



Attempts to Resolve the Food Crisis Aimed at Improving the Material Conditions of the Population in 1917–1920

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines attempts to resolve the food crisis and improve the material conditions of the population in 1917–1920. Particular attention is paid to the causes of food shortages associated with the First World War, the revolutions of 1917, the Civil War, the disruption of transport networks, and the decline of agricultural production. The study analyzes the food policy of the Soviet authorities, including the establishment of state control over food supplies, the introduction of the food dictatorship, compulsory requisitions, and the prodrazvyorstka system. The specific features of the food crisis in Turkestan and measures taken to organize centralized food distribution are also considered. The thesis concludes that although these measures temporarily contributed to supplying cities, the army, and state institutions, they failed to substantially improve the material conditions of the population and aggravated economic difficulties in rural areas.

KEYWORDS: food crisis, Turkestan, food supply, material conditions, prodrazvyorstka, food dictatorship, Civil War, agriculture, Soviet government, food requisitioning.

INTRODUCTION

The years 1917–1920 were a very difficult period politically, economically, and socially for the Russian Empire and the territory of Turkestan within it. As a result of the First World War, the revolutions of 1917, and the civil war that subsequently began, production declined sharply and the transport system was disrupted. This situation led to food shortages and the deterioration of the material conditions of the population.

Main Causes of the Crisis

- Due to the First World War, a large part of the working-age population was mobilized to the front.
- Agriculture suffered from a shortage of labor and machinery.
- The disruption of the railway and transport system made it difficult to transport food between regions.
- As a result of the civil war, cultivated areas decreased and farms were disrupted.
- Food prices increased in cities, and shortages of bread and other everyday products intensified.
- In Turkestan, drought, declining harvests, and economic instability further aggravated the situation.

Attempts to Resolve the Food Problem

After 1917, the Bolsheviks attempted to bring food supply under state control. Beginning in 1918, the policy of “food dictatorship” was intensified. Peasants were required to deliver grain and other agricultural products in quantities determined by the state.

In 1919, the food requisitioning system (prodrazvyorstka) was widely applied. According to this system, the state forcibly collected grain and other products considered surplus from peasant farms. These measures were aimed at supplying workers in the cities and units of the Red Army with food.

However, this policy caused dissatisfaction among many peasants. Compulsory deliveries had a negative impact on the development of agriculture, and peasants began to reduce production. As a result, the food problem was not completely eliminated.

The Situation in Turkestan

The situation in the Turkestan region was even more complicated. Political instability after 1917, the civil war, and the disruption of transport links caused serious damage to the food supply. The poorer sections of the population, especially the urban population, suffered severely from food shortages.

The Soviet authorities attempted to improve the situation by centralizing the food supply and organizing state warehouses and a distribution system. In some places, food committees were established, and the distribution of bread and other products to the population according to fixed norms was introduced.

The state also took measures to restore agriculture, expand cultivated areas, and increase food production. However, because the civil war continued, the effectiveness of these measures was limited.

Results

Although the measures taken to overcome the food crisis of 1917–1920 helped in the short term to supply cities, the army, and state institutions with food, they were unable to significantly improve the general material conditions of the population. On the contrary, compulsory food requisitions and economic restrictions worsened the living conditions of the rural population.

By 1920, economic decline, food shortages, and the impoverishment of the population had become serious problems. Subsequently, it became necessary to ease this policy, and from 1921 the transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP) began. The introduction of a food tax instead of prodrazvyorstka was an important step aimed at restoring the economic interests of peasants.

Conclusion

In 1917–1920, resolving the food crisis was one of the most important tasks of the state. The state attempted to solve the problem through the centralization of food supplies, compulsory requisitions, and rationed distribution. However, due to the war, economic decline, and the disruption of agriculture, these measures did not produce the expected results. The experience of this period laid the groundwork for changing economic policy in 1921 and transitioning to the NEP.

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