
THE ISSUE OF FOOD AND RELATED TAXATION IN TURKESTAN

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ABSTRACT: This article highlights the tax policy pursued by the soviet government in Turkestan, the difficult economic situation in region, the introduction of the food taxes during the 1917-1922 year.

KEYWORDS: Turkestan soviet power, tax policy, food taxes , rubles, razvyorstka system.

INTRODUCTION

In developed countries, taxes serve as a support for the economy. This article will discuss the taxes introduced to support the population during the famine and difficult economic situation in Turkestan.

Methods. Comparative analysis, analysis of sources, and interdisciplinary methods were used to reveal the topic. At the same time, an effort was made to illuminate the topic based on the principle of historicity, periodicity and objectivity.

Results. After the Bolsheviks seized power in 1917, one of the most pressing challenges they faced was ensuring a stable food supply. The authorities deemed the requisition of all available grain and its transfer to the state as the primary solution to this issue. With this objective in mind, the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan (MIQ) issued a decree on June 4, 1919, establishing a grain monopoly. This decree mandated the compulsory delivery of grain to the state at a fixed price . However, by 1920, several factors—such as the rigid price controls on grain, the lack of a free market, and the sharp rise in inflation—led to the destabilization of the economy. Additionally, the worsening food crisis required an urgent and systematic solution. As a result, the responsibility for food policy was transferred to the People's Commissariat of Food, and a unified food requisitioning system (razvyorstka) was introduced. By the end of 1920, 42 food procurement detachments were formed, consisting of 3,000 workers . These detachments operated by forcefully confiscating food from the population. Their actions, along with harsh distribution policies, further worsened living conditions for local residents. Unfortunately, continuous mismanagement of food policies led to repeated applications of the razvyorstka system. Eventually, in August 1921, the authorities decided to replace razvyorstka with a food tax . The abrupt transition from the razvyorstka system to food taxation further aggravated the situation in Turkestan. The region already suffered from severe shortages, making it impossible for farmers to meet tax requirements. Recognizing this, the Turkestan government decided to retain the requisitioning system until the next harvest in 1921 while gradually shifting toward food taxation . Consequently, in 1920, the Council of People's Commissars of Turkestan (XKS) reduced the overall volume of grain requisitioned . This decision was influenced by the difficulty of

delivering 16 different types of agricultural products and the lack of surplus food for taxation. On February 20, 1921, six million poods of grain were collected under the razvyorstka system. However, despite complaints from local executive committees about excessive grain demands, the MIQ of Turkestan issued a directive on April 3, calling for an intensification of agricultural product collection. This campaign was promoted under the slogans: "All industry to the food front! Everyone to food production!" These slogans were meant to encourage mass participation in agricultural production, but in reality, they forced rural communities into compulsory food deliveries. On March 21, 1921, the 10th Congress of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee (BMIQ) passed a decree officially replacing the razvyorstka system with a food tax. In accordance with this, the MIQ of Turkestan adopted a similar resolution on April 20, 1921. Although the new tax was set at a lower rate than previous requisitions, it failed to alleviate the suffering of the peasantry—on the contrary, their situation deteriorated. Authorities tried to create the illusion of fairness by freezing tax obligations on melon crops, claiming this measure was for the benefit of farmers. However, in reality, the tax burden remained oppressive. The new tax system included additional levies: 25% additional tax on all trade and industrial enterprises, as well as individual artisans. 50% additional tax on alcohol vendors. A supplementary "famine tax" of 10% on top of existing taxes. Every able-bodied citizen was required to pay a monthly tax equivalent to the price of 3 pounds of black bread. These excessive taxes caused widespread public outrage, leading to a surge in formal complaints. One such complaint came from the Kazakh-Turkish population of Ghazali district, stating: "We live in constant terror. Armed workers and soldiers raid our villages, seizing our property. Heavy, arbitrary taxes are imposed on us under the pretext of serving the 'revolution and its victims.' If they find a good horse, an expensive carpet, a fur coat, or gold and silver jewelry, they take it away. Women are frequently harassed. Famine has begun in our district, yet we receive no grain. Wheat, millet, barley, and rice transported by railway are stored in stations for Russians, while we are left to starve" On August 10, 1921, the Turkestan Council of People's Commissars (XKS) issued a new resolution titled "Methods for Calculating the Food Tax in 1921–1922." This resolution stipulated that tax collection should be adjusted according to the economic status of each household, with tax collection beginning on October 1, 1921. At the time when the food tax campaign was in full swing in RSFSR, Turkestan was only beginning to transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP). Unlike in Russia, where taxes were based on total land area, in Turkestan, they were levied only on cultivated land: 5% tax on land up to 2 desyatinas. 10% tax on land between 2–4 desyatinas. 12% tax on land between 4–6 desyatinas. 14% tax on land between 6–8 desyatinas. Additionally, in Turkestan, unlike in RSFSR, taxation included both small and large livestock, reflecting the need to secure food supplies such as meat, eggs, and dairy products. However, tax collection was often arbitrary. Authorities frequently ignored official guidelines and imposed taxes even on barren or uncultivated lands. This resulted in numerous complaints about inaccurate tax assessments and unfair taxation practices. Coercion and intimidation became common methods of tax enforcement. Between September 15 and October 15, 1922, the authorities forcibly collected: 69,000 poods of grain. 2,000 poods of meat.

CONCLUSION

In 1922–1923, the authorities planned to collect 112 million poods of food products, targeting only 16 types of goods. Of this amount, 500,000 poods of grain were sent to the front. 350,000 poods of grain were directed to Fergana. A total of 9.5 million poods of grain were collected as food tax in 1922 alone. On April 11, 1922, a new resolution on product taxation was issued, officially abolishing the razvyorstka system and fully replacing it with the food tax. However, despite these reforms, the population continued to suffer from food shortages and economic hardship.

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