

SOCIAL POLICY IN KARAKALPAKSTAN IN THE 1925-1930s

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Abstract

The article deals with the socio-economic situation of Karakalpakstan in 1925-1930. The results of the social policy of the Soviet power in Karakalpakstan in 1925-1930s, the transition to collectivization of agriculture in the conditions of Karakalpakstan are analyzed. Actual issues of formation of socio-political climate among dehkanstvo, demographic situation, natural and geographical features of the national economy, which in the historical and comparative analysis gives the opportunity to highlight a number of trends and factors that determine the practical significance of the study in the modern historical period.

Keywords: Priaralie, merchant, landowner, dekhkan, batrak, Soviet peasant, agrarian reform, chigir, bai, bek, vakuf lands, khan lands, atalyk.

Introduction

The issues of the history of social policy in Karakalpakstan during the period of restoring the national statehood of the Karakalpak people require a comprehensive and balanced assessment, as noted in historiography on this issue [1].

Relevant questions include the formation of the socio-political climate among dekhkans, the demographic situation, and the natural-geographical features of the national economy. A historical-comparative analysis allows us to highlight a number of trends and factors that determine the practical significance of this topic in the modern historical context.

Main Part

During the implementation of national policies by the Bolsheviks, the settlement characteristics of Karakalpakstan's population were not always taken into account. Until the mid-20th century, almost every ethnic group in the Priaralie region (Karakalpaks, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, Turkmens) maintained a close connection between their use of natural resources and the environmental

conditions of their settlements, as agriculture was the primary means of subsistence.

New processes that emerged in the Amu Darya department in the 1925-1930s affected the social structure of its population, society, and governance. Determining the real social structure during agrarian reforms is crucial, as it reveals the interests, sentiments, and behaviors of different social groups (merchants, large and medium landowners, dekhkans, poor peasants, batraks, charikers, etc.). However, providing a detailed classification of the population of the Amu Darya department is quite difficult due to the close interweaving of different social categories. According to statistical data, dekhkans predominated, with a significant proportion of the population belonging to the poor and landless classes.

However, in carrying out agrarian reforms, the Bolsheviks ignored the national-historical way of life of the local population, their mindset, and traditional customs. It was essential to consider the ethno-psychological characteristics of the region's people, which manifested in their cautious attitude toward innovations and radical transformations that led to a sharp shift in values, established norms, and behavioral stereotypes.

A.A. Golovanov noted that "the Bolshevik revolution led to the destruction of the fundamental foundations of the pre-revolutionary village, initiating complex processes of restructuring rural life and peasant psychology. In Central Asia, the October Revolution contributed to the elimination of conservative feudal-bai relations and the redistribution of land and water resources in favor of the working people. At the same time, within the dekhkan community, as in the entire rural population of the country, the genotype of a new type of peasant – the 'Soviet peasant' – began to form. This phenomenon has not been fully studied, but its main distinguishing features are already evident. Among them are: alienation from land and property, indifference to labor outcomes, a noticeable atrophy of the sense of ownership, and an extremely low level of material well-being" [2:7].

To implement agrarian reform, it was necessary to mobilize a large number of workers under compulsory labor obligations, as the state funds allocated for this purpose were insufficient to carry out the required irrigation work. On June 17, 1922, the Presidium of the Economic Council of the Amu Darya region, following instructions from the central government, decided to increase taxes on

the wealthy population [3]. According to this resolution, representatives of the clergy, merchants, artisans, and other so-called "bai" agricultural households were subjected to higher taxation. This policy represented an economic pressure tactic by the Soviet government against the affluent segments of society. In tax collection and ensuring the presence of workers for compulsory labor, not only party representatives but also Soviet authorities—especially the police and military food supply units—were actively involved [4:15].

In Karakalpakstan, the area of irrigated winter and spring crops reached 15,889 desyatinas in 1924, compared to less than 14,000 desyatinas in 1923. However, comparative analysis shows that the average cultivated area per farm nearly halved: in 1900, it was 2.72 desyatinas, in 1912—2.6, in 1917—1.8, in 1921—1.6, and by 1925, it had decreased to 1.4 desyatinas [5].

Addressing the key question of whether land and water reforms were successfully implemented during this period, we can conclude that they could not be fully realized due to local conditions. These included outdated farming techniques, the persistence of patriarchal-feudal relations, and specific soil and climate conditions.

At the First Congress of Soviets of the Karakalpak Autonomous Region, held in February 1925, one of the key topics discussed was the restoration of agriculture. Reports on this issue were presented by Matkarimov and Bovol. However, this task was extremely complex and required significant effort. The resolution adopted at the congress highlighted the severe crisis in agriculture, characterized by a catastrophic reduction in cultivated areas, a shortage of draft animals, completely worn-out agricultural tools, and poorly maintained irrigation systems. The lack of skilled workers to maintain these systems meant that irrigation repair became an annual hardship for dekhkans.

From 1924 to 1925, project and research activities were initiated in Karakalpakstan to modernize outdated local irrigation networks. The Tuyamuyun Surveying Party "Upradis," led by engineer N. Yanchur, conducted research in the Turtkul Water District to reconstruct the Shurakhan Canal system and construct its intake structure near Tashsak. The Kunya-Darya Surveying Party, under engineers P.P. Ilyenko-Petrovsky and N.T. Borodinsky, carried out research in the Chimbay and Khodzheyli-Kungrad water districts. As a result, in 1926, a new project was prepared for the construction of the Kyzketken Canal and the clearing of the old canal.

Research in the Khodzheyli-Kungrad water district led to plans for restructuring the irrigation systems of Suenli and Khanzhap to merge them into a single, more powerful main canal. This was intended to irrigate unused lands, eliminate the chigir (manual water-lifting) irrigation method, and improve water distribution and usage [6]. By 1926, irrigated and cultivated land in Karakalpakstan totaled 86,768 hectares, including 48,607 hectares for grain, 14,317 hectares for cotton, 14,039 hectares for auxiliary (household) plots, and 9,805 hectares for alfalfa. However, according to the Central Asian Water Management Agency, the total area of irrigated land was estimated at 62,300 hectares.

The development of agriculture in the region was closely linked to land management. However, the deputy head of the regional water management department, N. Kozo-Polyansky, argued that "in Karakalpakia, land management cannot exist without water construction" [7]. The regional land management council, by its resolution No. 11 of May 3, 1927, approved a plan for land management works in the Karakalpak Autonomous Region. Land management activities began in the Turtkul district, covering 28,714 farms that cultivated 38,403 desyatinas of land.

Following national territorial delimitation, the land fund of Karakalpak national statehood was classified based on natural-geographical features and types of economic activity as follows:

Low-water areas with unstable agriculture: Northwestern part of Daukarin, northern part of Kok-Uzyak and Naupyr volosts of the Chimbay district; Surkul and Hakim-Atin volosts of the Kungrad district. Areas with normal irrigation conditions and a clear tendency toward livestock farming: Chimbay, Kegeyli, Nukus volosts, the southern part of Kok-Uzyak volost of Chimbay district, and Khodzheyli district (except Yany-Kalin volost). Areas with excess water and poorly developed agriculture: Taldyk and Yany-Bazar volosts of Chimbay district; Kungrad, Khanyab, and Minzhargan volosts of Kungrad district. Areas with the most developed agriculture: Cultivated land zones of the Turtkul district. Purely nomadic livestock farming areas: Minbulak and Tamdyn volosts of Shurakhan district and the eastern part of Daukarin volost of Chimbay district. Therefore, the implementation of land and water measures in the Karakalpak Autonomous Region had its own characteristics. At first, the provision of landless and land-poor dehkans with labor plots was carried out at the expense of free lands and non-labor farms. The non-labor lands included: lands of former

large bais, beks, and waqf lands; lands of dehkans who did not cultivate plots with their own labor; lands of dehkans exceeding the norm of labor land use; leased lands; lands belonging to khans, atalyks, and large merchants.

Overall, land and water measures in Central Asia began in 1925 and, taking into account the level of economic development, political activity, and the influence of various forces, were completed in 1929. In Karakalpakstan, within two years (1925-1927), 28,572 landless and land-poor households received 917,127 hectares of arable and pasture lands through the expropriation of lands from large landowners and clergy. For example, 575 desyatins of land were confiscated from Karakum Ishan in the Chimbay district.

The form of land use, where irrigation farming with the cultivation of valuable industrial crops was practiced, was farm-based. Therefore, eliminating uneven land use in the Karakalpak Autonomous Region through land redistribution, based on the well-known Decree of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of Kazakhstan dated May 20, 1926, "On the Equal Distribution of Arable and Haymaking Lands," was impossible.

A plan for the implementation of these measures was drawn up, according to which, after the completion of the first stage of work (which was to begin on October 1, 1927, and end on January 1, 1929), land reform was to be carried out before the start of the sowing season. The second stage was planned to begin in 1929-1930 in the Chimbay and Kegeyli volosts, in 1930-1931 in the Turtkul, Shurakhan, Nukus, and Kokuzek volosts, and in 1931-1932 in the Sarybiy, Biibazar, Sheikhabbaz, and other volosts. By that time, the first stage of work had already begun in the Chimbay district (Kegeyli volost).

According to the predominant type of economic activity, the regions were divided into cotton-growing (Turtkul, Shabbaz, Khodjeyli, Kipchak) and semi-cotton-growing (Chimbay, Kegeyli, Kungrad, and Takhtakupyr). The Chimbay district also specialized in seed alfalfa production, the Tamdyn district in livestock breeding, and the Karauzyak district in livestock and trade activities, where agriculture was mainly for subsistence. In the Muynak district, fishing was the predominant industry.

There were differences in the availability of agricultural inventory, both living and dead: in the lowest group (up to 2.09 desyatins), there were 3,936 horses, or less than one horse per household, and 2,864 plows, averaging 0.1 per household. In the highest group, there were 2,204 horses, 834 plows, and 1,939

water wheels. On average, each household had more than one horse and one plow.

Attempts to implement land and water reforms in Karakalpakstan between 1925 and 1928 did not yield the expected results for the new authorities. The land management efforts enabled them to control the masses of landless dehkans by shaping a public perception of large landowners and entrepreneurs as class enemies through mass media. What were the goals of government bodies and public organizations in Karakalpakstan in the 1925-1930s? The complex crisis in villages and kishlaks hindered the authorities from effectively addressing pressing issues, frustrating party leaders and restricting their ability to establish full control over society and social processes. The economic influence of wealthy groups in villages and kishlaks also contributed to their ideological influence over other social classes. The development of agriculture and the creation of profitable farming on the periphery were necessary to strengthen the economic power of the industrial metropolis by generating revenue for the state. One of the key aspects of the attack on the "semi-feudal-capitalist elements" of Karakalpak villages and kishlaks was the struggle for the Sovietization of water and "kazu," which began in the spring of 1928 and ended in the fall of 1929. This issue was central to the socio-economic relations in the kishlaks and villages.

Under this reform, the primary criterion for allocating "kazu" was changed from the size of the irrigated land to the level of household income. Specifically, households with an annual income of less than 100 rubles were exempted from natural obligations. Those earning 200-300 rubles had to provide one worker; well-off and bai households earning up to 408 rubles had to provide two workers. Households earning over 400 rubles had to supply one additional worker per 100 rubles of income, and those earning 800 rubles or more had to supply two additional workers per 100 rubles.

Thus, the "Sovietization of water and kazu" can be characterized as a land and water reform specific to the Karakalpak Autonomous Region, accompanied by the cleansing of the party-Soviet apparatus and the rise of "belsendi" and "teperish"—terms that, in modern language, refer to the "lumpen-proletariat" of villages and kishlaks.

In the decree of the Kazakh Regional Committee dated January 11, 1930, the main agricultural regions of Karakalpakstan were identified as Shurakhan,

Shabbaz, Ktay-Kipchak, Khodjeyli, Karauzyak, Takhtakupyr, Chimbay, and Kungrad. It was noted that these regions had the necessary conditions for implementing the "policy of eliminating the kulaks as a class," such as high levels of commercial agriculture, organized farm laborers, and impoverished dehkans.

During the land and water measures, large land holdings were identified in the Turtkul district, including those of Nuraka Kaneev, Nasrullabay, Ibrahim Qazi, and Nuraziz Kazakbayev. In the Chimbay district, the list included Halmurat Begzhanov, Askarbay, Chynikul Hallekov, Kaipdarga, Khanmaksum, Karakum Hazrat, Ibrahim Adylov, Kalimbet Bai, Utemurat Bai, Khodzhimurat Bai, Temirkhan Bai, Tolybay, and Tolegen Bai. In Khodjeyli, the list included Kazakbay Sallah and Jumaniyaz Bai. Overall, it was estimated that in the Turtkul, Sheyabbaz, Chimbay, and Khodjeyli districts, there were at least 100 bais and wealthy clergy members.

The peasantry suffered the most from the brutal food policies. The authorities took grain from dehkans on credit, as they lacked goods for barter. This enraged the peasantry, which had lost hope of receiving any compensation. Since grain and livestock products were the only tradable goods in the village, the terrorized population could not resist. Officials imposed excessive punishments, crossing the boundaries of humanity.

A report by the Central Committee of the VKP(b) noted shocking abuses in Chimbay villages: "A widow from the 13th aul of the Chimbay district, Bekzada Tursunova, was forced to carry half a batman (about 8 kg) of corn in a pumpkin container on her back for 25 kilometers to a collection point while holding a nursing infant in her arms."

At a meeting of the Karakalpak Party Committee on November 10, 1930, the criteria for identifying "semi-feudal and kulak farms" were established for daily work in eliminating kulaks as a class. Middle-peasant farms were defined by a planting norm of 1 tanap per family member, ownership of 4-5 large livestock, 15-20 sheep and goats, and essential tools like 1-2 plows and 1-2 carts. Households exceeding these limits were placed under suspicion.

Wealthy agricultural and livestock farms were those with additional income sources such as trade, credit, mills, oil presses, and large-scale livestock operations. Bai traders had a turnover of at least 10,000 rubles.

Analyzing the outcomes of Soviet social policies in Karakalpakstan during the 1925-1930s, it becomes evident that the transition to agricultural collectivization in this region was premature. Initiated in 1929, this campaign lacked appropriate conditions and failed to consider both the moral and economic characteristics of the area.

In preparing for collectivization, authorities prioritized ideological aspects over economic ones. They relied on the opinions of the landless population, who were dissatisfied with the cessation of land redistribution efforts. However, in the context of the Karakalpak Autonomous Region (KAR), propaganda efforts faltered. For instance, during a party meeting on November 20, 1928, representatives from various districts, particularly from Chimbay, voiced demands for land redistribution, advocating for the seizure of fertile lands from wealthy individuals and religious figures to be given to the poor.

Moreover, the state lacked the necessary financial and material resources to implement collectivization measures. Plans were based merely on the mechanical consolidation of assets without considering public opinion or the traditional structures and relationships within Karakalpak society.

The Soviet regime also launched an offensive against the affluent classes, subjecting them to violence and repression, thereby depriving society of its foundational elements both ideologically and economically. A wave of brutal violence swept over Karakalpakstan, with political persecution primarily targeting participants of the 1929 resistance movement. As a result, 295 households were forcibly relocated.

Initially, collectivization in Karakalpakstan aimed to form various associations of land users, such as artels, communes, and cooperatives. Authorities attempted to highlight the advantages of collective farms over individual ones. Individual farmers faced excessive taxes and obligations, leaving them with little opportunity for self-development.

Thus, the years 1925-1930 were particularly challenging—a period marked by the active dismantling of traditional foundations of Karakalpak society and the rapid advancement of agricultural collectivization. This era witnessed the elimination of the wealthy and clergy as classes, their forced relocation, and the confiscation of their property. Individual farms were coerced into collective structures, leading to the communal ownership of all assets.

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