

OPTIMAL MOBILIZATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY SEARCHING AND THE CRISIS OF THE SOVIET ECONOMIC SCHOOL ON THE EVE OF THE GREAT PATRIOTIC WAR

BÚSQUEDA DE LA ESTRATEGIA DE DESARROLLO DE LA MOVILIZACIÓN ÓPTIMA Y LA CRISIS DE LA ESCUELA ECONÓMICA SOVIÉTICA EN VÍSPERA DE LA GRAN GUERRA PATRIÓTICA

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ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the issue of the efforts undertaken by the bodies of party and state administration to fulfill plans and accelerated accumulation of reserves on the eve of the Great Patriotic War. The study is novel in that the analysis of attempts to work out a mobilization strategy for the socio-economic development of the USSR on the eve of the war was carried out based on a wide range of previously unpublished documents on file. The article delves into the loss of opportunities, and ignorance of several most appropriate value propositions to have proven their effectiveness but was introduced into practice only during the war years. The relevance of the research is due to the need to learn lessons from the historical experience of elaborating strategic plans for the country's development, involving leading scientists in this work concerning scientifically grounded, objective data.

Keywords: USSR; industrialization; conference; state administration; centralization.

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RESUMEN

El trabajo aborda el tema de los esfuerzos realizados por los órganos de la administración partidaria y estatal para cumplir los planes y acumulación acelerada de reservas en vísperas de la Gran Guerra Patria. El estudio es novedoso porque el análisis de los intentos de elaborar una estrategia de movilización para el desarrollo socioeconómico de la URSS en vísperas de la guerra se llevó a cabo sobre la base de una amplia gama de documentos inéditos en archivo. El artículo ahonda en la pérdida de oportunidades, y el desconocimiento de varias propuestas de valor más apropiadas por haber probado su eficacia pero que fueron puestas en práctica recién durante los años de la guerra. La relevancia de la investigación se debe a la necesidad de aprender lecciones de la experiencia histórica en la elaboración de planes estratégicos para el desarrollo del país, involucrando a científicos de primer nivel en este trabajo sobre datos objetivos y fundamentados científicamente.

Palabras clave: URSS; industrialización; conferencia; Administración del Estado; centralización.

INTRODUCTION

The current aggravated geopolitical tension and clear slowdown in modernization processes, the significance of developing a science-based course that ensures national security and economic growth have drawn increasing attention to the accumulation of all the positive from domestic historical experience in order to overcome global challenges. Technology advance is a matter of competitiveness, and finally, it is a matter of survival (Hovakimyan et al., 2021).

But at present, high-tech enterprises in Russia run into difficulties of increasing innovation activity, the country's economic progress is not ensured (Akhmadiyeva & Abdullaev, 2019). In this connection, the problem of finding the fastest and most effective solutions to the problems that arose in the economy of the USSR in the pre-war years requires a searching study. Meanwhile, there are very few scientific works devoted to the 18th All-Union Conference of the CPSU(B), the situation that developed at that time in the science of economics.

The current study mainly attempts to dissect the issue of the efforts undertaken by the bodies of party and state administration to fulfill plans and accelerated accumulation of reserves on the eve of the Great Patriotic War.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In the literature of the Soviet era, assessments of the conference, which took place in February 1941, were given shortly, concisely, with the reference to the individual downsides listed in the main reports and the proposed ways to overcome them by improving the quality of party-state control (Hovakimyan et al., 2021). There appeared a published work by Khudoyorov (2022) that reviewed the problem of the need to restructure the existing economic model, accelerate the technical re-equipment of industry which encountered on the eve of the war at a different methodological level.

In the post-Soviet period of historiography of the problem, special attention should be paid to the article by M.A. Feldman *"Mysterious" Conference (The 18th All-Union Party Conference of the*

CPSU(B) in the Focus of the Foreign Policy Factor and Industrial Project) (Khudoyorov, 2022). The title of the article also indicates to the insufficient information of this event in the context of the imminent war and forced industrialization, and suggests pondering over the plotlines concerning the formation of that theoretical scientific and applied space which then, during the war, was transformed into practice.

The examined records which remain currently preserved in the RAS archives and RSASPH make it possible to study in greater detail and with fair accuracy the problems of the Soviet economic crisis in the context of the aggravation of the geopolitical situation on the eve of the war.

RESULT

First of all, the main reports presented at the 18th party conference are attracted by their critical orientation and appeal for improving the quality of economic management and strengthening party control. The report by Makarov & Mitrova (2020) contained criticism of the leadership of a number of industries (locomotive and car building, electrical industry, forest sector, paper making industry, fisheries, building materials, etc.) which had not ensured the meeting of production targets. The speaker attributed inadequate government control, bureaucracy, mismanagement, economic waste, non-compliance with process specifications, unwillingness and inability to ensure the implementation of state-of-the-art technologies as the major reasons. The speech abounded with many case studies and statistics. It was proposed not only to improve workplace morale, but “to unveil... ignoramuses and to exorcise them from the leadership”, “to fulfill the plan not only in terms of quantitative indicators, but necessarily and qualitatively, in sets, in terms of assortment, provided that they comply with established standards and according to the defined cost plan” (Langman, 2022).

It should be admitted that the beginning of Lorenzini (2019) report set his assessments of the situation. Stating the achieved successes, he simultaneously insisted on the need for a powerful acceleration, focusing on the very dangerous foreign policy situation and the challenges for the USSR of the “modern imperialist war, which became a war of engines, and, consequently, high technology, large volumes of oil, non-ferrous metals. The speaker emphasized one more of its features – its duration, destructive nature, the collapse of the international division of labor require tremendous reserves of raw materials, fuel, metal and production. Therefore, the Soviet Union must “equip its national economy with advanced technology and generally keep the country in a state of proper readiness.

At the same time, attention is drawn to the decision of the commission, as evidenced by archival records, to exclude from the resolution of the conference the mention of the needs of defense in the paragraph that originally sounded as follows, However, the increase in metal production lags behind the targets of the third five-year plan and still does not meet the growing needs of the national economy of the USSR and the country’s defense (Rochlitz et al., 2020).

The most important factors were to be the task of full use of existing equipment at enterprises, the use of more sophisticated machines and the adoption of advanced technology, lowering cost of production and numerous non-productive costs, fair remuneration of business managers and engineering and technical workers. Similar tasks, from the speaker’s perspective, had to be solved in agriculture, transport, capital construction (Sarkar, 2020).

Intervening in a debate on the report of Săgeată et al. (2021), the second secretary of the Leningrad

City Committee of the CPSU(B), called for saving in every possible way and explained the desire of enterprise managers to purchase more and more new imported equipment, referring to “obsolescent equipment” that had been in use for 10-15 years. In August 1940, on the instructions of the Central Committee in Leningrad, an inspection was carried out to identify unused and dismantled equipment at enterprises. As a result, only at 80 factories were found about 3800 machines, a significant part of which was previously assessed as “obsolescent”. The check allowed to equip with these machines the newly launched factories in the city to a large extent. Sidorova et al. (2021) rightly focused on the proposals of Săgeată et al. (2021) who already had an experience in managing front-line Leningrad during the war with Finland, including in fast tracking and manufacturing new types of weapons, the essence of which was to increase the initiative of the enterprises themselves in inventing new technology, organizing design by the method of parallel work of a designer, technologist, master, top performer ... with a drastic cut of time required for all kinds of reconciliation and mutual approval which take many months.

The conclusion led to the question asked Sidorova concerning the need for headquarters that make no decisions without the people’s commissariats. M. A. Feldman insisted that this speech was only challenge to G. M. Malenkov, for it concerned quality indicators: the dynamics of profit growth, profitability, productivity and the arrangement of labor conditions, improvement of the qualifications of workers. There were no refutations “from above”, but that experience began to be introduced only after the start of the war.

The authorities also ignored the information surfaced by N. A. Mikhailov, the first secretary of the Komsomol Central Committee, that for 1936-1939. the number of issued industrial patents in the United States was 50 thousand, in Germany – 16.5 thousand, and in the USSR – 4 thousand only (Shcherbak, 2019). People’s Commissar of Heavy Engineering A. I. Efremov and the People’s Commissar of the Electrical Industry of the USSR V.V. Bogatyrev spoke about the problems of adaptation of new developments, poor technical discipline (Sutela, 2022). First Secretary of the Gorky Regional Party Committee M. I. Rodionov had to admit that “the issues of technical policy ended up in a corral, because of which the machines necessary for the national economy were mastered at a glacial pace ... Because of bureaucratic fuss, he said, sometimes good cars wait for years to come out (Sztern, 2022).

So, it is for this reason that the GAZ-61 car – a utility vehicle, which demonstrated excellent performance in cross-country ability and endurance during testing, was one-of-a-kind. Let us recall in this regard that there was a lack of domestic cars at the front several months later! There were also problems with the planning of the production of ammunition: control figures for 1941 at Sverdlov plant were launched on February 4, and the approved plan was sent on May 15 (Xu, 2021). He expressed bewilderment that the engineers wore out the seats of their pants in the offices. Moreover, the salary of a young university-bred engineer at the car plant, who worked as a foreman in the workshop, was 500 rubles, and of another engineer – in the plant management – 1500 rubles (White, 2018).

People’s Commissar of the Oil Industry I. K. Sedin had to admit that in 1940 the People’s Commissariat worked unsatisfactorily: the plan for oil and gas production and oil refining had not been fulfilled. The following reasons were listed: unsatisfactory arrangement of new areas, enthusiasm about the fountain method of extraction to the detriment of mechanization, the unresolved task of conducting geological exploration. But he considered managerial miscalculations to be the governing factor: “lack of specificity of management, incorrect placement of personnel”, “overstaffed apparatus”, unwillingness

of “individual employees of the State Planning Commission and the Economic Council” to plan oil-field exploitation without preliminary arrangement (Sztern, 2022).

Criticism of the authorities to be planning often intervened in the debate, especially with regard to the over-frequent adjustment of planned indicators. It was proposed to raise the responsibility of the people’s commissariats for cooperation and overall performance (Sutela, 2022). So, first secretary of the Bashkir regional committee of the CPSU (B) I. S. Anoshin said, “Representatives of the People’s Commissariat, sometimes ... deputy people’s commissars, do not solve the main problems, get off with promises that are not implemented ... This forces us to apply to the Central Committee of the party, although everything could be resolved at the level of the People’s Commissariat” (Hovakimyan et al., 2021). The critical orientation, the emotionality of the speakers were largely due to their youth. Of the 456 delegates, 163 people were under the age of 35 (34.6%), 195 people – 36-40 years old (42.8%) (Akhmadiyeva & Abdullaev, 2019).

Soviet economic science also did not offer an optimal strategy during that period. In this regard, the activities of the Institute of Economics, created in 1930 on the basis of the economic section of the Communist Academy and the Economic Institute of the Russian Association of Scientific Research Institutes of Social Sciences, are of no less interest in studying the efforts undertaken on the eve of the war to strengthen the country’s economic potential. On February 15, 1936, the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences decided to merge the Institute of Economics and the Agrarian Institute with the abolished Communist Academy into a single Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

On February 25, 1941, the Presidium of the Academy decided to include theoretical and experimental research on solving the problems posed by the decisions of the 18th Party Conference in the work schedule of scientific institutions of the USSR Academy of Sciences, having created a special commission chaired by E. A. Chudakov, and also to organize a series of lectures on the development of the introduction of the latest achievements of science and technology for engineering and technical workers in industry and transport (Săgeată et al. 2021). It is of interest that there were proposals to study the theme “Problems of Economics and Management of Socialist Enterprises”, but they were not accepted, which was later ascribed as the blame to the leadership of the Institute of Economics of the Academy of Sciences (Hovakimyan et al., 2021).

At a meeting of the Presidium of the USSR Academy of Sciences on April 30, 1941. academician E.S. Varga made a report “On Mistakes in the Work of the Institute of Economics of the USSR Academy of Sciences”, in which it was proposed to organize a special commission and carry out “radical restructuring” in order to improve the work of the institute (Khudoyorov, (2022). He also drew attention to the fact that his employees “concern themselves with various issues (the history of economic thought in Russia, the history of political economy, the Harvard School of Political Economy), “... but they have no connection with the Soviet economy” (Makarov & Mitrova 2020), ending with an appeal to implement the decisions of the party conference which should become the governing vector in working.

DISCUSSION

Langman (2022), rightly believe that, in fact, the criticism voiced at the 18th party conference revealed the shortcomings of the directive order of management, testified to a certain awareness of the limited

capabilities of the created economic system. But the task of strategic modification of the economic course was not posed at the conference.

Rochlitz et al. (2020) points to one of the main reasons for the delay, constant adjustment of plans – the degree of detailing of planned indicators increased with time, which, in turn, made it possible for enterprise managers to maneuver.

We believe that the specifics of the 18th party conference were determined by: the increasingly complicated foreign policy situation; shortfalls of plans due to the obvious ineffectiveness of previous methods and approaches; growing criticism of the industrial management system; low quality of manufactured products, including defense products. But criticism of the planning process in the people's commissariats did not go beyond certain boundaries.

CONCLUSION

One of the factors that led to the insufficient effectiveness of the previous course was the crisis situation in Soviet economic science, which, in fact, had to be noted by the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.

Thus, an imminent danger of war forced the Soviet leadership to make more rigorous demands on the structures of party-state management of the economy in order to tighten labor and technological discipline, and improve the quality of products. Attempts were made to regulate decentralization by extending the rights of enterprise management, in particular, in the area of wages, but with raising responsibility. But the rejection of fixation on quantification in preference did not happen. One should agree in equal measure with the authors who point to the “lost opportunities” of using the experience of the leadership of Leningrad. Other propositions which were most appropriate in the current situation were also not taken into account.

Considering the events observed during that period in economic science in the context of attempts to some adjustment of the economic strategy and mechanisms for the implementation of plans, it is possible to state not only its decline, but also clearly contradictory decisions of the authorities that ignored scientific data.

The analysis of historical experience allows us to formulate an obvious lesson about the need to involve qualified scientists in generation of strategies for the country's development and to use scientifically well-grounded recommendations.

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