it can be concluded that by mid-1929, the unemployed had developed an unfavorable attitude toward state institutions, including the ruling party, trade unions, labor exchanges, etc., and harshly criticized measures implemented in the country. Ideas of uprisings and struggles against Soviet rule emerged. These attitudes were widespread, with OGPU officers recording 307 instances of characteristic attacks against the ruling regime within just one month. The adverse circumstances faced by the unemployed, such as food shortages, lack of employment opportunities, low income, mandatory registration with labor exchanges marred by deficiencies, reforms led to various conflicts with labor exchange staff, clashes and fights with police officers, riots, and popular ideas of revolts against Soviet authority, along with calls for military action against communists.

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Notes

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