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## **Historical Sciences**

# **TO THE QUESTION OF THE STATE OF THE SOVIET PRE-WAR ECONOMY IN THE LATE 1930s – EARLY 1940s**

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### **Abstract:**

The article presents an overview of the book by E.A. Osokina, who describes in detail how the Soviet economy developed in the prewar years, during the years of industrialization in 1927-1941.

We have tried, to the best of our ability, to present the general content and some of the main thoughts of this remarkable theme. The basic idea is that the Great Patriotic War, which began in 1941, only exacerbated the deep socio-economic problems in the USSR. These are the problems associated with food and consumer goods (the so-called «consumer goods»), as well as access to the ordinary civilian population.

It turns out that the Soviet state and the government turned out to be unable to establish a full-fledged supply of food to the population in the usual peaceful years, including due to the lack of a market and for other reasons. But in the war years, the Soviet state and government turned out to be at a new administrative height, since at that time it was possible to use the administrative methods of central planning and distribution that were usual for it from above, and for this the market was not needed at all. Such an interesting historical phenomenon is described in the monograph by E.A. Osokina, the review of which is given in this article.

**Keywords:** Soviet Economy and Trade, Commodity Shortage, Card System of Distribution of Goods, Deficit Economy.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

In our article, we will try to identify and formulate the main ideas of the book, let us express what thoughts we agree with and why, and if possible we will try to develop these thoughts and give some or other interpretations of them.

First, we turn to the content, that is, the table of contents of the book by Elena Alexandrovna Osokina. The book is a doctoral monograph consisting of three main parts, which are preceded by a short story about

the book itself, as well as sections traditional for historical science: the historiography of the issue and sources.

The main parts of the book (Osokina E.A. Behind the facade of «Stalin's abundance»: Distribution and market supply of the population during the years of industrialization. 1927-1941. - M.: Russian Political Encyclopaedia (ROSSPEN), 1999. - 271 p.) are built in a strictly defined by the author chronological sequence.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study was the problem of interaction and the attitude of the Soviet authorities and the civilian population.

In the process of research, historical-genetic, historical-comparative, and historical-statistical methods were used. The work includes a detailed description of historical events, a richness of historical facts. The comparative method made it possible to identify in the activity of the Soviet state both general and specific features.

The work is fully based on the principles of historicism (consideration of the topic from the point of view of historical conditioning and development), objectivity (comprehensive analysis of historical documents and an objective assessment of the subject), unity and interrelation of the general and the particular.

In the course of the study, the method of complex analysis of historical sources, cause-and-effect analysis was applied. We also used general scientific methods - induction and deduction.

## III. DISCUSSION

The topic of the article was investigated mainly by Soviet scientists, although some of the works were translated into English. The main parts of the book (Osokina E.A. Behind the facade of «Stalin's abundance»: Distribution and market supply of the population during the years of industrialization. 1927-1941. - M.: Russian Political Encyclopaedia (ROSSPEN), 1999. - 271 p.) are built in a strictly defined by the author chronological sequence.

The first part of the work «The Destruction of the Market: 1927-1930» contains a story about a new economic policy, its curtailment and replacement with the all-Union card system. There is a story about the activities of collectivization and repression (sanctions) against private owners who could constitute «dangerous» competition to collective farms (collective farms).

The second part of the work «Market Unavoidability: 1931-35» describes the social hierarchy in the society of that time, or, as the author himself says, «in poverty», as well as coping strategies of the civilian population, which were not subject to the privileges and privileges of state officials or army. The author in this chapter also deals with the topic of industrialization of the national economy of the USSR, which formed the basis (industrial base) of the Soviet economy.

The third and last part of the work titled «Union of Distribution and Market: 1936-1941» presents a picture of Soviet trade, in which there were numerous flaws and shortcomings that sometimes monstrously changed the behaviour of all people working in the trade sector, or who have at least some either to her attitude. In fact, instead of full-fledged trade, the country received distribution mechanisms, queuing institutes and a bread rationing system. The introduction of norms for the sale of goods in one hand is also a curious socio-economic phenomenon (for example, table 11), etc., the norms for the sale of goods in open trade («kg» in one's hands).

The traditional conclusion and an interesting appendix called «Russia and the world experience of state regulation of supply» completes this monograph, as well as some thematic tables and a list of bibliographies in both Russian and foreign (English) languages are given in the text of the book.

The topic itself and the problems of the pre-war and war economy of the USSR today attract the close attention of many specialists and experts, both military and civilian history, and the economy.

## IV. RESULTS

The work we want to talk about here is the work of the authoritative in the field of history author, doctor of historical sciences, E.A. Osokina. It has a very original name «Behind the facade of «Stalin's abundance», which we cannot but say in our review. It turns out that everything seems to be in the country, and bread, and cereals, and butter, and meat, etc., but only all of this is for the elect, for the political and military elite of society and the state. The common people were, as the book says, far behind the facade of the socialist «Stalin's abundance», and did not have access to many products or had a very limited scale and quantity. It turned out some interesting socialism - socialism is not for everyone, but socialism for the elect.

The material of the book is strictly systematized, clearly verified, scientifically documented, not only literary. It also has the archival sources that has been attracted on a broad basis.

E.A. Osokina writes the following: "the purpose of this book is to show the socialist trade as it was in reality, behind the" decorative facade "of posters, advertisements, films and other propaganda that formed the myth of the well-being and even abundance that allegedly existed under Stalin among generations".

The author argues in his work that throughout the entire period of industrialization (1927-1941) the market and the private entrepreneur (whose goal is to make a profit and because of it survive in dire conditions of forced industrialization, collectivization, and repressions) did not disappear anywhere.

The market and the private entrepreneur existed, even if in a deformed state - in the form of a «black market», in the form of a «speculative market». It was the historical period of hard and centralized state distribution of goods.

It was the insane economic policy of the state, which provides only the process of forcing industrialization, gave rise (but did not exclude, as the Soviet leadership constantly proved to us) mimicry of private entrepreneurship.

Arguments of E.A. Osokina in support of her position is very weighty, since they flow from archival documents in the form of decisions of the highest party organs, decisions of the leadership of the union level, normative documents of the OGPU, Narkomtorg and Narkomsnab of the USSR, etc.

E.A. Osokina conducts a detailed analysis of letters from ordinary people (compiled by the OGPU / NKVD), correspondence between the Soviet authorities at various levels, Stalin's correspondence with Mikoyan, Molotov and other leaders of the party and the Soviet state.

As evidence of the author's position, tables of norms of special supply of various social groups (intellectual elite, foreign workers and specialists, industrial workers, children and family members of these special groups), standards for the sale of goods in open trade are given. Scary figures showing acute poverty, hunger of the majority of Soviet people, and, especially, the difficult situation the peasantry found itself in (according to some data, between 1931 and 1933, between 7 and 10 million Soviet people died from starvation, whose victims were given to the «industrial monster»).

The scientific work performed by E.A. Osokina is unique because for the first time it contains the complete hierarchy of the catering system, stores, special distributors of goods, defines their tasks and functions in Soviet society. The author works very fully and authentically on the all-Union rationing system for bread and other essential products, its official mechanism and tasks, as well as their practical application.

The paper analyses the financial situation of all social strata of the population of the Soviet state - from the worker and the peasant to high representatives of the party elite, including I.V. Stalin and his family members. It is noteworthy that the material well-being of representatives of Soviet society is also investigated in comparison with the material situation of representatives of capitalist society (Western European countries, the USA). Thanks to this, the book manages to create a rather colourful portrait of the underground millionaire socialist trade, show how these people lived, who they were in reality, how they related to the party leadership of the country, and what opportunities they had at that time.

Monograph E.A. Osokina is of a scientific nature, it reveals errors in the economic policy of the Soviet state, revealing the reasons for the total famine and mass extinction of the Soviet people. As society develops, so to speak, in a spiral, the conclusions drawn by E.A. Osokina, it is useful to take into account

when analyzing the post-Soviet economic situation in modern Russia, including even now. Therefore, the socio-economic analysis conducted by the author is very important and necessary for the development of analytical thinking of the current generation of people.

E.A. Osokina describes and analyses in detail the current socio-economic situation in the country with the supply of mass consumer goods to the population. Soviet trade, as it turns out, could not cope with the needs of the population. The population of the country was starving, there were numerous queues, and a shortage of goods was created. The free-trade system was replaced by the rationing system as its complete antipode. «The history of the Soviet food crises and the food cards accompanying them from 1936 to 1937 and 1939 to 1941 shows that the Soviet «free» trade was the sister of the card system of the first half of the 1930s».

Different relapses of the rationing system — with different norms, methods of distribution, and groups of supplies — did not leave socialist trade until the German attack. The Politburo officially introduced the cards only in July 1941, when the Great Patriotic War was already under way. Free trade and the goods distribution' card system represented different states of centralized rationing. In the first case, free trade is relatively calm. In the second case - the crisis.

In general, the whole essence of the pre-war trade of the 1930s was determined by the same economic reason (trade deficit) and general economic policy (the concentration of resources in the hands of the state and their redistribution in favour of heavy industry). With the weakening of the commodity deficit, centralized distribution was freed from the extremes of card supply, acquiring the appearance of free trade. However, the Soviet «free» trade easily gave recurrences of the card system when there was an exacerbation of the commodity deficit.

## V. CONCLUSION

The research work carried out on this topic is of undoubted practical interest and is relevant. The work has traditional sections, namely: the introduction, the main part, consisting of three parts, and the conclusion in accordance with all known requirements.

The work is devoted mainly to socio-economic issues, mainly economic, but made from a historical point of view, that is, using the methodology of historical science and has a strong analytical character. The author tries to create an alternative concept of the history of the Soviet economy of the late 1920s and 1930s, as well as to give his own interpretation of the history of the economic development of the USSR, which deserves the most serious attention from researchers.

**Strengths of the monograph.** This work contains information about the basic views on understanding the concept of early Soviet history of the 1920s and 1930s, the needs of the Soviet people of that time, and how they were met. At the same time, it gives a new understanding of Soviet economic history, associated with an understanding of the needs of the average Soviet person as an «economic man.» In this scientific work, a serious attempt has been made to revise the history of the socio-economic development of the USSR and to generalize certain new ideas based on previously known postulates.

The work is made on the current historical theme. In addition, it presents not only the author's views, but also the views of various thinkers on the understanding of human needs and mainly reveals the problems concerning the topic of scientific work. The author makes a human need for an objective or intersubjective plane, which is the scientific novelty of the work under review. Until now, as far as we know, the needs of people have always been considered only in the subjective plane as a purely subjective desire of an individual.

The work is clearly structured. It contains the correct methodology, and it is synthetic. The large number of serious and reputable sources that has been used in it, which is very representative, causes deep satisfaction.

In this form, the material submitted for review has the «format» of serious scientific work. The text of the work has the necessary and one can even say a very large number of in-text footnotes, that is, the scientific apparatus laid in such cases, and provides statistical material supporting the theses of the work.

In the reviewed work there is a demonstrative visibility, there are tables, charts, pictures, diagrams, etc. The monograph is well structured, understandably written, has sound conclusions, provides discussion and historiography of the issues presented in the work.

**Weaknesses of the monograph.** The weaknesses of this scientific work include a small use of any mathematical apparatus and mathematical methods in this economic work, and they could well be, given the current level of development of information and computer technology (ICT) in modern science. However, in general, this does not reduce the value of the submitted scientific material and its suitability for publication in the open press in the media.

According to the reviewer, this work fully reflects the original author's approach to understanding the problems presented in it, has an original and independent scientific character. This, by the way, is very well seen already from the table of contents of the work, where each subtitle and the title of a paragraph briefly contain a certain author's idea.

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