

Social Image of the Ural Region Mining Workers at the Post-Reform Time Period

Imagen social de los trabajadores mineros de la región de los Urales en el período posterior a la reforma

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Summary

The article dwells upon a transition character of the Ural proletariat at the post-reform time period. Both domestic and foreign historiography define the social image of the Russian worker of the 20th century second part as either proletarian or referring to a “half-worker and half-peasant” type, combining traditional pre-capitalist features with newer ones, characteristic of industrial manufacture. A manufacturer’s being connected to the land as well as forming a certain mentality combined with the professional skills are considered the main criteria while defining the Russian workers’ typology. Taking into consideration the Urals old tradition of industrial manufacture, the process of forming an independent class at the area progressed rather vigorously. Despite of land allotments availability, workers in the Urals got under influence of modernization. Treating scornfully peasant work, industrial workers purposefully separated themselves from peasants. Nevertheless, it will be wrong to speak about complete disappearance of traditional peasant psychology among the Ural proletariat of the said time period. The working class at the region used to belong to a transition type, therefore we can speak about its incomplete establishment as a bourgeois society class.

Keywords: The Russian empire, the Urals, workers, proletariat, mining industry, daily routine.

Resumen

El artículo se centra en un carácter de transición del proletariado de los Urales en el período posterior a la reforma. Tanto la historiografía doméstica como la extranjera definen la imagen social del trabajador ruso de la segunda parte del siglo XX como proletario o refiriéndose a un tipo “mitad trabajador y mitad campesino”, combinando rasgos precapitalistas tradicionales con otros más nuevos, propios de la industria. fabricar. La conexión de un fabricante con la tierra, así como la formación de una cierta mentalidad combinada con las habilidades profesionales, se consideran los criterios principales al definir la tipología de los trabajadores rusos. Teniendo en cuenta la antigua tradición de fabricación industrial de los Urales, el proceso de formación de una clase independiente en la zona avanzó bastante vigorosamente. A pesar de la disponibilidad de asignaciones de tierra, los trabajadores de los Urales se vieron afectados por la modernización. Al tratar con desprecio el trabajo campesino, los trabajadores industriales se separaron deliberadamente de los campesinos. Sin embargo, sería erróneo hablar de la desaparición total de la psicología campesina tradicional entre el proletariado Ural de dicho período. La clase obrera en la región solía pertenecer a un tipo de transición, por lo que podemos hablar de su establecimiento incompleto como clase de sociedad burguesa.

Palabras clave: Imperio ruso, Urales, trabajadores, proletariado, industria minera, rutina diaria.

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduction to the problem

The fact whether the Ural workers were connected to the land or not seemed fundamental while defining their social image in the terms of historiography. Meanwhile, in our opinion the issue needs analysis from other angles. The point is that those ties with the land should not be looked upon as the only stratification factor on the territory of the mining Urals.

1.2. Problem relevance

The pressing need to study both social history and historical experiences of certain social groups transformation at the post-reform time period makes the article both urgent and topical. Therefore, we introduce the social image of the Ural region proletariat at the post-reform time period as an object of our attention in the course of the research.

1.3. Problem study

The district system valid till 1917 slowed down a complex and contradictory process of the Ural region mining workers becoming a special social group, which resulted in a rather complicated historiographic situation in the matter of revealing the social nature of the Ural region workers. The pre-revolutionary school historians, such as V.D. Belov, I.Kh. Ozerov (Belov V.D., 1896. Ozerov I.Kh., 1910), “new trend” representatives of the Soviet historiography such as V.V. Adamov, G.K. Guskova (Adamov V.V., 1972 Guskova G.K., 1970), contemporary Urals experts such as N.N. Alebras, M.A. Feldman (Alebras N.N., 1996 Feldman M.A., 2001) defined the social image of the Ural region workers judging by farms availability, as well as by a great desire of the workers to solve the land issue, by poorly equipped Ural enterprises and a low qualification level of the workers themselves. The workers could not therefore be referred to as classical proletariat. Meanwhile, F.P. Bystrykh and D.V. Gavrilov (Bystrykh F.P., 1963 Gavrilov D.V., 1985) regarded those workers to be typical proletariat and opposed the “new trend” historians who considered agricultural environment to have a considerable impact on the Ural region workers. While defining the workers image, they used to consider work at industrial enterprises to be more important than workers being closely connected to their land. For the European historiography, the way how much workers are connected to the land and the character of this connection are one of the main factors defining levels of class maturity of the Russian proletariat itself. Thus, M. Hildermeier, B. Bonwetsch and T. Steffens emphasized the working class of the early 20th century living “between the land and the factory”, while T. Held accented workers distancing themselves from the village and integrating further into the urban environment in the early 20th century.

1.4. Hypotheses

On the one hand, Ural used to be the Russian industrial centre with a great number of locals coming from working families; on the other hand Ural managed to preserve numerous feudal relics. These two factors stipulated for a contradictory nature of workmen’s social image within the given region, explaining the tangle of pre-capitalist features and industrial proletariat characteristics at the post-reform time period. All this influenced mining workmen’s mentality as well as their everyday life, affecting the ways of their social reflection in the early 20th century.

2. Methods

The leading methods used while working at the article are the following ones – a historical and genetic method lets us see the impact of capitalist modernization of Russia on changes in mentality as well as in everyday life of pre-revolutionary Ural district proletariat; a historical and

comparative method grants an opportunity to observe the given changes in a comparative aspect; a historical and typological method reveals the main changes in behavior stereotypes and lifestyle of people engaged in the local industry. Analyzing the development of Ural workers' social image in a broader context of Russia's capitalist transformation while taking into consideration the diversity of all corresponding changes justifies using a historical and system method as well.

2.1. Main Part

As a rule workers in the Urals did not feel like farming as they got out of that habit, thinking indulgently of peasants and their work. Workers were confident of getting a job at their factory. Their agrarian demands appeared, firstly, due to the claims the factory management were making towards workers' land allotments; workers, in their turn, were doing their best to keep the land to themselves on the base of prescriptive rights, which seemed entirely just and fair for them making their position legitimate. Secondly, the crisis rising in the mining industry made workers uncertain of their future, which, together with the paternalistic relations system of the pre-reform time period being partially destroyed, forced workers to provide themselves with land allotments as a kind of insurance against a rainy day. The financial situation at a factory determined how much workers were striving for their own land. "The worse a factory works, the more people strive for farming as a kind of insurance", said I.Kh. Ozerov. Besides, a number of workers "who had been brought up at a factory and were not used to farming, let out their land to peasants" (Ozerov I.Kh., 1910).

During the first financially steady post-reform years workers thought they could provide themselves working at a factory and therefore used to refuse from their land. In 1866 the Perm province governor declared that "work at a factory is the only means for workmen to earn their living". The Vyatka province governor said the same in 1882 thinking that "people who got used to factory environment unwillingly occupy themselves with farming" (Life Circumstances of the Ural Workers..., 1960). Workers themselves forwarded numerous petitions insisting that factory work be the only means for them to earn a decent living, while farming satisfied "only immediate wants". Clerks and authorized representatives of workers at Nizhniy Tagil factories informed: "People's life depends directly on factory work. The district workers together with their families make up the vast majority of the local population, and they will be doomed to lead a miserable life if factories close down. Providing workmen with land allotments does not solve the problem on account of, firstly, insufficient size of lots they are entitled to and, secondly, on account of poor climate and soil conditions of the region" (State Archives of the Sverdlovsk Region. Fund 24. Series 17. File 1080. Sheet 100).

In the Perm province haymaking prevailed over arable farming due to natural and climatic conditions of the region. People living at that time period did not believe farming "to be any decent means of earning a decent living in the Urals"; they considered it to be "a kind of an additional supportive means as well as a means to distract the local population from hard drinking" and to ease tension among "reckless workmen" (Mamin-Sibirjak, D. 1995). For indirect employees who were busy transporting raw materials and fuel, haymaking appeared a vital necessity for the sake of keeping horses. Factory workers considered haymaking a simple domestic need, a part of their traditional way of life, a habit, a survival component

Numerous reliable sources of that time note that in the end of the 19th century workers clearly saw themselves as a special social group and got self-identified from their close social

environment (such as peasants and factory management); workers were proud of their work at a factory and considered it their biggest priority and privilege. The records coming from the working environment constantly stress workmen's "real kinship" with obviously hard "hot" work. Izhevsk factory workers petitioned in April 11, 1885 that their generation "would belong to the factory forever" as work at a factory had always been vital for them. Foundry workers of Kamensk-Uralsky factory petitioned in November 29, 1888 about their "essential and vital need" to work at a factory. Open-hearth furnace workers of Nizhny Tagil factory said in August 1891 that their profession required not only technical skills but also proficiency and endurance as well as a conscious attitude to the production process; they resumed that "not everybody who is physically strong and has skills to work, is capable of doing our "hot" work successfully and professionally". Mr. Vinberg, the chairman of Serginsko-Ufaleysk factories association, noted that workmen's everyday life "directly depends upon a factory efficiency and productivity, not upon their land" (Life Circumstances of the Ural Workers..., 1960). In 1904 "Commerce and Industry Newspaper" carried out the research showing that "Ural workers belong to typical factory workers... they start working at a factory at the age of 15-16; they get a job at the very workshop their father and/or brother are already working, that is why we can see families of puddling furnace workers, welders, blacksmiths, locksmiths and others..." (Commercial and Industrial Newspaper.1904. November 17).

Factory workers were gradually getting out of the habit of working on land and therefore considered peasant labor unimportant. Mining workers of Krasnoufimsk district in the Perm province, for example, gave the following reasons for that: "Peasants are lucky – they sow one sack of grain and thresh two sacks". Ural legends gave an account of Peter I trying to make bast shoes. "Well, making bast shoes is the worst thing one can ever do" (Minenko, N., 1995). – these words imply contempt for the abovementioned purposeless occupation of peasants. In the 1850-60s workers demonstrated a scornful attitude to "anything peasant" and the given trend was a mass phenomenon though, at times, their disregard for peasant life went hand in hand with a kind of envy as farming made it possible for peasants "not to make anybody low bows". As V.I. Nemirovich-Danchenko claimed, families of Nizhny Tagil workers had no idea of such form of entertainment as singing and dancing in a ring: "For goodness' sake, we are not the peasants to do it!" He considered Kizel (the Perm province) workers "to have lost all peasant features and to have acquired a reputation of progressive and businesslike petty bourgeois representatives who were not simply literate but also used to read books on a regular basis" (Nemirovich-Danchenko, V., 1904).

Jean-Paul Sartre was probably right claiming that class self-consciousness appeared when a man started realizing his inability to enter a different social status.

The process of the Ural proletariat class-consciousness formation was rather contradictory and combined both old traditions and modern-day features. We agree with European historians M. Hildermeier, T. Steffens, B. Bonwetsch and T. Held who considered Russian workmen to be disposed towards rebellious strikes; we consider the given phenomenon to be the peasant psychology manifestation. The aforesaid phenomenon was exceptionally characteristic of the Ural mining region which witnessed the biggest number of violent and rebellious strikes throughout Russia. This Ural "rebelliousness" did not come from peasant influence only; it rather

came from peculiarities of the mining district system and reflected traditionalistic and paternalistic aspects of mass consciousness.

At the same time, the post-reform time period witnessed the proletariat acquiring such qualities as self-respect, yearning for prosperity and protection of their rights, professional pride, awareness of their work value. As D.N. Mamin-Sibirjak put it, in the second part of the 19th century workers valued educated and humane superiors; they longed for being independent of the factory and haymaking was also taken advantage of (Mamin-Sibirjak, D., 1995).

Workers realized their heavy life conditions but, having put up with social injustice, they tried to preserve their dignity. Workmen demanded respect, which, together with the requirement for a wages increase and introduction of 8-hour-long working day became reasons for industrial disputes in the beginning of the 20th century. E. Chshukin, a Chosovoy factory worker (the Perm province), formulated the aforesaid demand the following way (August 1903): “Mr. Foreman, you don’t have a right to beat workers” (State Archives of the Perm Region. Fund 174. Series 1. File 72. Sheet 28). Factory management representatives noted how much workers valued respect for their professional skills and human dignity. V.E. Grum-Grzhimaylo, a manager of Alapayevsk mining district, wrote that workers “demand justice and fair attitude towards them” (Russian State Historical archive. Fund 51. Series 1. File 230. Sheet 327). Stories about fair and just superiors are also characteristic of the Ural folklore.

Growing self-respect of a worker as a human who could make material values with his own hands was dwelled upon in a variety of numerous sources. A.M. Gorky described everyday life of Verkh-Isetsk factory (founded on the river Iset under Yekaterinburg in the 18th century) in his narrative “Confession” giving the following description of local workers: “They are truly independent and fearless people. They have nothing in common with wanderers and land slaves... These people are daring and though unbearably hard work has weakened them... they summon up all their strength and courage and rise against superiors in case of injustice” (Gor’kij, M., 1971). Workers themselves realized the given growth of self-respect in the end of the 19th century. In 1903 workers of Alapayevsk mountain district addressed Secretary of Agriculture and State Belongings and pointed out their highly developed self-esteem, spiritual growth and unwillingness to be controlled in any way. The Ural mining administration also considered “Ural workers to be highly independent people whose labor is hardly possible to exploit...” (Russian State Historical archive. Fund 48. Series 1. File 230. Sheet 97).

Despite the aforesaid formation trends of the Ural pre-revolutionary proletariat class consciousness (as well as Russian proletariat on the whole) one should not overestimate its maturity level. Meanwhile, T. Held and partly M. Hildermeier as well as T. Steffens and B. Bonwetsch tend to overestimate it, which contradicts their statement about pre-revolutionary Russia being significantly retrograde. Then, it is not quite clear how that “retrograde” country could give birth to “class conscious” proletariat and what could explain destructive processes in the Russian industry the given proletariat participated at upon overthrow of the monarchy.

3. Conclusion

Taking into account all aforesaid critical remarks, it appears incorrect to describe the social nature of the Ural mining workers as half-workers and half-peasants. Their image clearly includes major stratification features of the working class as it is, namely, the indissoluble connection with factory industry, identifying themselves as factory workers, distancing themselves from the close social environment despite strong day-to-day and industrial ties with it, generating such truly proletariat qualities as self-respect, professional pride and need for both self-reliance and independence. The Ural workmen's "questionable" qualities (such as conservatism, paternalism, peculiarities of work ethics, strong ties with land, settled way of life) belong to the regional and psychosocial features. As A.G. Rashin counted up, 80,7 % of the Ural metallurgists who had land allotments at their disposal came of working families, and that was not accidental. Otherwise, Soviet workers of the mining Urals should not be considered proletariat members, as many of them carried on "the old times" way of life keeping houses and land, being engaged in farming and haymaking. That is why, the social image of an Ural worker can be defined as a worker-homeowner, which results from their professional as well as everyday life peculiarities stressed by the authors of the early 20th century.

Meanwhile, the comparative-historical approach takes into consideration all local peculiarities and lets us conclude that the Ural workers are workers belonging to the transition period, that is why the nature of their social reflection has to be considered regarding the aforesaid viewpoint. Another argument in favor of the given assumption appears when we compare social psychology and social behavior of the Ural workers to those of peasants and "class brothers" from other Russian regions and the Western Europe.

Some researchers point out a great amount of peasant mentality within workmen's psychology and behavior; first of all, the given quality became apparent in similar behavior models as well as in similar political views and survival psychology. In B.N. Mironov's judgment, the mentality of most workers "stayed on the whole within the traditional peasant views which were introduced into the urban society. Other researchers note the community of qualities typical of all workers irrespective of their regional or professional nature; it was the given qualities that differentiated workers from other social groups. Yu.I. Kiryanov, in particular, stressed a number of common features typical of the Russian workers, namely, a desire for welfare and for a more comfortable "humane" life as well as an urge towards consolidation and protection of their self-respect and human rights (Kiryanov, Yu., 1997).

In general, in spite of differences in reasoning, we correlate our view on the Ural proletariat social image with V.P. Buldakov's thesis that "to wide extent, Russian workers were a transition class connected to both semi-serfdom state industrialism and semi-merchant entrepreneurship..." (Buldakov, V., 2010). It is reasonable to consider the peculiarities of the Ural mining workmen's social psychology and their social behavior on the basis of the aforesaid views.

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