



**AgEcon** SEARCH  
RESEARCH IN AGRICULTURAL & APPLIED ECONOMICS

*The World's Largest Open Access Agricultural & Applied Economics Digital Library*

**This document is discoverable and free to researchers across the globe due to the work of AgEcon Search.**

**Help ensure our sustainability.**

Give to AgEcon Search

AgEcon Search  
<http://ageconsearch.umn.edu>  
[aesearch@umn.edu](mailto:aesearch@umn.edu)

*Papers downloaded from **AgEcon Search** may be used for non-commercial purposes and personal study only. No other use, including posting to another Internet site, is permitted without permission from the copyright owner (not AgEcon Search), or as allowed under the provisions of Fair Use, U.S. Copyright Act, Title 17 U.S.C.*

## Soviet Collectivisation and Its Specific Focus on Central Asia

P. Kokaisl

Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague, Czech Republic

### Anotace

Hlavním cílem tohoto příspěvku je osvětlit poměrně málo známý proces kolektivizace v sovětské Střední Asii. Cílem je ukázat specifika této kolektivizace se zaměřením na Kazachstán. Kolektivizace měla ve všech svazových republikách podobný scénář – rolníci nejprve získali půdu, aby o ni v procesu kolektivizace za několik let přišli. Chudí zemědělci, zejména ti, kterým chyběly morální zábrany, často vnímali proces kolektivizace jako svou příležitost k získání moci. Zdá se, že většina z nich neviděla, nebo nebyla schopna vidět účel změny v sociální struktuře obce, nebo především reálné záměry komunistického režimu. Jakákoli manipulativní ideologie je ve své podstatě velmi škodlivá, a její důsledky jsou obtížně odstranitelné i po dlouhé době.

Tento článek se zabývá i současnou zemědělskou transformací ve Střední Asii a ukazuje na riziko při použití necitlivých postupů používaných při další zemědělské transformaci.

### Klíčová slova

Kolektivizace, SSSR, Střední Asie, zemědělská transformace, tranzice.

### Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to illuminate the relatively little-known process of collectivisation in Soviet Central Asia. The aim is to show the specifics of the collectivisation of Soviet agriculture, using the example of Kazakhstan. The peasants were first given some land, only to have it taken away over the course of several years, during the process of collectivisation. The poor farmers, especially those who lacked good civil morals, perceived the process chance to control the future development of the countryside. It seems most of them did not see or were not able to see the purpose of the changes in the social structure of the village, or especially the real intentions of the communists. Any manipulative ideological influence on the countryside is very harmful in its effect, and the consequences are difficult to remove even after a long period of time.

This article deals with the current economic and agricultural transformations in Central Asia and demonstrates a risk for the insensitive procedures used in agricultural transformation to be repeated.

### Key words

Collectivisation, USSR, Central Asia, agriculture transformation, economic transition.

### Introduction

The aim of this paper is to illuminate the little-known process of collectivisation in Soviet Central Asia and, especially in the example of Kazakhstan, to show specifics of this part of Soviet agricultural collectivisation.

The topic of the Soviet collectivisation has been processed by a huge number of Russian authors,

but compared to evaluation of the collectivisation in other post-communist countries, in some cases there is still evident a significant ideological slant when assessing this period of Soviet history. In some cases, we can register an endeavour not to see the process of the collectivisation as black-and-white.

In the Soviet Union, literature relating to the collectivisation could be classified

chronologically into several time periods – since the 1920s and then in the Stalinist era, there appeared non-critical and ideological-free publication mentioning only positives of the carried out process. Since the 1950s, in connection with the shift of the political situation after the accession of N. S. Khrushchev to the function of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, there appeared publications that were very critical toward the Stalinist regime, including criticism of methods used during forced collectivisation. Over time, publications with the theme of the collectivisation became more moderate in criticism of the methods used. In this time period, we can include for example the publications of V. M. Selunskaya (1961) *Bor'ba KPSS za socialisticheskoe preobrazovanie sel'skogo khozyaystva (oktyabr' 1917-1934)* [Struggle of Communist Party for the socialist transformation of agriculture (October 1917-1934)] or S. P. Trapeznikov (1959) *Istoricheskiy opyt KPSS v socialisticheskoy preobrazovanii sel'skogo khozyaystva* [The historical experience of Communist Party in the socialist transformation of agriculture]. Since the 1990s, works have appeared with the theme of the collectivisation noticing the complexity of assessing this process.

For example, Osorov (2000) assessed impacts of the collectivisation on the Kyrgyz culture and claimed that the transition from nomadic life to sedentary life style is a turning point in a history of each culture, because it brings socio-economic and cultural development. Now, it appears that the culture that went through this turning point first, naturally wins. While in South Kyrgyzstan there was intensive agriculture already developed in the 2nd millennium BC and in North Kyrgyzstan since the 8th millennium BC, nomadic pasturage always remained essential. Russian colonisation during the 19th century accelerated the process of transition to a sedentary life style, but according to statistics from the year 1914, still only 21,772 of the total of 98,840 Kyrgyz families (22%) lived a sedentary life style. Collectivisation and (often forced) settlement of nomadic population was done only thanks to the formation of the USSR and the Stalinist regime. In the 1930s, there were more than 400 new villages and tens of thousands of new houses built; the process of building new roads, schools and hospitals was very fast; electrification was done; and a fight was declared against illiteracy (which reached approximately 90%). The darker sides of recent Kyrgyz history – repression of people, trials

with former owners of herds – were especially painful for herdsmen, because the freedom and at least relative independence of nomadic life were utterly incompatible with the ideology and spirit of the Soviet regime. It is ironic that the worst methods bore fruit, because Kyrgyzstan became a modern country via this process.

The topic of collectivisation in Central Asia and especially in Kazakhstan is mentioned in some works of non-Russian authors – for example A. Blum (1991), *Uncovering the hidden demographic history of the USSR*, N. Pianciola (2001), *The collectivization famine in Kazakhstan, 1931–1933* or B. H. Loring (2008), *Rural dynamics and peasant resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929–1930*.

Collectivisation in the Soviet Union had different signs, and many works focusing on concrete regions were written. For example, O. A. Nikitina (1997) described the collectivisation in Karelia (*Kollektivizatsiya i raskulachivanie v Karelii, 1929–1932* gg.); N. A. Mal'ceva (2000) wrote about the collectivisation in the Stavropol region. In terms of more fundamental works on the Soviet collectivisation, it is necessary to mention the book by N. A. Ivnickiy (2004), *Tragediya sovetskoy derevni: Kollektivizatsiya i raskulachivaniye, 1927–1939*, and the book by D. A. Alimova (2006), *Tragediya sredneaziatskogo kishlaka: kolektivizatsiya, raskulachivaniye, ssylka*.

In connection with the collectivization appear articles (from the 90s) that mention problems with de-collectivization and the transition to a market economy – here is possible to mention the paper by Kazbek Toleubayev (2010), *Knowledge and agrarian de-collectivisation in Kazakhstan* or the paper *Land reallocation in an agrarian transition* by M. Ravallion and D. van de Walle (2006), both from the World Bank Group.

## Materials and methods

Quantitative and qualitative methods are used for getting results. Quantitative data relating to statistical data on the collectivisation in Soviet Union were garnered from publications that have already evaluated the collectivisation critically and were not significantly touched by falsification or idealisation of the collectivisation processes (which is typical for many period publications). Part of the statistical data relating to Central Asia used is from the year 1930 – these data inventory

managers in *kolkhozes* in terms of their profession and education.

Qualitative data are used in the form of secondary (inferred) data from publications documenting autobiographical narration of directly interested people, as well as in the form of primary data, also with an emphasis on personal stories related to the issue. Primary data come from terrain research in Central Asia within the period of 2003–2011.

## Results and discussion

### Initial conditions of the Soviet collectivisation

After the revolution of 1905, the *commons*<sup>1</sup> (common ownership of production means with full or partial self-government) and commons equal land use were removed in Russia. Russian commons were actually feudal establishments, because it was not possible to secede from them unilaterally.

This situation changed on 9<sup>th</sup> Nov 1906, when the Russian government issued a decree establishing the allowed secession from commons. Stolypin's Agrarian Law allowed gathering all shares of commons land, whose permanent users were peasants, into a private property. The aim of the reform was to create an independent state of private farmers, while maintaining manor farm estates from old commons in the countryside. Therefore, the land intended for buyout by stronger subjects was taken from the common property – commons. The only hitch was that the best common lands had been changed to *kulak*<sup>2</sup> *otruby* (lands transferred into private property) and *khutors* (the same land but separately positioned, with outbuildings and residential buildings).

The tsarist government failed to establish individual property everywhere; until the beginning of 1917, *khutors* and *otruby* represented approximately one tenth of all peasant homesteads, especially in the northwest (in the neighbourhood of Baltic) and the south and southeast (south of Ukraine, Caucasian, central Volga). In other governorates, there remained mostly commons.

Small and poor farmers numbering around 1,200,000, who seceded from commons, sold

approximately 4 million '*desyatins*'<sup>3</sup> of allotment land to kulaks for significantly reduced prices. The government took steps to move these 'excess' peasants: when looking for land, Russia peasants often headed to very remote areas of Russia (for example, to Central Asia), but such efforts were not very successful – peasants usually returned back from new places.

The commons system was kept in different parts of Russia (and later the Soviet Union) at varying levels. While in the European part, the commons were removed (including the change of the patriarchal family) even in the mostly undeveloped areas by the 1940s, in some parts of Central Asia the commons elements remained until the disintegration of the USSR. As an example, we can mention the territory of today's Tajikistan.

The village community (*commons*) based on kinship always played a great role in Tajik Pamir and its foothills (Karategin, Darvaza, Kulyab). In Kulyab (Pamir foothills), a very special system was created, which linked together elements of commons and the *kolkhoz* system (Olimov, 1994). The region of Kulyab had very good conditions for agriculture (similar to the Leninabad region), but because of the great distance from bigger cities, business did not develop there based on the monetary relations. Another impact of the great distance from any major cities was that the lower consumption of above standard goods and the traditional way of life, including commons elements, were preserved here to a greater extent than in most other areas. In the era of the Soviet government, the commons were formally changed into *kolkhozes*, with unlimited power for the commons leader (*rais*), who was the chairman of a *kolkhoz* (and was called *bobo*, 'granddad'). Maintaining commons elements during socialism was acceptable due to the strong elements of solidarity, and, moreover, it did not threaten the stability of society. In addition, the transformation (and simultaneous partial maintenance of original elements) in the sphere of religion could be seen as curious. Under the Soviet government, a 'national' Islam with a special *adat*<sup>4</sup> formed. The Kulyabs (also Muslims by religion) just became members of the Communist Party and defenders of the Soviet ways.

---

<sup>1</sup> Common is characterized as a form of association of people, characterized mainly by a primitive communal system.

<sup>2</sup> *Kulak* (the fist) – term for wealthier independent farmer in Russian village (with acreage up to 200 ha). This social class was formed from the original uniform Russian village due to the Stolypin agrarian reform after the revolution in 1905.

<sup>3</sup> 1 *desyatina* = 1,093 ha.

<sup>4</sup> *Adat* – secular common law completing the religious right (sharia).

### Reign of J. V. Stalin

Although the tragedy and the impact of the Stalinist policy touched lives throughout society, we can notice probably the greatest impacts in the case of agriculture and rapid collectivisation, according to more or less uniform patterns applied under very different conditions within the entire Soviet Union.

Stalin's ideology came from the belief that each community is divided into opposing classes fighting each other. Stalin published these opinions in his writings in proletarian magazines in the year 1906 (in which he refers to Karl Marx, '*alliance of the bourgeoisie can only be shaken by an alliance of the proletariat*').

*...There is no doubt that the class struggle will be harder and harder. The task of the proletariat is to bring a system and organization into its fight.* (Stalin, XI. 1906)

Stalin (together with Lenin) followed the thesis of class struggle with a clear requirement for the confiscation of all lands and their transfer to those who were working on them. Land confiscation was supported by the Congress of the Communist Party in 1903 and at the Congress in 1905; unity dominated in this respect also among the *Bolsheviks* and *Mensheviks*. (Stalin, III. 1906)

After the Soviet leadership gained the power, it first assumed two ways of converting villages into socialist villages; both should mean abolition of exploitation by eliminating private farming. Both of these ways assumed formation of new economic units based on collective farming: *kolkhozes* and state farms.

Kolkhozes had already been formed as of 1917, but the 'new economic policy' program (NEP) applied beginning in 1921 and replaced the policy of 'military communism' from the civil war era, making a space for private enterprise and suspending the growth of *kolkhozes*. After 1917, cooperative enterprises existed in the following form:

- cooperative farms for collective tillage, while working tools remained in private hands of cooperative farm members;
- collectivised arable land, drawing power, agricultural inventory; right to own property related only to dwelling, crofts, big and small domestic cattle, domestic poultry;
- communes with a great degree of collectivisation including entire farmstead,

including for example poultry; revenues were divided by 'units' (Aliyeva 1973:35).

During the first post-revolutionary years, cooperative farms of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> type prevailed. Their number reached up to 18 thousand, but they were disorganised under the NEP policy.

Collectivisation in the 1920s began to take place in villages at first in the form of commune formation, to which supports from the state were promised and provided, and a campaign was led for their creation and expansion. At the same time, benefits of communal life in villages were underlined. According to the period promotional materials, communes were supposed to bring benefits to all workers, and only people using other people for day-labour were supposed to be frightened by them (Kislyanskiy, 1921).

Communes had a different character compared to *kolkhozes*. Generally, we could say that in communes there was deeper division of labour, which interfered in labour matters as well as family matters. Communes organised education of their members, arranged courses for tractor drivers, etc. However, the organisation of courses was often very chaotic. Cases of arranging course for tractor drivers without having any tractors available were documented.

In the middle of the 1920s, communes and *kolkhozes* legislatively existed side-by-side; later on farm stabling took place only in *kolkhozes* and state farms, which were formed on state fund lands, former Tsarist lands, etc.

The development of cooperative enterprises in the USSR proceeded in 1920s, but very slowly: in 1927, in the whole Soviet Union, there were 17,267 *kolkhozes* of all types, which associated just 400 thousand farms, representing only 1.5% of the total (Tragediya sovetskoy derevni... 2004).

A new offensive in founding *kolkhozes* came after the 15<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party in December 1927. The Congress declared collectivisation to be a main goal in the socialist transformation of the countryside and required the creation of production cooperatives. Despite this, all delegates who reviewed work in villages during the Congress, underlined that caution and progressiveness were important for the collectivisation. Molotov<sup>5</sup> said in his contribution: '*We need many years to proceed from individual farming to joint farming... It is necessary*

---

<sup>5</sup> Molotov, V. M. (1890–1986), Soviet politician and diplomat.



to realize that experience from the seven-year NEP existence taught us enough about what Lenin said already in the year 1919: no acceleration, no indiscretion by party organ or Soviet government in relation to peasants’.

Still in 1928, Stalin said that the farming in private hands would be the basis of the whole agricultural system. In mid-1928, there were less than 2% of all peasant farms, 2.5% of all sown areas and 2.1% of grain-sown areas in *kolkhozes*.

Nevertheless, within a year, Stalin markedly changed his opinion and decided on an accelerated rate of collectivisation. Consequences of the accelerated collectivisation came very quickly: on the all-union scale, agricultural production decreased during the first ‘Stalinist’ Five Year Plan for the National Economy of the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup>.

Mass collectivisation began in the years 1928-1929, and at first, it included small peasants and landless people. For persuasive agitating action, there were 25,000 activists, communists, called up from cities, who were supposed to persuade peasants of the benefits of joint farming. It was quite a paradox that people from cities, without any experience in rural life and agriculture, persuaded experienced peasants who had been living in the countryside often for several generations. As the factual arguments were missing, agitation degenerated into the promotion of a simple motto: ‘The one who would not enter the *kolkhoz* is an enemy of the Soviet government’. From there, it was just a small step to the mass persecution of collectivisation opponents as well as people who just doubted some of its aspects and asked for some time to think it over. Soon, methodical intimidation and violence were utilised against opponents, and the idea of forcible seizure of property and deportations of opponents arose.

<sup>6</sup> Planned for the period 1 October 1928 to 1 October 1933, officially fulfilled one year earlier.

### Creating a class enemy as a pillar of the Soviet collectivisation

In December 1929, Stalin came up with a slogan about liquidating kulaks as a class and announced that the liquidation of kulaks must become a part of establishing cooperative farms and total collectivisation.

Thus, two inseparable processes represented part of the collectivisation throughout the whole Soviet Union: establishing *kolkhozes* and liquidation of wealthier farming classes. These were divided into three categories; the criterion, even if not clearly defined, was the size of property. In Russian terminology, these were ‘*bednyaki*’ (poorest people), ‘*serednyaki*’ and the wealthiest were ‘*kulaki*’.

In Russia, in 1917, landowners had the largest land areas (41.7% of agricultural land), but they produced only 12% of all grain; *kulak* farms worked on 21.8% of lands, producing 38% of all grain, and *serednyaki-bednyaki* farms accounted for 36.5% of lands, yielding 50% of all grain (data from 1913; Kamenshchik, 2003) (table 1).

The table 1 unambiguously shows the inefficiency of big landowning farming, while the efficiency of *kulak* farming was the highest. It is a matter for discussion whether it was prudent to get rid of just *kulak* farming.

When liquidating *kulaks*, a special term was introduced, ‘*rozkulachivaniye*’ (un-*kulaking*). Un-*kulaking* should break the protest against collectivisation, and property of *kulaks* should form a material basis for the building of cooperative farms, *kolkhozes* (Kokaisl, Pargač, 2007). The total number of ‘un-*kulaked*’ farms in the Soviet Union represented 10–15% of all farms (Ivnitskiy, 2003).

When planning the liquidation of *kulaks*, *kulak* farms were divided into three groups:

1. Participants of the contra revolutionary rebellions and terror organisers: These people

	lands totally	share of yields	average efficiency
big landowners	42%	12%	29%
kulak farms	22%	38%	174%
serednyaki-bednyaki farms	37%	50%	137%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: data from 1913; Kamenshchik, 2003

Table 1: Share of different types of farming in Russia of yields and land under cultivation (1913).

were supposed to be isolated or even shot dead. Relatives were supposed to be evacuated to remote areas of the country.

2. The wealthiest kulaks: These were supposed to be evacuated into remote areas of the country together with their families.
3. Owners of smaller farms: They were able to remain in regions where they lived, but they had to move beyond collectivised villages.

Among *kulaks*, there were included peasants having two cows or two horses, or even just a better house. The category in which the peasant was included, however, also depended on skills or the good will of the apparatus. This registry was done by a so-called 'trio', formed by representatives of the village committee ('*selsoviet*'), party organisation and militia. The trio categorised residents, including the kulak. The general framework was established, but its interpretation depended on the trio.

The 'un-kulaking' included not only the seizure of property, but also the evacuation of *kulaks* and their families into predetermined regions. The policy of forced resettlement or forced migration (or deportation) had already been practiced in the Soviet Union since the 1920s; it followed the practices of the Tsarist regime, and in the 1930s it reached huge proportions. It was justified as serving 'state interests' and the 'interests of working people' (Zemskov, 2003).

While in Central Russia, *kulaks* were resettled to the north, to Siberia, a considerable number were also sent to Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and opponents of collectivisation from this region were evacuated to Northern Caucasus, Ukraine and other regions. During the two-year period of 1930–1931, 6,944 families (33,278 country people) were evacuated just from Central Asia, except for Kazakhstan (Alimova, 2006).

According to the archives of the Main Administration of Corrective-Labour Camps (GULAG) and a unit of the Ministry of Interior of Russian Soviet Socialist Republic (OGPU), during the same period of 1930–1931, 6,765 *kulak* emigrants were evacuated from Kazakhstan. Other sources mention higher numbers: between January and March 1930, 5,563 people were evacuated; in 1930, another 5,500 people, and more (Abylkhozhin, 1997). Evacuated people were relocated to the Kola Peninsula, Kolyma and Siberian regions. At the same time, groups of evacuated people from other regions of Russia moved to Kazakhstan.

The number of evacuated kulaks from particular Central Asian republics (Alimova, 2006) is recorded as follows:

- Uzbek SSR 3,500
- Turkmen SSR 1,000
- Tajik ASSR 700
- Kirgiz SSR 700
- Kara-kalpak AO 100
- Kazakh SSR 6,765

From the list of evacuated *kulaks*, it is evident that entire families, also large families, were deported, if they farmed together – so a farm owner with his wife, his married children and their children, and eventually married brothers of the farmer.

In 1930, the accelerated collectivisation was applied throughout the Soviet Union. This happened after the issuance of a document of the Communist Party, *About the pace of the collectivisation and state support to the collectivisation*.

The collectivisation pace was planned in relation to nature of the regions: in the territory of today's Kazakhstan, in Ukraine and black soil regions of Russia, it was supposed to take place over two years, and in other regions over three years.

When evaluating previous achievements of continuous performance from the first Five Year Plan at the Congress of Workers of Socialist Industry in February 1931, Stalin talked about the previous weakness of Soviet industry, which came only from scattered and small farms: *But that is behind us now, no it is different. Tomorrow, maybe in a year, we will become a state with the biggest agriculture in the world. State farms and kolkhozes, which undoubtedly belong to large economic enterprises already gave us a half of all grains this year. This means that our system, Soviet system, gives us such possibilities to move forward rapidly, which no bourgeois country can dream of* (Stalin 1931).

The first Five Year Plan ended with mass collectivisation but also with famine (even bigger than in 1921), which took millions of lives. Livestock production had fallen down to 65% of the level from 1913; the number of horses, sheep, goats and poultry decreased by more than a half.

The Soviet collectivisation was also not accepted without reservation. In 1930 alone, there were 14 thousand rebellions, demonstrations and violent actions registered against the Soviet regime, attended by approximately 2.5 million inhabitants.

The most significant protests took place in the peripheral areas of the USSR: the *Basmachi* rebellion in the Central Asia, Altai rebellion, and rebellions in Chechnya, Taymyr and Kazakhstan.

It is very difficult to use a single instance as an example of a 'typical' collectivisation in the Soviet Union, because its implementation could vary greatly within particular regions of one federal republic.

The most well-known instance related collectivisation is probably the Ukrainian famine of 1932–1933, which peaked in early 1933 and directly or indirectly caused the deaths of 4–7 million people. Today it is almost impossible to determine the real cause of the famine based on Soviet statistics; according to these statistics, the total crop yield was higher in 1932 than in 1930 and 1931, which does not correspond to testimonies of witnesses. It is certain that an explosion of Ukrainian nationalism certainly played a role, and which Stalin wanted to break decisively; and another element may well have been the reluctance of peasants to work in the fields, when they had no opportunity to use the crop grown and were forced to sell grain to the state for absurdly low prices. At any rate, the system of compulsory (often un-realisable) contributions was a very effective tool to eliminate opposition to the collectivisation.

Much less is known about the collectivisation in Kazakhstan, except that very similar methods were used in collectivisation there.

### **Kazakh tragedy**

Although collectivisation throughout Central Asia was carried out under similar scenarios, it had the most terrible consequences in Kazakhstan.

As in other places, in Kazakhstan, collectivisation proceeded as an enactment of class struggle, in which society had to deal with a class enemy, represented by village farmers and every peasant who was not immediately willing to give up his property on behalf of the collective. That is why the collectivisation proceeded in an atmosphere of fear and violence and deportations of those who did not want to accept its principles.

Under the Kazakh conditions, it was a liquidation of the *kulak* class (big land owners) and family and tribal leaders: agriculture was ruined; there was a famine; people escaped beyond the Union Republic or even the USSR, especially to China. Opponents were largely imprisoned, and participants and

organisers of the resistance received judgements of death. The mass emigration of the population also resulted in a population collapse. Another feature was the forcible settlement of nomadic herders into *kolkhozes*, and the destruction of their traditional way of life.

The aim was to stimulate the Kazakh nomadic commune and destroy social differences. Part of the transformation was supposed to be the conversion of nomadic shepherds to settled agricultural way of life. Particular pastoral families (and so single families) had no stable areas intended for grazing. In the territory of today's Kazakhstan, there had been three tribal states (*orda*, *jüz*) since the late 17<sup>th</sup> century headed by hereditary khans with subordinated sultans. After building up the Russian administration since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian governor of Western Siberia confirmed *volost mayors* and aga-sultans to manage particular regions. Aga-sultans generally came from the strongest, but in many cases rather from the wealthiest family. Aside from juridical and executive power, he also determined which way particular families would migrate to summer grazing and in what order. Kazakh nomadic commons had in some respects a similar structure to commons formed among settled peasants in other parts of Russia – this similarity consisted in a relatively high degree of autonomy within a common. Differences related to the extent of disposition of owned property; that was not related to real estate in the case of nomadic herders, while settled peasants had their houses and outbuildings under their full control.

Dramatic changes in the Kazakh countryside began in the middle of the 1920s and are imputed to the ultra revolutionary methods of the former secretary of the Communist Party, F. I. Goloshchyokin<sup>7</sup>. After ascending to the function in 1925, he declared the intent to transform an '*aul*' in the revolutionary way to socialistic '*aul*'. One element of the 'Little October' was to remove all politicians who disagreed with the Goloshchyokin's intentions from their positions. The Little October attack was led against party opponents as well as against members of national intelligence, which demanded stopping arrivals of new immigrants. Goloshchyokin routinely had political opponents removed from their functions, beginning in 1928;

---

<sup>7</sup> F. I. Goloshchyokin (\*1876–†1941). Like the vast majority of top representatives of the Central Asian Soviet republics, he was kept in prison and executed during the Stalinist cleansings.



he had been sending them to jail as followers of so-called 'national deviation'.

Arable lands and pasture lands were re-designated. According to the decree of 21<sup>st</sup> August 1928, property of wealthy farmers and Beys<sup>8</sup> was liquidated. Farmers were deprived of approximately 1.36 million *desyatins* of meadows used for hay crops; these were given to small- and middle-size peasant farm. None of this produced the expected results. As these farmers did not have any cattle, they could not use the land they received, so often such lands were given back to the original owners.

The other step was a confiscation of properties of Beys, owners of numerous cattle herds. Around 145,000 head of cattle owned by 700 big farmers were distributed among small owners. Simultaneously, big farms were burdened with high taxes (Taukenov, 2002).

The collectivisation proceeded so rapidly that even its organisers were not able to manage it, let alone have it be understood by its subject, the peasants. As of 1928, 2% of farms were collectivised; as of 1<sup>st</sup> April 1930, this number was 50.5%; in November 1931, it was approximately 65%. Some regions even exceeded this average: for example, in Ural and the Peter-Paul circle of the Ural region, 70% of property was collectivised, and as of the autumn of 1931, the republic had 78 districts (of 122) in which 70–100% of farms were collectivised. Although the former public officials sowed optimism regarding the quantitative side of the action, there is a more and more evident slump in the economy (Abylkhozhin, Kozybaev, Tatimov, 1989).

According to Goloshchyokin, the changeover from nomadic to a settled way of life could not be managed without sacrifice. That is why he considered necessary the concomitant circumstances that liquidated Kazakh agriculture, resulting in a radical decline in livestock, not compensating losses of efficient agricultural production, food shortage and starvation among the population. Goloshchyokin did not respect Kazakh cultural and economical traits and assumed that economic development must take place here the same way as in other union republics. He exaggerated the level of the 'class struggle' in Kazakh *aul* in the belief that it could not be otherwise in the environment

---

<sup>8</sup> Beys possessed juridical power. The position was not heritable, although good material conditions and connections were preconditions for transferring the position.

of semi-feudal social relations (Abdakimov, 1994).

Collectivisation preceded the crisis in grain production. In 1927, there were 430 million puds of grain (1 pud = 16.38 kg) harvested; in 1928, the harvest was only 300 million, and sown areas were reduced, because the state purchase prices were three times lower than market prices. Managing administration made every endeavour to strengthen grain resources; in this respect, kolkhozes were supposed to help. A broad campaign proceeded for meat and wool production, which led to the massive slaughter of cattle. In winter of 1930, another campaign was implemented for wool supplies, so there was high sheep mortality due to freezing. At the same time, the number of cattle continued to decrease rapidly.

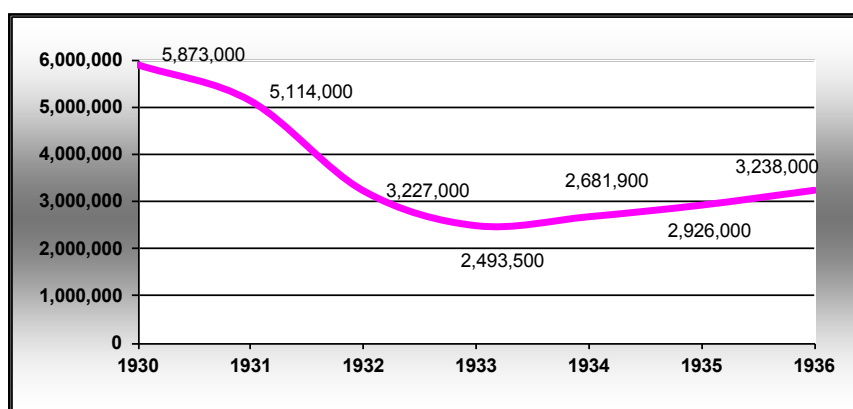
### **Hunger, population dying**

Data on the number of victims of hunger vary. Masanov (2001) reported a 1.798 million drop in population, which represented 46.8% of the total Kazakh population in 1930. However, we must interpret such numbers as including people who left the country, were evacuated, deported or nomadised out of the republic. Nonetheless, according to other data, hunger took a big toll on the population: according to the population census in the year 1926, 3.628 million local Kazakh people lived in the territory of today's Kazakhstan and in 12 years, that number decreased by 1.321 million people (36.7%) (Tatimov, 1968).

According to data from the Central Office of Economic Records USSR, in 1932, the number of Kazakhstan inhabitants decreased from 5.873 million down to 2.493 million, among which 1.3 million people emigrated.

Realisation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party policy and policy of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party in Kazakhstan in the sphere of collectivisation brought enormous human and economic losses. It led to a reduction of the cattle population from 40 million to 4 million, which caused a famine and migration of a large number of people from this Federal Republic. This exodus was triggered by fear of the future, hunger, poverty and disruption of the economic and social bases of all spheres of life.

Bands of hungry people filled the cities of Alma-Ata, Tashkent and Bishkek. Mortality and emigration in this era were high in all groups of the population in Kazakhstan: Russians,



Note: Alexeyenko, A. N., Masanov, N. E. *Migracionnyye i etnodemograficheskiye procesy v sovet-skiy period...*, p. 376

Source: chart made by the author of this study

Chart 1: Population development in Kazakhstan in the years 1930–1936.

Ukrainians, Uyghurs, etc. However, in the case of Kazakhs, both these indicators were the highest, due to forced sedentarisation. The chart 1 shows demographic trends.

The eastern part of Kazakhstan (today's East Kazakh region) was the most famine-affected region. The population here declined by 370.8 thousand people (63.5%). A large number of migrants headed to neighbouring China and to border regions of RSFSR (Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic). The total population in Kazakhstan decreased from 5.8 million in 1930 to 3.2 million in 1936. During the period of 1930–1933, the population decreased by 2.4 times due to deaths and emigrations. One quarter of Kazakhstan's population (1.03 million people) nomadised from Kazakh steppes to neighbours or abroad (China, Mongolia, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey). From this number, 616,000 people moved permanently, and 414,000 people returned later. Among the permanent migrants, 200,000 people moved abroad: from southern and eastern areas to China, Mongolia, Afghanistan; from western areas to Turkey and Iran; from northern areas to Russia.

In the neighbouring republics of the Union, the number of Kazakhs increased significantly during this era: 10 times in Kyrgyzstan, 7 times in Tajikistan, 6 times in Turkmenistan, 1.7 times in Uzbekistan and 2.3 times in the RSFSR (Tatimov, 1968).

Respondents in Kyrgyz Bishkek (in 2007) mentioned that in the 1930s whole families starved to death who had come from Kazakhstan and were looking for some Kyrgyz help. Some of them

were dying from hunger and the consequences of the distressing journey, others managed to settle there. Even in 2007, many Kazakhs lived in Bishkek.

### Assessment of the Soviet collectivisation

The Soviet collectivisation resulted in many millions of uprooted people during collectivisation mismanagement. During the first years of the collectivisation, there was a huge decline in agricultural production and an inability to feed the population. The thesis of class struggle during the collectivisation provided the tools for dealing with opponents of the Soviet regime and potential political opponents in the highest places of the republic bodies of the Communist Party.

The Soviet collectivisation also brought certain positives. Among these positives, the elimination of the feudal order, reducing hand labour share by the introduction of mechanisation: according to the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, in 1928, cattle ensured 96% of energy sources for use in farming; in 1932 this number decreased to 77.8%. The efficiency of farming also eventually increased.

Table 2, which presents data taken from the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia*, quite convincingly demonstrates the success of collectivisation based on quantitative data. These figures are, however, regularly missing the period of 1923–1928, because in this period, production was so high that it would completely overshadow the image of successful collectivisation (Kamenshchik, 2003).

The established *kolkhozes* gradually gained a considerable social function in many places,

years	1900–1904	1905–1909	1910–1914	1928–1932	1933–1937
yields q/ha	7.0	6.6	7.3	7.5	9.1
Total grain production (mil. q)	563.8	566.8	675.6	735.9	944.7

Source: Great Soviet Encyclopaedia

Table 2: Production and grain yields in Russia and USSR in 1900–1937.

because they provided livelihood and fulfilled social and cultural functions: building schools, libraries, securing the sale of goods and transportation even in very remote areas.

### Post-Soviet era

Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 1990s, the agriculture went through another post-communistic transformation, this time to privatisation. Again, a quite insensitive process was chosen, and during the privatisation, rather than transformation, the functioning system was damaged, again followed by a rapid decrease in production and the number of animals bred.

Especially in some Union republics, *kolkhozes* were bound very closely to people from specific villages, and they had a significant social function that was completely lost with their abolition. In Soviet Central Asia, the agricultural sector played and still plays a big role, and in areas with specific weather conditions, in extensive pastoral livestock husbandry in particular. Pastoral livestock husbandry always significantly affected the whole culture, both in its material and spiritual parts. When the agricultural transformation was performed, however, significant changes were carried out. Former large farming units (*kolkhozes*, state farms), which had a significant social function in addition to agricultural production, fell apart. Families (together with other relatives), which had partially undertaken the social function previously belonging to *kolkhozes* and state farms, became a basic production unit. The family institution also went through changes, but in many respects, the patriarchal nature remains.

In pastoral farming methods, animals began to be grouped into herds again, grazed by *chabans* for themselves and their relatives. The hiring grazing method resumed, where *chabans* graze animals for people other than their relatives as well (Kokaisl, Pargač, 2006).

On the one hand, in post-soviet republics, there was evident inevitability of the privatisation in the agricultural sector, because of the transformation of the entire national

economy and its transformation to the market economy. These all-society changes concerned the entire system including agriculture. On the other hand, under the slogans of the transition from the centrally planned economy to free market economy, agricultural enterprises were privatised quite at a flat rate, regardless of their economic results and interests of their employees or management of such enterprises.

Situation in Tajikistan is a good example of an extremely bad transformation. Privatisation took place entirely according to recommendations by the world's most influential financial institutions, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. However, these recommendations very often came from one universal pattern and took very little notice of the socio-economic particulars of each region, or even of entire countries. The uniform character of privatisation recommendations were common to African as well as Latin American and Asian states, and also for states facing problems of post-socialist transformation. In effect, the given recommendations were commands, because states that did not follow them could not obtain loans and financial resources they needed for their development. For this reason, they were trying to get a positive assessment and present statistical data documenting the rapidly declining number of state and semistate enterprises. This indicator tends to have a greater value as a criterion of transformation success. The methods and impact of the privatisation are considered rather as marginal issues.

These matters were nonetheless fully relevant for the Tajik agriculture. The number of *kolkhozes* and state farms rapidly declined, from 348 down to 152 (44% of the original number) state farms, from 387 down to 185 (48% of the original number) *kolkhozes*, and from 13 down to 6 (46% of the original number) large agricultural companies during the period of 1996–2002 (Sel'skoye khozyaystvo... 2003).

The mentioned figures, however, do not highlight the full loss of the state farms that (as a state property) were subjected to obligatory privatisation,

	Minimum (2004-2006=100%)	Year	Maximum (2004-2006=100%)	Year	Current production (1992=100%)
Kazakhstan	61.65	1998	144.86	1992	98%
Kyrgyzstan	65.81	1995	108.33	2011	128%
Tajikistan	56.81	1999	129.88	2011	151%
Turkmenistan	42.75	1996	117.97	2007	184%
Uzbekistan	74.78	1996	134.14	2011	165%

Source: FAOSTAT database, FAO Statistics Division 2013

Table 3: Minimum, maximum, and current percentage of agricultural production from 1992 to 2012.

because many of them showed a very high degree of economic efficiency.

In the case of *kolkhozes*, the situation was different. Even though principles of common decision-making and *kolkhoz* property ownership in Soviet era were often only formalities, the state (sovereign post-Soviet Tajikistan) did not have a legal right to decide about their flat-rate liquidation. The decision of the state to restructure *kolkhozes*, which in fact meant their absolute liquidation, was just such a state intervention, which made it completely impossible to apply the property rights of members of *kolkhozes*. The state progression was justified by the state effort to increase production efficiency and reduce government expenses, which would be sent to the social sphere, but after some time it is more evident that even these partial goals remained largely unfulfilled. On the contrary, now it is evident that many *kolkhozes* were pioneers in the effort to introduce market principles into their economy even in the Soviet era and worked completely without any state grants; these *kolkhozes* significantly contributed by their own production into the state budget.

The table 3 (FAOSTAT database, FAO Statistics Division 2013) shows the percentage of agricultural production from 1992 to 2012 (Index 2004–2006=100). From to this table, it is not apparent at first glance that the fastest and deepest agricultural transformation after the collapse of the USSR was conducted Kyrgyzstan and that by contrast transformations in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan took place the slowest among all the Central Asian states. Turkmenistan, of all Central Asian states had the largest decrease in production, while on the other hand the smallest is seen in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan, a country with the fastest reforms, has a fall in production that was not as big as that in Turkmenistan, but current production compared to 1992 is only 20% higher. Kazakhstan has a current agricultural production even lower than in 1992,

but it is the only Central Asian state that is food-self-sufficient.

## Conclusion

During the socialistic transformation in the USSR, first peasants obtained land allocations, just to lose it several years later during the collectivisation. All the poorer farmers, especially the ones with not really good morality, felt it was their chance to influence the future of the countryside.

Intensified class struggle was programmatically controlled from higher positions in the state, within which forced agricultural collectivisation had also been carried out, resulting in the destruction of political opposition (in some cases also potential opposition). In the countryside, the poor lacked land and small farmers, owners of minor lands, hardly big enough to feed their own families, were punished for having what they did. In many places, hateful attitudes of poorer rural classes were reinforced by the superior behaviour of rich landlords toward poor rural people. Human envy together with poverty also contributed.

Another feature of the Soviet collectivisation was haste and absurdity in establishment and management of cooperative farms as well as, under the guise of the class struggle, a liquidation of the highest party and state representatives, who threatened or could threaten the governing group.

The main problem was a total lack of trained personnel who would be able to lead the newly created large farms. It was evident that collectivisation makers took too big a bite, which was clearly beyond their capabilities. In this phase of the collectivisation, the poorest social groups were less painfully affected but at the same time, this group was least qualified.

Groups that suffered a painful loss of property largely lost any motivation to further engage

in transformation steps, and for ideological reasons their involvement in management of emerging *kolkhozes* was refused. *Kolkhozes* could not be led by the former exploiters, but only by people with a good relation to the new order.

Remedies to injustices caused by the Soviet collectivisation began almost immediately after Stalin's death. Over the course of three years, approximately ten thousand political prisoners were released in the Soviet Union; after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the door was opened to relative freedom and rehabilitation for several million others, although some unjustly convicted people had to wait for full rehabilitation until the 1980s or 1990s.

It took several decades before the transformation of cooperative farms developed into prosperous firms led by qualified people. With the benefit of hindsight, we can say that large-scale farming has considerably higher competitiveness compared to small, fragmented farms. This fact was also accepted by those who were personally affected by the forced collectivisation.

Establishing cooperative farms would be clearly beneficial if it was done on a voluntary basis and based on the real needs of farming peasants. However, using disorganised and violent methods when establishing socialistic cooperative farms necessarily took a big toll on the populace and

the economy: transformation shock together with a huge drop in production, breaking up many families and eradicating entire cultures. These negative phenomena could have been avoided by using more sensitive initial practices.

Statistical data from *Food and Agriculture Organization* shows that in the case of the Central Asian republics, none of the transformation methods can be retroactively designated as the best. Countries that implement a quick-shock agricultural transformation in a relatively short period of time involving large ownership changes, including significant changes in the structure of crops, gained no advantage. After twenty years, their agricultural production is comparable to the production states that performed agricultural transformation significantly more slowly.

It turns out that any violent or rapid implementation of reform is very damaging, and these after-effects cannot be removed even after a long time; often it is a matter of multiple generations. It is a pity that the initiators of reform often do not learn from past mistakes, resulting in hastiness and insensitivity in implementation.

## Acknowledgements

This article is the result of solved grant project P404/11/1830 (Czech Science Foundation).

*Corresponding author:*

*doc. Ing. PhDr. Petr Kokaisl, Ph.D.*

*Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences in Prague,  
Kamýčka 129, Prague 6, 16521, Czech Republic*

*E-mail: kokaisl@pef.czu.cz*

## References

- [1] Abdakimov, A. *Istoriya Kazakhstana*, Almaty: RIK, 1994, ISBN 5-8380-1432-6.
- [2] Abylkhozhin, Z. B. *Ocherki social'no-ekonomicheskoy istorii Kazakhstana* Almaty, 1997, ISBN 978-5-7667-4636-2.
- [3] Abylkhozhin, Z. B., Kozybaev, M. K., Tatimov, M. B. *Kazakhstanskaya tragediya, Voprosy istorii*, 1989, № 7.
- [4] Alimova, D. A. *Tragediya sredneaziatskogo kishlaka: kolektivizatsiya, raskulachivaniye, ssylka*, Tom II, Tashkent: Shark, 2006.
- [5] Aliyeva, S. A. *Razvitiye kolkhoznogo prava v Uzbekistane*, Tashkent: FAN, 1973.
- [6] Blum, A. *Uncovering the hidden demographic history of the USSR*, *Population today*, 1991, 19 (7–8), pp. 6–8, ISSN 0749-2448.



- [7] Ivnickiy, N. A. *Sud'ba raskulachennykh v SSSR*, Moscow: Sobranie, 2003.
- [8] Kamenshchik, A. "Cifry – khoroshaya veshch'", *Gazeta Duel'*, 1. 4. 2003, № 13 (301).
- [9] Kislyanskiy, S. S. *Komu vygodna komuna i kto yeyo boitsya*, Moscow: 1921, 15 p.
- [10] Kokaisl, P., Pargač, J. et al. *Pastevecká společnost v proměnách času: Kyrgyzstán a Kazachstán*. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2006, 292 p., ISBN 80-7308-119-9.
- [11] Kokaisl, P., Pargač, J. et al. *Lidé z hor a lidé z pouští: Tádžikistán a Turkmenistán Střípky kulturních proměn Střední Asie*. Prague: Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, 2007, ISBN 978-80-7308-167-6.
- [12] *Kollektivizaciya i klassovoe rassloenie kishlaka i aula sredney Azii*. Tashkent: Sredne-Aziatskoe byuro CK VKP(b), 1930.
- [13] Loring, B. H. Rural dynamics and peasant resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929–1930, *Cahiers du Monde Russe* 2008, 49 (1), pp. 183–210, ISSN 1252-6576, E-ISSN 1777-5388.
- [14] Masanov N. E. *Istoriya Kazakhstana. Narody i kul'tury*, Almaty: Dayk-press, 2001, p. 376.
- [15] Mal'ceva, N. A. *Ocherki istorii kollektivizatsii na Stavropol'e*. Stavropol': Stavpress, 2000. ISBN 978-5-924530-21-6.
- [16] Nikitina, O. A. *Kollektivizaciya i raskulachivanie v Karelii, 1929–1932 gg*, Petrozavodsk: Periodika, 1997, 219 p., ISBN 5-201-07839-7.
- [17] Olimov, M. "Ob etnopoliticheskoy i konfessional'noy situatsii v Tajikistane i veroyatnosti mezhetnicheskikh konfliktov", *Vostok*, 1994, № 2.
- [18] Osorov, Z. "Myths and Survivals of Nomadic Past", *Kyrgyzstan Times*, September 28, 2000.
- [19] Pianciola, N. The collectivization famine in Kazakhstan, 1931–1933, *Harvard Ukrainian studies* 2001, 25 (3–4), pp. 237–251, ISSN 0363-5570.
- [20] Ravallion, M.; Walle van de, D. Land reallocation in an agrarian transition, *Economic Journal*, 2006, 116 (514), pp. 924-942, ISSN 0013-0133, E-ISSN 1468-0297.
- [21] Stalin, I. V. "Klassovaya bor'ba", *Ahali Droeba (Novoe Vremya)*, № 1, 14 noyabrya 1906 g.
- [22] Stalin, I. V. "O zadachakh khozyaystvennikov. Rech' na pervoy Vsesoyuznoy konferentsii rabotnikov socialisticheskoy promyshlennosti, 4 fevralya 1931 g", *Pravda*, № 35, 5 fevralya 1931 g.
- [23] Tatimov, M. B. *Letopis v cifrach*, Alma-Ata, 1968.
- [24] Taukenov A. S. "Antisovetskie vooruzhennye vystupleniya v Tsentral'nom Kazakhstane (1930–1931 gg.)". *Mezhdunarodnyy istoricheskiy zhurnal*, 2002, № 17.
- [25] Toleubaev, K.; Jansen, K.; Huis van, A. Knowledge and agrarian de-collectivisation in Kazakhstan, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, Volume 37, Issue 2, 2010, pp. 353–377, ISSN 0306-6150, E-ISSN 1743-9361.
- [26] *Tragediya sovetsskoy derevni: Kollektivizaciya i raskulachivaniye, 1927–1939, Tom I*. Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2004, ISBN 5-8243-0006-2.
- [27] Zemskov, V. N. *Specposelency v SSSR. 1930–1960*, Moscow: Nauka, 2003, ISBN 978-5-02-008855-9.