

NICCOLÒ PIANCIOLA

FAMINE IN THE STEPPE

The collectivization of agriculture and the Kazak herdsmen 1928-1934

The fate of the nomad peoples in the Soviet Union is one of the least known episodes in the social, economic and demographic upheavals wrought by Stalin's "revolution from above." In the Soviet Union in the late 1920s the principal peoples whose subsistence depended on transhumant-nomadic animal herding were the Kazaks, Turkmen, Kirghizes and Buriat Mongols. Under the First Five-Year Plan, all these peoples became subject to plans of so-called "sedentarization," carried out with varying degrees of coercion and at different rates of speed. Collectivization and sedentarization decimated the animal herding economy. Its most disastrous results were in Kazakstan, culminating in the great famine of 1931-1933 in which between 1.3 and 1.5 million Kazaks (between 35% and 38% of the total population, the highest percentage of any nationality in the USSR) lost their lives.¹ This article, based on research in the central archives in Moscow and on collections of published documents from Kazak archives,² deals with the problem of Soviet policies for rural Kazaks between the end of the NEP and the collectivization and dekulakization campaigns, suggesting hypotheses for the reasons why the herdsmen were the social group that suffered the consequences of the Stalinist "revolution from above" more heavily than

1. In the most recent and convincing contribution on the problem, S. Maksudov concluded that the number of deaths among the Kazaks directly ascribable to the famine was approximately 1,450,000. See: S. Maksudov, "Migracii v SSSR v 1926-1939 godah," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 40, 4 (1999): 770-792.

2. Subsequent research done in Kazakhstan in the archives in Almaty and Shymkent, the results of which could not be included in this article, did not modify the interpretations formulated in the present work.

any other and on what went into the decision-making and economic processes that led to the death of nearly a million and a half people between 1929 and 1933.

To understand what occurred during the process of collectivization, we need to take a step back and get a general picture of the Kazaks' condition between the final years of the tsarist empire and the first of the Soviet era. Specific aspects of the situation in Kazakstan (differentiating it from other zones in the USSR where nomad-pastoral peoples lived) were what determined certain characteristics of the collectivization process in this area of the Soviet Union.

With the area inhabited by the Burjat Mongols, the Kazak region was the part of the Russian empire, and of the USSR, that had the highest presence of European colonists in territories occupied by Asian peoples. The colonization of the steppes began, between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with settlements of Cossack communities composed of peasant-soldiers who guarded the empire's southeastern frontier regions. At the end of the nineteenth century, population growth in the Russian countryside and new policies of agricultural colonization began to swell the stream of Russian peasants moving to the Kazakstan steppes in search of new land to till. In 1889 a decree annulled the ban on immigration to the region; in 1891 the new Steppe Statute was issued, under which the lands used by herdsmen were declared "property of the state"; in the years that followed a series of government commissions were busily identifying land that was "under-utilized" by herdsmen and was subject to expropriation so it could be turned over to immigrants to cultivate. The stream of peasants turned into a flood in the first decade of the twentieth century, especially when the Stolypin agrarian reforms came into force: in 1916 in the six Kazak provinces (Turgaj, Akmolinsk, Ural'sk, Semipalatinsk, Syrdar'ja and Semireč'e) just under 1.4 million colonists from the European part of the empire were present, nearly a fourth of the total population of the region.³

The country in Kazakstan was transformed by the state's actions and by immigration: the nomads moved shorter distances; disputes with the colonists over who would use the land became more frequent; the pastoral economy underwent a process of subordination to the agriculture of the new arrivals. The First World War led to an explosion in the tensions created by colonization. The order to mobilize Central Asians to work behind the front lines, issued on June 25, 1916, led to a major revolt, which soon turned into an anti-colonial insurrection with thousands of victims among the Russians, followed by the indiscriminate slaughter of Kazaks carried out by the tsarist army⁴ and, after the February Revolution, by peasant-soldiers returning from the front with their arms.

3. G. Kendirbai, *Land and people: the Russian colonization of the Kazak steppe* (Berlin: Schwarz, 2002): 18.

4. M. Buttino, *La rivoluzione capovolta. L'Asia Centrale tra il crollo dell'impero zarista e la formazione dell'URSS* (Napoli: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2003): 80-96. A later Duma investigation headed by Alexander Kerensky concluded that tens of thousands of natives were exterminated in a systematic manner without regard for age or sex: "Nursing babies were eliminated, as were old women and old men." (quoted in P. Holquist, "To count, to extract and to exterminate. Population statistics and population politics in late Imperial and Soviet Russia," in T. Martin, R. G. Suny, eds., *A state of nations: Empire and nation-building in the age of Lenin and Stalin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001): 121).

It was the beginning of a period that lasted until 1923, characterized by the collapse of the imperial economic system (which caused a series of famines in the region, in which hundreds of thousands of people lost their lives) and by the outbreak of an anarchic civil war. Between 1917 and 1920 the organs of the state apparatus linked to Moscow were absent from the Kazak region, which was divided into zones controlled by the Kazak nationalist party, Alaš-Orda, and centers of local power in the hands of armed Cossacks and peasants, the latter often nominally fighting for the Bolsheviks.

After the region was brought under control, between 1920 and 1922, the Red Army pacified it, even forcing several thousand Russian peasants off their land in Semireč'e,⁵ to the benefit of the Kazaks and Kyrgyz who were returning from China. At the same time the more autonomy-minded Central Asian "national-communists," headed by the Kazak Turar Ryskulov, were defeated, relegating them to minor positions. In the meantime, on August 26, 1920, the Autonomous Kirghiz Republic, which encompassed the north and central regions of present-day Kazakstan, had officially come into being. In 1924, with the "national division" of Central Asia into the new Soviet Republics, the southern regions of Syrdar'ja and Džetyssu were incorporated into the Kirghiz Republic⁶ (renamed Kazakstan a year later). In September 1925 Filipp Gološčekin, an old Bolshevik of proven Stalinist loyalties, arrived in the region as head of the local party. It was he who would lead the regional administration during the years of collectivization.

1. The 1920s

After pacification and with the end of the economic emergency,⁷ the Soviet state had to come to terms with a Kazak population that was largely extraneous to its institutions. In the late 1920s there were approximately 3.8 million Kazaks in

5. Cf. V. L. Genis, "Deportacija russkih iz Turkestana v 1921 godu ('Delo Safarova')," *Voprosy istorii*, 1 (1998); and T. Martin *The affirmative action empire: nations and nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001): 60.

6. Under the tsarist empire and until the mid-1920s, the Kazaks were officially called Kirghizes, while the present-day Kirghizes were called Kara-Kirghizes.

7. Northwest Kazakstan was one of the areas in the USSR struck hardest by the famine of 1921, while the violent methods of requisitioning officially abolished by the NEP continued to be used at least until the harvest of 1922. In addition, recently published archival documents demonstrate that in 1923 and 1924, a large part of the USSR, stretching from some zones in the Ukraine to the Volga, Siberia and northern Kazakstan were hit by a drought that led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people. In February 1924 starvation was widespread in many zones in the Aktjubinsk and Kustanaj governorships. The following June, in the Akmolinsk governorship alone, a census found between 50,000 and 60,000 people suffering from hunger. Cf. A. Berelowitch, V. Danilov, eds., *Sovetskaja derevnja glazami VČK-OGPU-NKVD. Dokumenty i materialy*. T. 2: 1923-1929 (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000): 96, 185, 229, 230, 236, 255.

Kazakstan, divided in nearly 800,000 family units.⁸ The following were the occupations done by the family units: 38.3% worked exclusively as animal herders; 33.2% worked both as animal herders and in farming; 24% worked only in farming; and 4.5% were craftspeople.⁹ These figures obscure the fact that the productive unit in the nomad population was not the family but rather the “mobile village” or *aul*. The richest members in the *aul* (the *bai*) bound the poorer families to them through relationships of patronage which centered on ceding some of their animals. The relationship (called *saun*) was based on the goods and services the client owed his patron, in return for protection (most importantly economic protection, during the subsistence crises that recur frequently in a pastoral economy). The livestock the poor herdsman received from the rich one remained the property of the latter. The herdsman pastured the animals and looked after them: all the produce he was able to obtain from them (milk, other dairy products, wool) was his and in this way subsistence was guaranteed. The new animals born in *saun* remained the property of the *baj*.¹⁰ Confiscating the animals “of the *baj*” would therefore endanger the possibility of subsistence of the entire *aul*. This is what happened, beginning in 1928.

Data from the Kazak Bureau of Statistics show that in the late 1920s, only 23% of the Kazaks were entirely sedentary (i.e. they did not move further than half a verst from their villages),¹¹ while the rest of the population were “nomadic or semi-nomadic.” Isabelle Ohayon has convincingly argued that approximately half of those defined semi-nomads by the tsarist and Soviet administrations should have been considered semi-sedentary and that the impact of colonization and of tsarist policies had produced an initial form of sedentarization among the Kazaks, characterized by the use of stable winter pastures, the cultivation of forage crops among the semi-nomads and the passage to agriculture for the richest and poorest members of society.¹² In effect, only a

8. *Gosudarstvennyj Arhiv Rossijskoj Federacii* (hereafter cited as GARF), *fond A-374, opis' 16, delo 88, list 37* (subsequently A-374/16/88/37), Kazakstan Bureau of Statistics. The total population of Kazaks in the USSR was approximately 4 million; the largest group of Kazaks living outside Kazakstan was in Siberia. In Xinkiang, the region in western China that bordered on Soviet Kazakstan, there was also a substantial Kazak minority, swelled by those who fled the Russian empire between 1916 and 1922.

9. GARF A-374/16/88/44, Kazakstan Bureau of Statistics (1928).

10. Ž. B. Abylchožin, “Collettivizzazione, carestia e fine del nomadismo: Kazakstan, 1929-35,” in M. Buttino, ed., *In fuga. Guerre, carestie e migrazioni nel mondo contemporaneo* (Naples: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2001): 146.

11. Other sources furnish similar data: according to Šebalin, in *Džetyysu* 85% of the Kazaks were nomads or semi-nomads. Cf. P. I. Šebalin, *Džetyysu (Semireč'e). Ekonomičeskij obzor* (Smolensk: Džetyysujskaja Gubernskaja Planovaja Komissija, 1926): 174.

12. On the eve of the Revolution of 1917, “approximately 40% of the Kazaks lived from cultivating the land, engaging in commercial activity or thanks to their functions in the state's colonial apparatus. At the beginning of the twentieth century, new and diversified forms of mobility and organization characterized animal herding, still the most widespread economic activity: nomadism, semi-nomadism, semi-sedentarism and finally sedentarism coexisted and were of more or less similar importance.” (I. Ohayon, “Formes et usages du territoire à la période coloniale: la première sédentarisation des Kazaks,” in C. Poujol, ed., *Contribution à l'histoire contemporaine du Kazakstan* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, forthcoming)). I am indebted to Isabelle Ohayon for allowing me to read her essay before publication.

minority of the Kazaks practiced the type of animal herding which involved moving constantly throughout the entire year without predetermined routes, which corresponds to traditional nomadism. This type of wandering was frequent especially in the semi-desert plains bordering on the Caspian Sea and in other limited areas of central and southern Kazakstan, while the majority of other herdsmen practiced forms of transhumance in which the distances involved varied from hundreds of kilometers in the steppes in the central and northern regions of the Republic to the few kilometers required to move to summer pastures in the mountain massifs of Tian-Shan and Altai. Furthermore, a significant number of Kazaks practiced farming, although in the majority of cases it was a secondary and accessory activity compared to that of keeping animals. It was especially the poorest individuals in the *aul* who were involved in agriculture — those who owned few or no animals and who remained in the winter encampments all year round — while the rest of the community moved with their animals to spring and summer pastures. It was also common for the poorest members of the *aul* to work as farmhands and animal herders for Russian peasants.¹³

Kazak nomadism was thus increasingly changing into transhumant animal herding circumscribed to moves over shorter distances.¹⁴ In the years preceding its downfall, the tsarist state had in fact increased its presence in the Kazak territories with a view to exploiting agriculture and exerting administrative control over the population. In terms of our argument, however, what is more important is that in the 1920s animal herding was still the most widespread activity among the Kazaks and that it was closely interwoven with farming in two ways: on the one hand, many poor Kazak families worked in agriculture as an accessory activity to the animal herding of the richer members of the *aul*; on the other, economic exchange between the Kazak herdsmen and Russian peasants was widespread.

1.1. Economic relations between herdsmen and peasants

Because of Slavic agricultural colonization, Kazakstan was the region inhabited by nomad herdsmen in which the greatest economic interdependence between the agricultural and pastoral sectors of the economy was to be found. It is important to dwell on this point, as one of the cardinal points of the requisition and collectivization campaigns would be the confiscation of the marketable agricultural surplus and the outlawing of private commerce.

13. A. Berelowitch, V. Danilov, eds., *op. cit.*: 257.

14. Even the approximately 25% of the Kazak population that was fully nomadic on the eve of the Revolution had passed to “nomadism included in defined, organized territories, in other words included in a sedentary scheme.” (I. Ohayon, *op. cit.*). Since many of the sources I consulted use the term *kočevnik*, meaning “nomad” (or, after the famine, *otkočevnik*, which could be roughly translated as “ex-nomad”), to indicate any Kazak that was not a city dweller, I have been forced to maintain the generic and imprecise term “nomad” in describing Kazaks, whether they were peasants, transhumant animal herders or true nomadic herders.

During the NEP, after the disruptions of the 1916-1922 period, the economic relations between herdsmen and peasants were significant: the European peasants sold grain to the Kazaks, who bartered for or bought the grain by selling animals and products from animal rearing to the same European peasants, both at fairs and in the cities. Very few herdsmen had enough animals to be admitted to the markets; the others herded animals for the richer Kazaks or turned to farming for short periods of time (while waiting for their herds to increase so that they could start out on longer routes again), or worked as farmhands for European peasants,¹⁵ or even went to work in the mines. What was decisive for the events which followed was the knowledge, on the part of the state apparatus, that the Kazaks consumed wheat and other grain. In the words of Sokolovskij, one of the directors of the Kazak Bureau of Statistics, in a speech given at a conference at the beginning of 1928:

The Kazaks are not grain producers, as the Russian population is, yet the quantity of grain they eat is not negligible. [...] What is more, even in the most nomadic zones, the ones with most animal husbandry, the population lives on food obtained from cereal crops — not on mutton, but on millet and wheat.¹⁶

He concluded that “the Kazaks were saving their animals excessively.”¹⁷ The exact quantity of grain consumed annually by the herdsmen for subsistence eluded the statistical surveys carried out by the state,¹⁸ whose figures were very rough estimates. Among the Russian peasants, according to estimates made at the time, approximately 10 puds (164 kg) of grain a year was the minimum required for survival, to which 2.5 to 5 puds (41 to 82 kg) of seed grain had to be added.¹⁹ In 1926 the average grain consumption per year in the *džetaki*²⁰ in the Aktjubinsk region was

15. There were many Russian peasants who had as many as ten Kazak farmhands working for them: in 1924, in only three *rajony* in the Aktjubinsk governorship the presence of 1,240 farm laborers was recorded (A. Berelowitch, V. Danilov, eds., *op. cit.*: 257), and it was also common for poorer Kazaks to work herding the Russians' livestock.

16. GARF, A-374/16/88/45, *Central'naja kontrol'naja komissija VKP(b) — Narodnyj komissariat raboče-krest'janskij inspekcii SSSR (CKK-NKRKI SSSR)*.

17. *Ibid.*

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Revoljucionnaja Rossija*, 14-15 (1921): 13 (cited in R. Pipes, *Il regime bolscevico. Dal terrore rosso alla morte di Lenin* (Milan: Mondadori, 1999): 470n.). The figures given should be understood as averages based on quantities which varied from one region to another. Marco Buttino gives exactly the same figure: approximately 10 puds per year per capita, i.e. 163.8 kilograms (M. Buttino, “‘La Terra a chi la lavora.’ La politica coloniale russa in Turkestan tra la crisi dello zarismo e le rivoluzioni del 1917,” in A. Masoero, A. Venturi, eds., *Russica. Studi e ricerche sulla Russia contemporanea* (Milan, 1990): 285. Buttino's source is N. I. Malahovskij, *Materijal dlja izučenija hlopkovodstva* (St-Petersburg, 1912): 25-26. If this was the minimum needed for survival in bad years, the average quantity normally consumed was, however, higher: according to Viktor Danilov, approximately 263 kilograms (16 puds) of grain a year (cited in M. Ellman, “The 1947 Soviet famine and the entitlement approach to famines,” *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 24 (2000): 610n.

20. Poor Kazaks who spent the entire year working the land, while other members of the *aul* brought the animals to pasture.

10.4 to 10.7 puds of millet per person.²¹ In 1926 it was estimated that in the Džetyysu region food consumption among the nomad population averaged 7.9 puds per person, while for the non-nomad population (Russian and Kazak) it was 12.1 puds.²² Clearly the difference in consumption by herdsmen and farmers was significant, however also the herdsmen consumed large quantities of grain. An agronomic survey done in 1927 found that Kazaks in the Alma-Ata *volost'* in Džetyysu had an average of 1 to 1.5 *desjatina* of cultivated land per household,²³ composed on average of 4.5 to 5 people: given that the average harvest for each *desjatina* of land in the Alma-Ata *uezd* was 8.2 puds of grain,²⁴ this means that on average each Kazak family had to buy approximately 27 puds of grain from non-nomads, in other words 75% of the grain the family consumed each year.²⁵ It is highly likely that a majority of the Kazaks living in the areas most heavily colonized by Russians, the northern and eastern parts of the region, were in a similar situation. Some data tends to lead to the conclusion that even the herdsmen living in the more arid regions that were not heavily colonized by Russians normally purchased grain for their food needs. For example, the average consumption for herdsmen in the *uezd* of Irgiz and Turgaj (governorship of Aktjubinsk) was respectively 9.8 and 9.3 puds of grain per person per year; in each case, 89% and 80% of these amounts were purchased.²⁶

Based on these data, we can conclude that for the herdsmen, dependence on the commercial networks that connected them to the peasants was fundamental in enabling them to subsist above the survival threshold, especially during the winter months. An economic survey done in the Aulie-Ata *uezd* (governorship of Syrdar'ja) in 1925 under the direction of Sokolovskij and Uraz Džandosov, Commissar of Agriculture in Kazakstan, arrived at the conclusion that, in comparison with farmers, the Kazak herdsmen were far more market oriented.²⁷ Dependence on commercial networks was particularly marked in times of crisis in the animal husbandry sector.

21. S. I. Rudenko, "Očerok byta kazakov bassenja rek Uila i Sagyza," in S. F. Baronov, A. N. Bukejhan, S. I. Rudenko, *Kazaki. Antropologičeskie očerki* (Leningrad: Izd. osobogo komiteta akademii nauk po issledovaniju sojuznyh i avtonomnyh respublik, 1927): 25.

22. Figures obtained from archives in the Statistical Bureau of the Governorship, cited in P. I. Šebalin, *op. cit.*: 76, 174.

23. K. K. Sakovskij, ed., *Materialy ekspedicii Sredne-Aziatskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta po obsledovaniju životnovodstva v Džetyysujskoj gubernii i karakulevodstva v Kara-Kalpakskoj avtonomnoj oblasti v 1927 godu* (Tashkent: Izd. Narkomzema KASSR i SredAz Gos. Universiteta, 1930): 51.

24. P. I. Šebalin, *op. cit.*: 77.

25. This is confirmed, among others, by K. K. Sakovskij, *op. cit.*: 51, according to whom the Kazaks regularly bought flour and millet.

26. Ja. D. Levčenko, *Materialy k opredeleniju tovarnosti Kirgizskih hozjajstv Aktjubinskoj gubernii* (Aktjubinsk: Izdanie Aktjubinskogo Gubispolkoma, 1925): 77. For the period prior to 1914, see also V. P. Kurilev, *Skot, zemlja, obščina kočevykh i polukočevykh kazahov. Vtoraja polovina XIX-načalo XX v.* (St-Petersburg: Muzej antropologii i etnografii, 1998): 252 f.

27. Cited in M. K. Kozybaev, *Kazahstan na rubeže vekov: rasmyšlenija i poiski* (Almaty: Glylm, 2000): 404.

These observations are consistent with the conclusions of anthropological studies on pastoral societies in the Middle East (the Arabian peninsula, Turkey, Iran)²⁸ and East Africa. Sabine Schwartz in her work on herdsmen in northern Kenya, calculates that normally “while the meat of a whole goat can feed a family for at most three days, the corresponding quantity of 45 kilograms of grain can feed the family for fifteen days.”²⁹ In the rural market studied by Schwartz, the price of meat is five times higher than that of an equivalent quantity of grain. In addition, the calorie value of meat is lower than that of an equivalent quantity of cereals.³⁰

For Ethiopia, studies using data from the second half of the twentieth century have shown that on the basis of normal market prices, calories derived from animal products cost approximately twice those from cereal products. Herdsmen could therefore survive with a smaller number of animals if they sold some of them in order to purchase grain to eat. In the pastoral regions of Ethiopia, the average herdsman obtained half his calorie intake from a diet of agricultural crops.³¹ A diet based solely on meat and dairy products, often thought to be what all herdsmen eat, is in reality a luxury that only the rich can in a few cases afford. Given the high cost of meat — due to the large investment of labor in looking after and pasturing animals — and given that it can be easily sold, in normal circumstances, herdsmen consume comparatively small quantities of it. Studies of several different peoples have demonstrated that meat is eaten almost exclusively when there is a feast or if there is a food emergency.³²

It is consistent, therefore, that all descriptions of the Kazaks’ diet should find, in addition to a high consumption of cereals, a high consumption of milk and milk products — especially kumiss, but *ajran* and cheese as well. A Soviet anthropologist describing customs in the Aktjubinsk governorship, wrote that “in summer, with the exception of feast days [...] and special or solemn occasions meat is not eaten.”³³ It was eaten in winter,³⁴ but always accompanied by cereal products.

1.2. “Decolonization” policies

Another specific feature of Kazakstan was that because of the massive Slavic agricultural colonization that had taken place, competition for resources (land and water) between the animal herding and farming communities was greater in

28. See E. Marx, “Vi sono pastori nomadi nel Medio Oriente arabo?” in U. Fabietti, P. C. Salzman, eds., *Antropologia delle società pastorali tribali e contadine. La dialettica della coesione e della frammentazione sociale* (Pavia: Ibis, 1996): 116-128.

29. Sabine Schwartz, *Ökonomie des Hungers. Konsummuster und Vermarktungsverhalten nomadischer Viehhalter Nordkenias* (Berlin: Reimer, 1986): 229.

30. E. Marx, *op. cit.*: 120.

31. A. Sen, *Poverty and famines. An essay on entitlement and deprivation* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1981): 105.

32. E. Marx, *op. cit.*: 121.

33. S. I. Rudenko, *op. cit.*: 25.

34. Once more according to Rudenko, each winter a family with four or five members killed a calf and three or four sheep.

comparison to other areas of agricultural colonization in the former Russian empire. These tensions often translated into forms of ethnic hostility, to some extent due to the “affirmative action”³⁵ policies pursued by the Soviet government (e.g. the delimitation of “national territories” and access to resources determined on an ethnic basis).³⁶ These “decolonization” policies were put into practice in what can be considered the “real” NEP, between 1923 and 1927,³⁷ and consisted of a series of measures that bestowed advantages in the access to agricultural and other resources to the native inhabitants of the region, previously the object of discrimination. Immigration from Russia was made illegal,³⁸ while the distribution of uncultivated land was supposed to occur following a system of priority (*očerednostʹ*) based on national affiliation, officially defined at the Fifth Party Congress in 1925. The Kazak population was to be settled in conformity with its interests, after which land was to be assigned first to immigrants who had worked in agriculture in the region prior to 1918, then to unauthorized immigrants who had arrived in Kazakstan before August 1922 and finally to unauthorized immigrants who had arrived between September 1922 and August 7, 1924.³⁹ The *očerednostʹ* concerned all agricultural services (for example access to water sources). However, despite the redistribution that occurred between 1921 and 1922 and the legislative advantages guaranteed to Kazaks, the differences in standard of living between the various “national groups” remained marked. Publications from the 1920s are unanimous in their descriptions of the Kazaks’ indigence and their poverty in relation to the colonists. Šebalin, for example, wrote that in Džetysu, despite the series of measures that had been put into effect,

35. Using the term Terry Martin has applied to this period of Soviet history.

36. T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire...*, *op. cit.* See particularly the information on Kazakstan: 59-67.

37. Although the NEP was officially introduced in March 1921, it was only with the 1923 harvest that the economic emergency and violent requisitions ended. In some areas, including ones in Kazakstan, famine struck again in 1924.

38. However, immigration never fully ceased: an exodus of refugees fleeing the famines rampant in European Russia under the NEP, between 1920 and 1922, was followed by immigration of illegal economic migrants. In 1927 the Regional Secretary, Gološčekin, in a letter to Molotov, protested vigorously against the local administrations in Brijansk, the Ukraine and the Northern Caucasus that were issuing authorizations to emigrate to Kazakstan, officially closed to immigration. See *Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Arhiv Social'noj i Političeskoj Istorii*, hereafter RGASPI, 17/33/486/55 (May 6, 1927), *Central'nyj komitet KPSS*. Martha Olcott (*The Kazakhs* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1987): 295) estimated that the total number of Slavic immigrants during the NEP was approximately 50,000. According to old but reliable figures given by Eugene Kulischer, 73,000 immigrants arrived in Kazakstan between 1924 and 1929 alone, and these figures “are substantially below the actual volume of the migration.” (E. Kulischer, *Europe on the move. War and population changes, 1917-1947* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948): 83). Many of these were unskilled laborers that arrived to seek work building the Turksib railway. In Semipalatinsk, at the beginning of 1928, there was a concentration of as many as 13,000 of them. See GARF 17/33/420/65-68 (June 25, 1928) and M. Payne, *Stalin's railroad: Turksib and the building of socialism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001): 135-136.

39. V. Lan'ko, *Vesʹ Kazakstan. Spravočnaja kniga* (Alma-Ata: 1931): 71 (quoted in L. K. Šotbakova, *Nacional'nyj aspekt pereselenčeskoj politiki i korenizacii v Kazahstane v 1917-1941 gody*, dissertacija (Moscow: Istoričeskij fakul'tet MGU, 1995): 68).

the Kazak population has not yet been able to gain control of land and water rights [...] and, furthermore, because of the failure to delimit the boundaries between various areas of land exploitation, numerous disputes between different groups of beneficiaries have continued, especially between groups of different nationalities.⁴⁰

Although legally the Kazaks were favored in the distribution of land, often they lacked the means to cultivate it. When given a tract of land, they often rented it to Russians. In many instances Kazaks even sold Russians their state seed allocations.⁴¹

In terms of state and party structures, a program of “nativization” (*korenizacija*) was supposed to be put into effect, in order to include as many natives as possible. Yet also in this case, attributing a high political valence to national differences gave rise to effects that were the contrary of those hoped for, exacerbating the contrasts between Europeans and natives, rather than placating them.⁴²

“Decolonization” and economic policies were not successful, in the brief period the NEP was in effect, in overcoming the heritage of tsarist colonial policies and the consequences of the 1916-1922 crisis. On the eve of the “grain-requisition crisis,” the majority of Kazaks were poor and the difference in standard of living between Kazaks and colonists had remained unchanged. Agronomic expeditions sent to the region during the 1920s emphasized this fact, in contrast with official statistics (produced without consistent methods of data collection and often unreliable).⁴³ Nor had the policies of nativization in the late 1920s yet succeeded in affecting the colonial nature of the regional administration: the state and party structure remained largely in the hands of Europeans, who were the bulk of the civil servants in executive positions.⁴⁴ Kazaks remained essentially alienated from the state: the majority of them were so poor that they were exempt from taxation;⁴⁵ few had any schooling and the level of illiteracy among the nomads was one of the highest of

40. P. I. Šebalin, *op. cit.*: 158.

41. “Appendix ‘The Eastern Autonomous Republics’ in the OGPU report for October 1924 on the political situation in the USSR” in A. Berelowitch, V. Danilov, eds., *op. cit.*: 255.

42. T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire...*, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4: 125-181.

43. See especially F. G. Dobržanskij, Ja. Ja. Lus, N. N. Medvedev, *Domašnje životnye jugovostočnoj časti Kazahstana (Semireč’ja)* (Leningrad: Izd. Akademii Nauk, 1927); *Id.*, *Domašnje životnye Semipalatinskoj gubernii* (Leningrad: Izd. Akademii Nauk, 1928).

44. In 1926 Kazaks (58.1% of the total population) held only one fourth of the executive positions in the administrative apparatus. See R. Houle, “Russes et non-Russes dans la direction des institutions politiques et économiques en URSS. Une étude des recensements, 1926-1979,” *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 38, 3 (1997): 359; and R. A. Cherot, “Nativization of government and party structure in Kazakhstan, 1920-1930,” *The American Slavic and East European Review*, XIV, 1 (1955).

45. In the years 1924-1927, 62% of the nomads were exempt from all taxation, while among non-nomads the percentage was only 17%. See N. V. Pogorel’skij, *Osedanie kočevnikov i razvitie životnovodstva* (Alma-Ata: Akademija Nauk KazSSR, 1949): 89-90 (cited in I. Vladimírsky, “Collectivization and the reconstruction of agriculture in Kazakhstan during the 1920s-1930s,” Ph.D. thesis (Tel Aviv University, 1998): 138. I am indebted to Irena Vladimírsky for allowing me to read the chapter on sedentarization in her doctoral dissertation).

any national group in the Soviet Union;⁴⁶ they were also exempt from military service.

2. The events of 1928

This peculiar frontier society, which was struggling to emerge from the upheavals of 1916-1922, was struck by a second crisis in 1928. The events were characterized not only by the grain-requisition crisis but also by a more generalized assault on the Kazaks' way of life, a campaign to eliminate traditional authority: the decisive step in the process of etatization, of incorporating the Kazaks within the state governed from Moscow.

This process of incorporation, which was in fact a full-scale offensive, consisted of three main stages: the campaign of requisitioning the wealth and livestock of the "great *bai*," rich owners of livestock who represented authority and the ownership of the resources of *the entire* nomad community (from January to the end of 1928); the first military draft that included young Kazaks — the only prior attempt at mobilizing Kazaks had led to the great revolt of 1916 (the first groups were called up in the autumn of 1928); the reopening of the region to immigration by European colonists (April, 1929).

The great breakthrough of 1928 was presented in propaganda as the social revolution that Kazakstan had been awaiting since the Bolsheviks had come to power, the "little October" that Gološčekin, the party head in Kazakstan, had spoken of. But the campaign's targets were not only the rural elite. In September 1928, a member of the presidium of the Central Committee of the RSFSR unabashedly declared: "The purpose of the campaign was to wage war against the feudal overlords,⁴⁷ the *bai*, the Alaš-Orda, anti-Soviet elements, and the nationalist intelligentsia in Kazakstan."⁴⁸

These shifts in fact went hand in hand with the marginalization and arrest of many formerly important members of Alaš-Orda who still held positions in Kazak institutions, and with a purge within the party, in which the Kazak Bolsheviks opposed to what was happening were removed from their positions. At the same time, the agricultural situation was not favorable to the campaigns that were being undertaken. There was drought and *džut* (spring frosts that form a crust of ice on pasture land and prevent the animals from grazing) in Kazakstan in the 1927-1928 year. The grain harvest was poor and many head of livestock died.⁴⁹ The

46. In 1928, the rate of illiteracy among Kazaks was 92.8%, while among Russians in Kazakstan it was 64%. See A. R. Rahimbaev, *Sostojanie žadaci prosvetitel'noj raboty nacmen šinstv RSFSR* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1930): 76-78, and R. A. Cherot, *op. cit.*: 50.

47. Several Soviet theorists argued Kazak society had reached the "feudal" stage of class exploitation.

48. RGASPI, 94/1/1/631, *Frakcija RKP(b), VKP(b) vo vserossijskom central'nom ispolnitel'nom komitete (VCIK), na s'ezdah sovetov, v prezidume VCIK SSSR*.

49. Partial data from four governorships (Semipalatinsk, Džetysu, Syrdar'ja, Ural') indicated that approximately 600,000 head of cattle had died. GARF, A-406/9/705/33.

simultaneous cultural, economic and political offensives the Kazaks were subjected to therefore took place at a particularly unfavorable juncture in time, when the economic crisis afflicting the entire Soviet Union (the grain-requisition crisis) and a crisis in the pastoral economy (*džut*) occurred simultaneously with the turn to the policy of etatization for the Kazak region.

2.1. “Debajization”

The heart of this campaign was intended to be the expropriation of the wealth of a few hundred rich animal owners (*krupnye bai*) and clan leaders (*bai-polufeodaly*),⁵⁰ who were to be deported to remote regions in the interior of Kazakstan, and whose property was to be distributed to the poor of the *aul*. The campaign of “debajization” was meant to mark the end of traditional hierarchies in nomad society and the destruction of the tribal solidarity that prevented the state from controlling socio-economic relationships in rural areas so that it could reshape them for its own ends.

The 1927-1928 Kazak grain-requisition campaign is important not merely because it is the first example of requisitioning aimed at bringing about collectivization⁵¹ and dekulakization (in this case “debajization”) in the USSR, but also because while it was being carried out the mechanisms of “redistribution of damages” emerged that would lead to the death of over a million Kazaks during the process of collectivization. What was officially described as the expropriation of the property of approximately 700 large animal-owners, acted as a cover for, and from the very beginning (at least in some regions), was accompanied by the indiscriminate pillaging of the rural Kazak population. Not only did the plenipotentiaries confiscate the property that belonged to the *bai*,⁵² they also

50. The two categories were not incompatible. Cf. the thorough treatment of the campaign against *bai* in Isabelle Ohayon, “*Du nomadisme au socialisme*”. *Sédentarisation, collectivisation et acculturation des Kazakhs en URSS (1928-1945)*, Thèse de doctorat, Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) (Paris, 2003): 33-99.

51. Several hundred collective farms were set up with the livestock confiscated. This aspect is emphasized by R. W. Davies in *The industrialization of Soviet Russia*. Vol. 1: *The Socialist offensive. The collectivization of Soviet agriculture, 1929-1930* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1980): 140.

52. In the spring of 1929 the official figures on the results of the campaign were presented: approximately 145,000 head of livestock had been confiscated from 696 *bai*. Therefore, on the average, just over 200 animals (counted in terms of large animals) were confiscated from each *baj* (cf. K. Aldažumanov, M. Kairgaliev, V. Osipov, Ju. Romanova, eds., *Nasil'stvennaja kollektivizacija i golod v Kazahstane v 1931-1933 gg. Sbornik dokumentov i materialov* (Almaty: Fond “XXI vek,” 1998): 35). However, many of the *bai* managed to escape deportation, taking refuge with their herds in the administrative units adjoining their own. On September 8, 1929, there was a further government decree ordering that *bai* who had taken refuge in *rajony* adjoining the ones they had come from should be deported to the distant regions the decree of over a year before had set forth. (*Sistematičeskoe sobranie zakonov kazahskoj avtonomnoj sovjetskoj socialističeskoj respubliki, dejstvujuščih na 1-oe janvarja 1930 g. (6 oktjabrja 1920 g.- 31 dekabrja 1929 g.)* (Alma-Ata: Izdanie upravljenija delami SNK KASSR, 1930): 183).

subjected the Kazaks to an enormous burden of taxes (increased five or six-fold from the previous year) and enforced fines on any and every pretext, in such a way as to funnel large numbers of animals towards the state and the non-nomad sector of the population.

The region that was hit hardest by the campaign was Semipalatinsk, of crucial importance because it was crossed by the Turkestan-Siberia railway then being built and was therefore at the heart of new plans for colonization. In addition, the region was a sensitive area because of its position bordering on China. In the mid-1920s, Kazaks were a majority (57.4%) of the total population there, but there was a significant presence of settlers from Russia (33.1%) and the Ukraine (7.1%); these figures were very similar to the ones for Kazakstan as a whole. The ineptitude demonstrated by the party officials in Semipalatinsk in handling the crisis (requisitions, urban and rural revolts, *džut*) and the protests by Kazak members of the regional government led to the adoption of sanctions against the committee of the governorship, accused of having risked provoking “another 1916.” In August 1928 the *Politbjuro* removed the party secretary in Semipalatinsk. A commission headed by Aleksej Semenovič Kiselev, Secretary of the Central Executive Committee of the RSFSR (VCIK), was sent to investigate.

The Kiselev Commission⁵³ ascertained that the requisition campaign (officially aimed only at the property of the “great *bar*”) had begun in January 1928, despite the fact that the *krajkom* decree that authorized the beginning of the campaign had not been published until the following August. Although the European peasants had also been hard hit by the forced procurements of the winter, the brutality of confiscation among the Kazaks was appalling. According to Kiselev, measures that had been taken “originally in relation to the entire population,” because of the “mix of nationalities” characteristic of the region, created the greatest damage to a single group.⁵⁴ Moreover, it was discovered that the districts where procurement obligations had been proportionately most oppressive were the ones heavily inhabited by nomad herdsmen, for example the Karkaralinsk district (in 1917, 98.5% of the inhabitants of the Karkaralinsk *uezd* were Kazaks and only 1.4% were Russians and Ukrainians). Kiselev calculated that in the Semipalatinsk region, a total of 17,000 Kazak families had been affected.⁵⁵

The directives of the governorship’s committee had encouraged abuses by lower cadres. According to Kiselev, the way the committee had acted had “created the basis for the widespread conviction that one could impose any fines one wished and would not be punished for this.” Although a stream of protests had poured into Semipalatinsk, they had been completely ignored. For this reason, “the lower levels

53. The basis of my information is the session of the presidium of the CC of the RSFSR at which members of the commission and government officials from Semipalatinsk were heard. The stenographic record is in RGASPI, 94/1/1/680-625 (September 24, 1928). Terry Martin first used this source for *The affirmative action empire.... op. cit.:* 67.

54. RGASPI, 94/1/1/629.

55. T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire.... op. cit.:* 67.

of the apparatus were convinced that their policies were supported, and this is why this story assumed such vast dimensions.”⁵⁶

Kiselev spoke of “Chinese” cruelty in carrying out requisitions. There were cases of Kazaks being tied to horses and dragged for several kilometers. Those who were arrested were often tortured. Several of the people arrested died from the tortures they suffered. At times the plenipotentiaries took hostages in an *aul*, evidently to stop the Kazaks from fleeing with their animals: “In one case a woman was put on a horse and carried off. She fell off and nearly died.”⁵⁷

When those in charge of the requisitioning were local Kazaks, things were different. In some cases, 50% of the animals confiscated were “temporarily left” with the owners because the secretary of the rural cell was married to the daughter of the *baj* and sought to protect his relatives.⁵⁸

The Kazaks, already suffering because of the livestock deaths caused by the 1927-1928 *džut*, were compelled to sell their remaining animals to get money to pay taxes and buy the grain they needed to face the food crisis. The large numbers of animals being brought to market caused prices to plummet: horses were being sold at a tenth of the price they had fetched in normal years.⁵⁹ Arbitrary impositions furnished excellent opportunities for local authorities to get rich. Kiselev emphasized that party members in administrative positions had been in the forefront in taking the Kazaks’ animals for themselves (animals which they regularly failed to record, and which “disappeared” when the commission’s investigation began): “We do not have reliable information on the number of animals confiscated, nor do we know where these animals are.” Kiselev called together a soviet accused of cornering the market in animals owned by the Kazaks. He was given reticent excuses as well as the confirmation that the pillaging and impoverishment of the nomad population had been interpreted as an action that had been carried out with government support:

One of the members of the soviet says that today he is a member of the soviet, but tomorrow they may not elect him. However he is a poor peasant, and this is why he bought the livestock now. Another justified his purchase with the fact that he needs a horse to be able to travel. The others [...] said simply that nobody was taking the animals, and they therefore decided, as it is said, to “help the government,” cornering the market in livestock at rock bottom prices.⁶⁰

Taxes were arbitrarily imposed on Kazaks by numerous overlapping organizations — for example the committees of the *rajony* and those of the *oblasti*. A few days after they had done all they could to sell their animals at whatever prices they could

56. RGASPI, 94/1/1/674.

57. RGASPI, 94/1/1/676.

58. RGASPI, 94/1/1/668.

59. RGASPI, 94/1/1/669.

60. RGASPI, 94/1/1/668.

get to respect the strict deadlines set for payment, the members of an *aul* would find themselves facing yet another representative of the state demanding they pay additional taxes. Arbitrary taxation was imposed not only by those in administrative positions, but even by any group that had some possibility of being identified with authority:

The situation degenerated to the point that teachers, seeing that everyone else was having a go, decided that they, too, should conduct “voluntary contributions.” They thought: since everyone is taking, why shouldn’t we do it, too, for cultural needs? “Our time” they said to themselves “has come” and they gathered — “for constructing schools, purchasing books,” etc. — 2,000 head of livestock.⁶¹

Apart from opportunities for enrichment by those in power in local government, the imposition of taxes and fines represented a dramatic impoverishment for the majority of the herdsmen’s families. In Džetyssu, a Kazak household of four or five people bought between 40 and 55 puds (656-902 kilograms) of wheat a year. Taking as a basis the lowest price paid for a horse recorded by the Kiselev Commission (15 rubles) and the market price of wheat in Alma-Ata in January 1928,⁶² we arrive at the conclusion that in order to survive, a Kazak family had to sell 16 horses, or an equivalent value of other animals. In the census of livestock carried out in 1928 among a sample of 7,615 herdsmen’s families in the Semipalatinsk governorship, it was found that 86.6% of them had been left with fewer than 15 animals, while only 2.9% owned more than 35 head of livestock⁶³ — studies done at the beginning of the century set 30 as the minimum number of animals necessary for a household to avoid going into debt. One of the paradoxical results of the requisitions was that instead of emancipating the poor herdsmen from dependence upon rich animal owners, this dependence was increased after the vast majority of herdsmen could only turn for help to the 3% of the families left with a reasonably sufficient number of animals.

One of the consequences of the campaign in Semipalatinsk region was that several thousand people fled to China, taking tens of thousands of animals with them.⁶⁴ Border troops and customs officers proceeded to fleece those leaving the USSR, requisitioning money and livestock from them. Naturally not only rich animal owners fled to China, but Kazaks of all social classes, together with “presidents of rural soviets, members of the *Košči* union,⁶⁵ and even party and

61. RGASPI, 94/1/1/670.

62. GARF, 1235/122/283/195 (19/1/1928), *Vserossiiskij central’nyj ispolnitel’nyj komitet RSFSR (VCIK RSFSR)*.

63. GARF, A-374/16/88/51.

64. RGASPI, 94/1/1/670. The numbers recorded were 423 families and 22,000 animals, but these were undoubtedly a small fraction of the total.

65. The league, formed by the state, that brought together nomads and poor native peasants.

Komsomol members,”⁶⁶ in other words the very same activists that had been prepared for the campaign of “debajization.”

2.2. The Red Army drafts Kazaks

In January 1928, for the first time since the Russians had arrived in Central Asia, the government decreed that Kazaks be included in the military draft, with the first groups being called up in the autumn. In 1916, the only time Kazaks had been called to serve the state in war (albeit only in work behind the lines), this had led to a general uprising. During the 1920s, the sole Kazak presence in the Soviet army was a national cavalry regiment, created in 1924 and made up of volunteers. In June 1927 it counted 609 people; another 111 attended a training academy.⁶⁷ Even at the end of 1926, the plans for introducing conscription in Kazakstan envisaged the inclusion of Kazak recruits starting only in 1931, while in 1927 volunteers were supposed to be taken into the army, especially cavalry regiments.⁶⁸ However, the crisis during the winter of 1927-1928 led to an acceleration of the process. In 1928 those born in 1905 were drafted.

The fact that drafting Kazaks was meant to be a way of limiting conflict between Europeans and natives was explicitly written in the text of the decree.⁶⁹ The lawmakers referred to the tensions created by the differential treatment accorded to different national groups, tensions which were regularly noted in the reports sent to regional officials by army detachments. Russian recruits said, “We go to defend Soviet power, let the Kirghiz [Kazaks] go, too” or “It’s the Kazak Republic and we go into the army in their place.”⁷⁰ An increase in ethnic hostilities during the period of preparations for the draft was an event that recurred every year.⁷¹

At the beginning of 1928 the protests against the preparations for the draft were far more intense than they had been the previous year.⁷² Among the Kazaks, the alarming news that they were about to be subject to the draft indirectly confirmed the rumors of an imminent war that were circulating throughout the USSR and in Kazakstan predicted conflict with China and Poland.⁷³ Young Kazak men were hidden by their families and, in some cases, the detachments from the commissions in charge of the census on which the draft would be based were beaten up by crowds

66. RGASPI, 94/11/1/666.

67. *Rossijskij Gosudarstvennyj Voennyj Arhiv* (hereafter RGVA), 9/28/568/5, *Političeskoe Upravlenie RKKK*.

68. RGVA, 9/28/549/15.

69. *Sistematičeskoe sobranie...*, *op. cit.*: 36.

70. RGVA, 9/28/451/89.

71. RGVA, 9/28/451/88.

72. RGVA, 9/26/451/87 (February 1928).

73. RGVA, 9/26/451/87.

of Kazaks and forced to flee.⁷⁴ Despite these episodes, the first draft in the history of the Kazaks was a success and Gološčekin was able to boast that 100% of the young Kazaks called up had been drafted.⁷⁵ Thus at the time when the second campaign of requisitions was being launched, tens of thousands of young men were taken away from their *auly*, diminishing the likelihood of resistance against another period of pillage.

2.3. The reopening of Kazakstan to immigration

The turning point in the Soviet Union's policies of migration came on January 18, 1928, with the decision taken by the Central Committee and by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, which established that moving groups of people and rationally resettling them was a means for developing the nation's economy. The resolution set forth a series of economic measures aimed at aiding emigrant peasant families and instituted various official bodies whose task was to provide the aid and the organization needed to move people from one area to another. The question of colonization had already been reexamined by the People's Commissariat for Nationalities in the late 1920s. At the end of 1927 Nurmakov, President of the Kazak *Sovnarkom*, and Sultanbekov, former Commissar of Agriculture, said the colonization projects for the Pansoviet Committee for Agricultural Colonization were "nothing else, but a continuation of the work of the old Tsarist Resettlement Administration, carried out by the same bureaucrats (*činovniki*) within the apparat, and based on the old data from the materials of that administration."⁷⁶ The plan provided for the arrival of 3.6 million colonists and the dismemberment of Kazakstan. Although the plan was not put into effect, immigration of agricultural workers into the Republic was once more legalized.⁷⁷

This brought to a close the brief period (1921-1929) which had begun with "land and water reform" in Semireč'e and the expulsion of several thousand Russian peasants. Some peasant families were directly involved in the ebb and flow this change in policy gave rise to: one example is the case of 15 families of Russian peasants that returned to Kazakstan in 1929 to whom *Narkomzem* had assigned holdings that were part of the land earmarked for colonization. The families had been part of a nucleus of 46 families expelled from two villages in Džetysu in 1921, during the land reform. In April 1926 they were assigned new tracts of land in the

74. V. Danilov, ed., *Tragedija sovjetskoj derevni: kollektivizacija i raskulačivanie: dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomah; 1927-1939*. T. 1: *Maj 1927- nojabr' 1929* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1999): 131.

75. Speech on April 9, 1929, quoted in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 39.

76. RGASPI 17/113/338/151-4, 93-94 (October 31, 1927), cited in T. Martin, "An affirmative action empire: Ethnicity and the Soviet State, 1923-1938", Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 1996): 546.

77. T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire...*, *op. cit.*: 66.

Don *okrug*, in Northern Caucasus. Three years later, a third of the families decided to return to Džetyysu.⁷⁸

The Directorship for Immigration was created in Kazakstan on February 13, 1929 with a resolution passed by the *krajkom*. The ban on immigration to Kazakstan was officially rescinded shortly afterwards, in April 1929, at the Seventh Congress of the Soviet of the Republic.⁷⁹ The plans of the Committee for Colonization, which was part of the Soviet Union's CIK, provided for moving 500,000 colonists into Kazakstan for the period of the First Five-Year Plan. The Republic was intended to be the second largest in terms of agricultural colonization, after the Far East (expected to receive 687,000 colonists) and ahead of Siberia (with 400,000).⁸⁰ The figure indicated for Kazakstan in the First Five-Year Plan had not been this high: 300,000 agricultural colonists, most of whom were to have moved from the Ukraine and Russia into the northern regions of Kazakstan: the *oblasti* of Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk and Petropavlovsk,⁸¹ among the areas most suitable for cultivating cereal crops. The other large region open to colonization was to have been the area surrounding the Turkestan-Siberia railway, being built from Alma-Ata to Semipalatinsk.⁸² In July 1929 the committee of the Alma-Ata *okrug* approved a resolution which proclaimed the importance of agricultural colonization for bringing "free" farmland into cultivation. The governorship's committee warned about an increase in ethnic tensions, expected to be a consequence of the changes in immigration policy.⁸³ By 1929 the prevailing opinion was the one asserted in a text on economic geography published that year: "It is only planned colonization that can fully exploit the economic possibilities of a region, such as Kazakstan, whose rich resources have not yet been fully utilized."⁸⁴

3. Collectivization and "sedentarization"

During the winter of 1929-1930, along with all-out collectivization and dekulakization, the "sedentarization of the nomads" was decreed. In Kazakstan, during the first year of the collectivization campaign, the main objective had been

78. GARF, 1235/124/215/47 (September 1929), Communication from the RSFSR *Narkomzem*.

79. L.K. Šotbakova, *op. cit.*: 34.

80. GARF, R-3260/9/6/9 (1929).

81. L. K. Šotbakova, *op. cit.*: 34.

82. GARF, R-3260/9/28/7 (February 3, 1929).

83. From "Protocol n° 50 of the official session of the committee of the *okrug* of Alma-Ata of the VKP (b)," July 25, 1929, in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *Novejšaja istorija Kazahstana: sbornik dokumentov i materialov*. T. 1: 1917-1939 gg. (Almaty: Sanat, 1998): 221-222.

84. V. P. Voščinin, *SSSR po rajonom: Kazakstan (Serija ekonomičeskaja geografija SSSR)* (Moscow, Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1929): 88. Voščinin (*Ibid.*, p. 56) calculated that 3 million agricultural colonists could be admitted to northern Kazakstan.

European peasants. The areas most involved were therefore the most highly colonized ones, a swathe that took in the northern and eastern regions of the Republic: the Kustanaj and Akmolinsk *oblasti* (where Kazaks were only 35% of the population), Semipalatinsk (52% of the population were Kazaks), and Džetysu (60% Kazak).⁸⁵ The first phase in collectivization followed a pattern common to other regions in the USSR: large-scale revolts, the rapid entry of peasants into the kolkhozes during winter, their exodus en masse in the spring (after Stalin's letter "Dizzy with success" was published in *Pravda* on March 1, 1930). Yet, although the Kazaks were not the principal target of the first wave of collectivization, they suffered heavily from grain requisitioning.

The plenum of the Central Committee of the Kazak section of the party that met from December 11 to 16, 1929 resolved that the "sedentarization" of the nomads was a necessary prerequisite "for the socialist reconstruction of the economy."⁸⁶ In January 1930, the Central Committee decreed that 554,000 nomad households (of the 566,000 counted in the census) should be sedentarized by the end of the First Five-Year Plan. On January 8, 1930, a permanent committee on the question was formed to work with the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR. In a *krajkom* resolution dated January 19, 1930, sedentarization was linked to collectivization and it was decided that its application be imposed, in this first phase, only in fully collectivized areas. However, no funds were specifically earmarked for the sedentarization drive, either in the budget of the *kraja*, or in those of the party's local administrative offices. The necessary funds were to have been budgeted by the people's commissariats and other government bodies.⁸⁷ Financing the process of sedentarization involved an estimated cost of 29.37 million rubles. Of this sum, 12.34 million rubles was to have been covered by those being sedentarized, through tax increases. The largest item in the budget, as later emerged in investigations carried out by the center, was the construction of new housing, estimated to cost 9.99 million rubles.⁸⁸

In theory, the sedentarization project had four different aims: freeing land for grain cultivation; incorporating the nomads into the collective farm system; making a work force available for agriculture and industry; ending friction between herdsmen and peasants, which had had a negative effect on the region's agricultural production. The most pressing question and the one on which the projects for sedentarization were based was in fact "the grain problem," within the "extremist and caricaturized version of what was called the Witte system,"⁸⁹ which was the

85. In all other regions, Kazaks were between 70% and 90% of the population.

86. M. B. Olcott, "The collectivization drive in Kazakhstan," *Russian Review*, 40, 2 (1981): 126.

87. A. B. Tursunbaev, ed., *Kollektivizacija sel'skogo hozjajstva Kazahstana (1926-ijun' 1941). Sbornik dokumentov* (Alma-Ata, 1967): 276.

88. Figures given by Š. Jusupov, "Iz istorii osedanija kočevogo i polukočevogo kazahstanskogo naselenija (1930-1934)", dissertation in history (Alma-Ata, 1949): 154-155, cited in I. Vladimirsky, *op. cit.*: 146.

89. A. Graziosi, *La Grande guerra contadina in Urss. Bolscevichi e contadini, 1918-1933* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1998): 84.

basis of the government's economic plan for speeding up industrialization. The means found for extracting more grain was collectivization. This, however, entailed the need to increase production and, as the state lacked the resources to increase agricultural productivity, it was decided that more land should be cultivated, a highly feasible option in Kazakstan, where vast areas were "under-utilized" (i.e. utilized by nomads). Ja. A. Jakovlev, the People's Commissar for Agriculture in the USSR, told the Sixteenth Party Congress (June to July 1930) that:

According to our calculations [...] there are from 50 to 55 million hectares in Kazakstan that can be considered suitable for cultivation. Of these, approximately 36 million are situated in the northern regions of the Republic: those of Aktjubinsk, Kustanaj, Petropavlovsk, Akmolinsk, Pavlodar and Semipalatinsk. Here land sown with grain occupies only 5% of the total arable area.⁹⁰

As the majority of Kazaks lacked tools to cultivate the land and the state did not have the resources to provide them with what was needed, in practice increasing cultivation meant increasing the amount of land cultivated by peasants, with the herdsmen relegated to the areas with the poorest land. Organizing sedentarization remained largely a dead letter for all of 1930. At the end of 1930 a VCIK investigation found that the task of settling the former nomads had come to a halt and the sites on which villages should already have been built were desolately vacant.⁹¹ At the end of 1930 the construction of housing and other buildings had not reached 15% of the number planned and, in many cases, the houses built were hovels unfit for habitation.⁹² The disastrous situation in the progress of the work of sedentarization was the combined result of the low priority assigned to the project, disorganization in transport, and a chronic lack of construction materials (which affected all construction projects in the USSR at the time). Government documents from Kazakstan which are pertinent to the question are a series of descriptions of the perennial impasse that was met in putting the plans into effect. At the end of 1930 a Moscow commission concluded that the work of sedentarization was at a "standstill."⁹³

The nomads viewed sedentarization with great hostility. According to a study done in the nomad district of Balhaš (Alma-Ata *okrug*), the herdsmen saw sedentarization as a "trap," devised so that a census could be taken and it would be easier to tax and depredate them.⁹⁴

90. *XVI s'ezd Vsesojuznoj Kommunističeskoj partii (bol'shevikov): stenografčeskij otčet* (Moskva, 1930): 584 (cited in Ž. B. Abylchožin, "Collettivizzazione, carestia..." *op. cit.*: 148).

91. GARF, A-296/1/450/126, *Komitet po prosvetšeniju nacional'nyh men'sistv pri Narkompros RSFSR (Komnac RSFSR, November 1930)*.

92. Report on the implementation of sedentarization in 1930, quoted in I. Vladimírsky, *op. cit.*: 142-143.

93. GARF, A-296/1/450/126 (November 1930).

94. *Ibid.*

3.1. The arrival of the “special colonists”

During this period, peasants deported from the European part of the USSR were arriving in the region. Kazakstan was in fact one of the destinations (the third in importance after the Northern *kraj* and Siberia) for hundreds of thousands of peasants who were being deported for having opposed collectivization. Although the arrival of “dekulakized” peasants from Russia did not mean they were automatically settled on “denomadized” lands, the intentions of the regional government were moving in this direction. The destination of the first wave of deportees was, in fact, supposed to be nomad *rajony*. The chaotic situation that ensued after the decision was reached meant that the deportees were instead relocated to agricultural areas; this made it easier to settle them and made it possible to stem the drop in production. On January 23, 1930, the *krajkom* decided “indicatively” on the districts where the deportees should be sent: Adaj (a nomad region on the Caspian Sea); Pribalhaš (a nomad district in the Alma-Ata *okrug*); the Čeckij district (Karkaralinsk *okrug*); the southern areas in the Atbasar and Turgaj districts and those in Ust’-Ursam, Bukeev and Irgiz.⁹⁵

However, the great mass of deportees (70-80%) arrived when the region had not yet been “denomadized”: the largest wave of peasants in fact arrived between the summer of 1930 and autumn of 1931. Furthermore, the first phase of deportation, which occurred in 1930, was largely one of “deportation/abandonment,” similar to what was happening in other regions where the “dekulakized” were arriving. The deportees who were settled in receiving regions became “special colonists” (*specpereselency*). This status entailed the loss of all civil rights and mandatory residence in a specified area, on “the poorest quality” land, distant from railways, roads and borders. In Kazakstan the areas originally identified for this purpose were the coasts and islands of the Aral Sea. A February 1930 *krajkom* directive specified that 3,000 families (12,000 to 15,000 people) were to be settled on the Aral’s shores.⁹⁶

In May 1930 there were still very few deportees: about 7,800 people had arrived, all from the interior of the Republic, except for 281 Russians who had been moved from Central Asia.⁹⁷ It is likely that the low number of deportees in this first phase can be linked to the spread of the revolts that had occurred in early spring. In March, in a message to Jagoda, second in command at OGPU, the *krajkom* reaffirmed that it was “firmly” opposed to the transfer of all the “kulaks” targeted for deportation and this, it was euphemistically explained, was because of the “political situation

95. “Protocol of the troika session at the *krajkom* with respect to the deportation and distribution of kulak families,” quoted in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 54.

96. RGASPI, 17/25/47/29, Resolution of a secret session of the *krajkom* (February 20, 1930).

97. *Central’nyj Arhiv Federal’noj Služby Bezopasnosti Rossijskoj Federacii* (hereafter CA FSB RF), 2/8/329/1-44, “Report of the OGPU operative group on the results of the work of deportation of second-category kulaks” (June 5, 1930), in V. Danilov, ed., *Tragedija sovjetskoj derevni: kollektivizacija i raskulačivanie; dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomach; 1927-1939*. T. 2: *Nojabr’ 1929-dekabr’ 1930* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000): 423.

that is emerging in Kazakstan.”⁹⁸ Despite pressure from the center, in the first six months of 1930, the total number of deportees was approximately 17,000, half of whom came from the interior of the Republic.⁹⁹ Dekulakized people in Kazakstan were deported within its borders, in some instances to regions where manpower was needed to increase the amount of land on which grain was cultivated. For instance, the “kulak and *baĵ*” families (in other words, families of Russians and Kazaks) subject to expulsion from the Aktjubinsk and Syrdar’ja *okrug*a were deported to the Akmolinsk region. The regional administration ordered that they should be left “with the simplest agricultural tools.”¹⁰⁰

Between 1930 and 1931, approximately 51,000 families were deported to Kazakstan.¹⁰¹ Given an average of nearly 5 people per family, it can be deduced that in the two-year period 1930 to 1931, between 200,000 and 250,000 people were deported to the region, which represents 11-14% of the total number of deportees in the entire USSR during this period.¹⁰² At the end of 1931, 192,000 deportees were counted in Kazakstan: many had escaped, others had not survived. The regions the deportees who arrived in 1930 and 1931 came from were above all the Central and Lower Volga (58% of the total); the Central Black Earth Region (20%); the Moscow area (6%), and Transcaucasia (2%). The remaining 13% were families of “*baĵ*” and “kulaks” from the interior regions of Kazakstan. In December 1932 nearly 10,000 Cossacks from Kuban’ arrived in Kazakstan, victims of the terror that had been unleashed to fulfill the region’s grain-requisition quotas.¹⁰³

After the first deportations to the shores of the Aral, there were generally three destinations deportees were sent to: the wheat-producing regions in the north and south; the rice-growing areas in the south; and the Karaganda region, where a giant agricultural and mining complex under GULag administration (KarLag)¹⁰⁴ was being enlarged — between late 1932 and early 1934 its population went from 10,000 to 25,000 forced laborers. Its workforce was composed principally of prisoners from labor camps, but many “special colonists” also worked there. Some nomad districts were also included in the area of economic control of the OGPU’s

98. RGASPI, 17/25/47/86, Resolution of a secret session of the *krajkom* (March 3, 1930).

99. CA FSB RF, 2/8/329/198-212, “OGPU report on kulak resistance to the policy of collectivization and to their deportation in 1929-1930” (November 17, 1930), quoted in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 705.

100. RGASPI, 17/25/47/28, Resolution of a secret session of the *krajkom* (February 20, 1930).

101. L. K. Šotbakova, *op. cit.*: 43.

102. In the two years from 1930 to 1931, approximately 1.8 million peasants were exiled from their regions (“first and second-category kulaks”).

103. V. Danilov, I. Zelenin, V. Kondrašın, I. Sidorov, eds., *Tragedija sovjetskoj derevni: kollektivizacija i raskulačivanie; dokumenty i materialy v 5 tomach: 1927-1939. T. 3: Konec 1930-1933* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001): 584, 612-613.

104. GARF, 9414/2/108/1-15, *Glavnoe upravlenie lagerej (GULag)*. In 1930 agronomic and geological expeditions recommended an area suitable for constructing a camp. In 1931 the first condemned prisoners arrived; a year later, the area under the jurisdiction of the local section of the GULag was 17,000 sq. kilometers.

Karaganda complex. In March 1931, the Karkaralinsk district, bordered by the labor camps on the west, had been targeted by those in charge at the OGPU as a destination for deporting tens of thousands of families of colonists.¹⁰⁵

The “special colonists” were engaged in a wide variety of jobs (felling trees, copper and iron mining, railway construction), but most often were sent to work in the Karaganda coalfields (over 15,000) and in farming. Two thirds of these forced settlers were in fact installed in the north, in regions suitable for cultivation. There they lived in conditions that were on the brink of survival: a third of the deportees spent the freezing Kazak winter in temporary shanties or in *zemljanki* (the traditional shelter of the poorest peasants, consisting merely of a hole in the ground covered with branches) they had had to build for themselves.

3.2. The “redistribution of damage”

In the campaigns carried out after 1928, the same mechanisms of “redistributing damages” were repeated. The procurement quotas assigned to individual administrative regions were divided in such a way that it was principally the nomads and semi-nomads who bore the brunt of the provisions.

After the March retreat, the Kazak officials sought to get a clearer idea of the situation on the ground, especially in the areas where the most rebellions had occurred. In April 1930, the Kazak official Ernazarov went to Balhaš a nomad district where there had been an uprising shortly before. This district, with Lake Balhaš in the south, had a population of approximately 25,000. It was one of the three regions in Alma-Ata *oblastʹ* that had been officially designated as having “a purely nomad economy” by the commission responsible for defining the dominant agricultural activity in each district, in order to rationally subdivide procurement quotas of grain, meat and animals. Soviets had been organized there only in 1928, at the time of the first campaigns of forced requisitioning. The district’s executive committee had a plan to requisition 410 tons of grain, and the plan was exceeded by an impressive 66 tons. However, as Ernazarov warned Gološčekin, “the grain and seed were collected at the cost of ruining animal herding; in the district grain was used as currency.”¹⁰⁶ Animals were bartered for grain and the Kazak herdsmen “were forced to exchange their last cow for grain, in order to observe the dispositions from the local official bodies.”¹⁰⁷ As a consequence, the number of animals dropped 35%.

105. The original plan had been to deport 150,000 families from the areas around Karkaralinsk, Karaganda and Akmolinsk. The figure was then lowered to 56,000, with an initial deportation of 10,000 “heads of families” so that they would be able to prepare the ground for the other members of their families.

106. Report from E. Ernazarov to F. I. Gološčekin on the situation in the Balhaš district (April 21, 1930), cited in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 234.

107. *Ibid.*

The method followed to meet quotas was to arbitrarily tax individual families, without regard to what their degree of wealth actually was. As a matter of fact, apparently one of the richest *bai*, a tribal chief, who had been exempted from the agricultural tax and from requisitions, subsequently led the revolt that broke out in April. The revolt consisted in an assault against a village center in the district (abandoned by staff and officials before the rioters arrived). The latter proceeded to sack the deserted village, seizing the requisitioned grain stored there and destroying houses and farm machinery.¹⁰⁸ In 1930 in the Karkaralinsk district (Semipalatinsk *okrug*), one of the hardest hit areas in 1928, the same thing happened as in the Balhaš district: there was a 27% drop in the number of livestock.

At least until the spring of 1930, events confirmed what the “Semipalatinsk case” had taught regional and national officials two years previously: enforced grain requisitions were carried out also at the expense of the Kazaks. Rošal’, a member of the Kazak *krajkom* sent to Moscow in September 1930, emphasized this circumstance in asking that that year’s procurement quotas for Kazakstan not be increased. In fact at the outset, the grain levies for 1930-1931 had been set at 58 million puds. On September 14, a meeting of the USSR Central Committee on grain procurement was held to decide increases, imposed by Stalin in a telegram from Soči the previous day. The following exchange took place between Rošal’ and Molotov:

Rošal’: [...] In our area there’s been a large increase in the cotton crop, but a decrease in grain cultivation, given that the amount of area cultivated has remained unchanged.

Molotov: Another tragedy.

Rošal’: I said that we’d seen a great increase in cotton farming.

Molotov: Another tragedy.

108. In Kazakstan the reaction to collectivization was particularly violent and it was the herdsmen who were principally involved. In early 1930, there were hotbeds of revolt, both among Europeans and among Kazaks, in all areas of Kazakstan. Data are incomplete but show that in the first six months of the year more than 80,000 people took part in uprisings (Ž. B. Abylhožin, K. S. Aldažumanov, M. K. Kozybaev, *Kollektivizacija v Kazahstane: tragedija krest’janstva* (Alma-Ata: 1992): 20-26). In Kazakstan, for the year 1930 the OGPU recorded 266 “mass revolts” and 332 “acts of terrorism,” such as the killing of Communists, members of the Komsomol or plenipotentiaries for collectivization (“Secret report by the political section of the OGPU on the form and dynamics of class warfare in the countryside in 1930,” dated March 15, 1931, cited in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 801, 804). Although the majority of the revolts were local ones and consisted of uprisings of villages or of *auly*, in a few cases they involved several thousand people. In 1930 the largest were those in the Kzyl-Orda region (4,500 people — the largest uprising in the USSR at the time); the revolts in Irgiz (in the Kustanaj and Aktjubinsk *okrug*), in which 2,500 people took part; the revolt in the Suzak *rajon* (Syrdar’ja *okrug*), involving 2,000 people (“Report by the OGPU on kulak resistance to the policy of collectivization and their deportation in 1929 and 1930,” dated November 17, 1930, cited in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 703-705). The most extensive treatise on resistance to collectivization in Kazakstan is Kajdar Aldažumanov’s article “Krest’janskoe dviženie soprotivlenija,” in G. Anes, ed., *Deportirovannye v Kazahstan narody: vremja i sud’by* (Almaty: Arys, 1998): 66-93; the best research focusing on a regional case is T. Allanižajov, A. Taukenov, *Šotskaja tragedija. Iz istorii antisovetskih vooružennyh vystuplenij v Central’nom Kazahstane v 1930-31 gg.* (Almaty: Fond “XXI vek”, 2000).

Rošal: From the general point of view everything is fine but [...] take our Alma-Ata *okrug*. The quotas [for the grain levy] for the Central Volga¹⁰⁹ were only 23 puds, while with us in the nomad *okrug*a the quotas are 32 puds. Here I must clearly declare that the increase weighs most heavily on the shoulders of the Kazak population that is in the course of being sedentarized. [...] The pressure on the nomad zones cannot be the same as one the zones inhabited by Europeans, this is irrefutable. [...] In the Aktjubinsk region the harvest was poor; in the past they furnished 14 million puds, but this year we have given them a total exemption. We have asked for no help, but we cannot be assigned [an additional] 2 million [puds of grain quotas].¹¹⁰

The following day Kazakstan was assigned an additional 3 million puds of grain quotas — approximately 50,000 tons.¹¹¹ In reality, the *krajkom* did very little to stop what it claimed to condemn. The same practices were followed in setting the nomads' grain quotas for 1930-1931. In September, the month the meeting was held, the OGPU reported that the authorities in the Kzyl-Orda district had divided the amount of grain that had to be delivered among the various zones in the district in such a way that *half* of the district's grain levy would have to be furnished by the Kazalinsk area, one of those classified as having a "purely nomad economy." Only after the angry reaction of the population (riots — what the OGPU called "outbreaks of banditism") did the administration decrease the quotas.¹¹²

4. The end of animal herding

As previous works on collectivization and the famine in Kazakstan have shown, the main cause of the catastrophic loss of livestock were the livestock requisitions carried on during 1930 and 1931. In this article, I underscore the role which grain requisition played in the Kazaks' impoverishment,¹¹³ a role directly linked to the large population of agricultural colonists in the region. As we have previously seen, in 1928 *džut* and grain requisitions forced herdsmen to gain access to the market by selling off their livestock, in line with a mechanism common in times of scarcity in zones inhabited by both nomads and peasants, described by Amartya Sen in *Poverty and famines*.¹¹⁴ This process was aggravated and magnified by the

109. One of the principal grain growing regions.

110. From the stenogram of the Party's Central Committee's meeting on grain procurements (September 14, 1930), RGASPI, 82/2/61/1-39 (cited in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 619).

111. V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 633.

112. CA FSB RF, 2/8/37/48-53, "Note from the Plenipotentiary Delegation of the OGPU for Kazakstan to the central OGPU on grain procurement" (September 11, 1930), cited in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 603.

113. Following the path in the seminal article by Ž. B. Abylhožin, M. K. Kozybaev and M. B. Tatimov, "Kazahstanskaja tragedija," *Voprosy istorii*, 7 (1989).

114. Sen deals with the question of the relative impoverishment of nomad herdsmen and farmers in the famines that occurred in Ethiopia and in Sahel in the 1970s (A. Sen, *op. cit.*: 86-130). In both famines it was the nomads who paid the highest price in human lives in comparison to the population as a whole. This is explained by Sen essentially in terms of the loss of exchange value of the herdsmen's goods in comparison to the value of agricultural products.

collectivization drive: grain quotas were imposed even on herdsmen in order to force them to sell their animals. Uraz Isaev, President of the Council of People's Commissars in Kazakstan, went as far as to argue, in a letter to Stalin, that for the Kazaks, the grain requisitions had done greater harm than those of meat and animals. "It was not the state procurements of meat that were particularly important in causing a decrease in the number of animals," Isaev wrote, before going on to blame this on "the bureaucratic transformation of semi-desert *rajony* whose economies were pastoral into 'agricultural *rajony*,'"¹¹⁵ in such a way that grain requisition quotas were assigned to the nomads. Isaev also pointed out the harm that had been done to the nomads by the breaking off of exchange with non-nomads, since the pastoral *rajony* were in a situation in which they were "completely encircled by the state requisitioners of commercial grain," active in the nearby agricultural *rajony* and consequently in order to eat the herdsmen had to slaughter their herds."¹¹⁶ In the 1931 situation, with the majority of peasants already collectivized, the exchanges that had previously taken place between nomads and non-nomads ceased, while the drive to obtain grain, imposed on the peasants through the system of collective farms, reached new heights of effectiveness.

The winter of 1930-1931 in fact saw a new wave of collectivization, this time without the state in any way backing down the following spring. At the Kazak Party Plenum in February 1931, Gološčekin encouraged local administrations not to be "afraid of excesses."¹¹⁷ Between the summer of 1930 and the summer of 1931, the number of collectivized families went from approximately a fifth to approximately half of the total, but among the non-nomad population, the majority of families had already been collectivized prior to this. The year 1931 was truly "the first Bolshevik sowing," in other words the first time sowing took place when the majority of peasants were settled on collective farms. From its outset, the reason for collectivization had been to concentrate rural resources in a relatively small number of points, so that wealth could be more easily controlled and taken by the state. Faced with growing difficulties in the kolkhoz system, especially the fact that the kolkhozes desperately needed draft animals, it was decided to have recourse to the livestock the nomads still owned, which were used in practice as reserved wealth to shore up the collective system of agriculture that was on the brink of collapse.

The final blow dealt by policies directed against the herdsmen came at the beginning of 1931. With a series of resolutions the plenum of the *krajkom* decided there should be acceleration (*forsirovanie*) in socializing herds. The first of these measures — which in the years that followed came to be called "the errors of

115. August 1932 letter from Isaev, President of the Kazak *Sovnarkom*, to Stalin, cited in S. Abdirajymov, I. N. Buhonova, E. M. Gribanova, N. R. Džagfarov, V. P. Osipov, eds., *Golod v kazahskoj stepi* (Alma-Ata: Qazaq Universiteti, 1991): 141.

116. *Ibid.*

117. RGASPI, 17/25/58/15ob (cited in Š. Muhamedina, *Istorija kočevyh i starožil'českikh hozjajstv (Opyt partijno-gosudarstvennoj centralizacii hozjajstvennoj žizni Kazahstana v 1920-1936 gg.)* (Akmola, 1994): 102).

1931” — was taken in February.¹¹⁸ Subsequently, overturning the decisions taken the previous summer at the Fourteenth Party Congress, on May 29, 1931, the *krajkom* decreed the formation of huge animal rearing *arteli*. There was to be a shift from small kolkhozes on the *TOZ* model,¹¹⁹ normally composed of 25 to 30 families (there were, however, some *TOZ* kolkhozes with fewer than 10 families) to 516 large kolkhozes (organized following the model of the *artel'* for animal raising) with 500 to 600 families each, in order to make the “commercialization of production” simpler.¹²⁰ In practice, the decision was to concentrate 1.5 million people (a fourth of the population) in these enormous animal raising kolkhozes. In August 1931 in 60 nomad and semi-nomad *rajony* only 312 of the previously existing 2,710 *TOZ* remained, while the others had all been reorganized as *arteli*.¹²¹ It proved impossible to keep alive the large numbers of animals concentrated in these kolkhozes, created on unsuitable land, distant from springs and wells. Many died because of the lack of organization in requisitions. For example, in the Karkaralinsk *rajon*, by the end of January 1931, there were 5,000 large animals and 18,000 small ones. Because of the lack of necessary care, epidemic illnesses spread among the requisitioned livestock. No measures to save them were taken by the district’s administration.¹²²

On August 17, a further resolution was passed by the *krajkom* and the Council of People’s Commissars on increasing the tempo of collectivization in the livestock-raising *rajony*. In a report dated May 1932, President of the *Sovnarkom* Isaev claimed that between June 1931 and the spring of 1932 the number of animals in the private sector had fallen from 50% to 12% of the total, while the figure had risen from 31% to 49% in the kolkhozes and from 29% to 39% in the sovkhoses.¹²³

118. Cf. M. Omarov, *Rasstreljannaja step'. Istorija Adaevskogo vosstanija 1931 goda po materialam OGPU* (Almaty: Gylym, 1994): 23 on how this policy was enforced in the Mangiřlak *rajon*; Ź. B. AbylhoŹin, M. K. Kozybaev, M. B. Tatimov, “Kazahstanskaja tragedija,” *Voprosy istorii*, 7 (1989): 61 on the nomad region of Turgaj.

119. An acronym for “*tovariřestvo po obřcestvennoj obrabotki zemli*” (association for cultivating the land in common). It was the simplest type of collective farm, on which only land and the most important equipment were collectivized. Livestock, most equipment, houses and some land remained private property.

120. GARF, 6985/1/7/101-99, *Komissija VCIK po voprosam osedanija kočevogo i polukočevogo naselenija*. The fund, the principal single source of the present work, contains material gathered in Kazakstan or produced autonomously by another special commission (after the 1928 commission on the events in Semipalatinsk), headed by the Vice-President of VCIK, A. S. Kiselev, “on the problems connected to the sedentarization of the nomad and semi-nomad populations,” active from April 20, 1934 to August 31, 1934. The commission’s mandate was to examine the results of the policies of “sedentarization.”

121. Ź. B. AbylhoŹin, *Tradicionnaja struktura Kazahstana: social'no-ekonomičeskie aspekty funkcionirovanija i transformacii (1920-1930-e gg.)* (Alma-Ata: Gylym, 1991): 188.

122. Message to the *krajkom* on livestock epidemics in the Karkaralinsk and Kzyl-Orda *rajony* from the Assistant Director of the information section of the OGPU (January 28, 1931), cited in K. AldaŹumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 78.

123. Report by U. T. Isaev, President of the Kazakstan *Sovnarkom*, and O. Orumbaev, People’s Commissar of Finance, to the *Sovnarkom* of the USSR (May 11, 1932), cited in K. AldaŹumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 139.

The essence of the decisions taken in Alma-Ata between the spring and summer of 1931 was that as much of the herdsmen's livestock as possible should be "funneled" towards non-nomads, to meet the drastic lack of work animals and of animal by-products on the collective farms. In the process, kolkhozes would have to be set up for former Kazak nomads deprived of part of their herds. From the small amount of information available, what seems to emerge is a scene of generalized plunder, while the newly formed Kazak kolkhozes were disbanding and new groups of refugees without livestock poured into the countryside. It was not only because of directives from above that the "funneling" of animals from the herdsmen to the peasants was occurring. Turar Ryskulov, in a letter to Stalin written early in 1933, protested that "in many different places an ancient tradition has been revived: if there is a loss of animals in Russian villages, this is inevitably recouped at the Kazaks' expense."¹²⁴

By early autumn 1931, the largest uprisings had been put down. The harvest, even for a difficult year, was lower than that of the previous one, while requisitions had been increased from 33% to 39.5% of the crops gathered.¹²⁵ In the *krajkom's* resolutions the total collectivization of the remaining livestock was supposed to be accompanied by a parallel speeding up of the process of sedentarizing the herdsmen. On December 25, 1931, with a resolution that was kept secret, the *krajkom* and the Council of People's Commissars set the wildly unrealistic objective of completing sedentarization by the end of 1932.¹²⁶ The plan set forth in the resolution was that the Kazaks would be sent to European-style settlements with approximately 500 families each, similar to the animal raising *arteli* defined in the resolution passed the previous spring. With the disappearance of their livestock, the final destination for them became agriculture: the Kazaks from the central arid part of the region (whose economy was nearly entirely pastoral) were to be deported and settled in the agricultural areas in the north and south and set to work tilling the land.¹²⁷

The policy of concentrating thousands of former nomads in a few vast settlements would subsequently be ridiculed: Kiselev would speak of the fact that in 1931 "the idea of building New Yorks in the mountains and the steppes had taken shape and was beginning to be put into practice."¹²⁸ None of this got beyond the

124. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov, Vice-President of the RSFSR *Sovnarkom*, to Stalin, Kaganovič and Molotov, cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 187. The letter is the broadest and most thorough document on the situation among the Kazak population during the famine. It is a report written by Ryskulov as President of the commission formed by the government of the RSFSR "to draw up a project for settling the ex-nomad refugees."

125. N. Werth, "Uno stato contro il suo popolo. Violenze, repressioni, terrori nell'Unione Sovietica," in S. Courtois, N. Werth, J.-L. Panné *et al.*, eds., *Il libro nero del comunismo. Crimini, terrore, repressione* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998) (or. French edition: *Le livre noir du communisme. Crimes, terreur, répression* (Paris: R. Laffont, 1997)): 148.

126. GARF, 6985/1/7/101-99.

127. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 159.

128. GARF, 6985/1/4/94.

drawing board. During the course of the year, the decisions taken in Alma-Ata had none of the hoped for effects and the existence of the “New Yorks in the mountains and the steppes” was short-lived. During the winter of 1931-1932 an enormous number of farm animals died.

The *krajkom*'s directive dated December 25, 1931 was the first to raise the question of how to manage the masses of impoverished ex-nomads. There was not the slightest hope that the method they came up with, concentrating the Kazaks in large settlements in the region's agricultural areas, would be put into practice because there were no resources available for carrying it out. Starting in October 1931, we have hundreds of accounts of masses of indigent Kazaks fleeing in every direction and descriptions of scenes of death and desolation everywhere in the steppes.

4.1 The death of livestock

In the First Five-Year Plan it was envisaged that products from Kazak animal farms were to be shipped to Russia, and that this would be possible thanks to improvements in the transport system (starting from the building of the Turksib). The plan also provided that the basic structures for a meat-packing industry should be created within the Kazak Republic itself, with the construction of a gigantic meat-canning plant in Sempalatinsk, one of four planned in the entire USSR.¹²⁹ Its economic functionality had however been compromised by the virtually total disappearance of Kazak livestock. As early as August 1932 Isaev wrote to Stalin that the factory would be provided with meat from the Kazak herds no earlier than the end of 1937.¹³⁰

The almost total disappearance of the Kazak livestock, was seen by the center as the most serious and least expected of the economic consequences of collectivization in the region. Between 1928 and 1934 the percentage of Kazak livestock in the total number of the livestock in the Soviet Union went from 18 to 4.5%.¹³¹

The number of head of livestock in Kazakstan had therefore fallen by approximately 90% between 1928 and 1934, but for the areas inhabited by nomads and semi-nomads the figure was 97.5%. In 1929, on average, a family in Kazakstan owned 22.6 head of cattle and for the nomad and semi-nomad areas the figure rose to 41.6; in 1933, ownership had fallen to 3.7 animals per family in Kazakstan as a whole and to 2.2 animals per family in nomad and semi-nomad areas.¹³² The

129. R. W. Davies, *The industrialization of Soviet Russia*. Vol. 4: *Crisis and progress in the Soviet economy 1931-1933* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996): 488.

130. Letter from U. Isaev to Stalin, August 1932, cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 141.

131. Cf. R. W. Davies, M. Harrison, S. G. Wheatcroft, eds., *The economic transformation of the Soviet Union, 1913-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994): 289.

132. GARF, 6985/1/6/223, Figures from the Commissariat of Agriculture in Kazakstan, provisional conclusions drawn by the Kiselev Commission.

Commission concluded: “This shows how the nomad and semi-nomad *rajony* have lost all significance as *rajony* for commercial animal breeding, but also that the vast majority of Kazak families have been left with virtually no means of subsistence.”¹³³

Table 1. Livestock figures for Kazakhstan

Year	Total number of horses	Number of which were workhorses	Cattle	Sheep and goats	Pigs	Camels	Other animals	Total
1926	3,044,000	910,300	6,750,300	23,105,900	425,500	–	–	–
1927	3,575,800	947,400	7,720,600	26,102,300	520,700	–	–	–
1928	3,841,900	922,900	7,681,000	26,609,000	371,400	–	–	–
1929	4,133,100 <i>3,792,200</i>	1,037,900	7,268,000 <i>6,744,900</i>	24,864,200 <i>23,832,800</i>	318,900 <i>271,700</i>	<i>1,130,400</i>	<i>45,100</i>	<i>35,817,100</i>
1930	3,346,100 <i>2,615,372</i>	851,300	4,978,000 <i>4,125,085</i>	16,192,400 <i>12,776,316</i>	53,000 <i>21,348</i>	<i>788,429</i>	<i>38,158</i>	<i>20,364,708</i>
1931	2,265,000 <i>1,768,494</i>	843,800	3,230,500 <i>2,577,611</i>	7,048,600 <i>3,969,231</i>	89,000 <i>38,775</i>	<i>467,772</i>	<i>26,376</i>	<i>8,848,259</i>
1932	770,800 <i>685,048</i>	589,300	1,822,500 <i>1,588,770</i>	3,250,500 <i>2,718,341</i>	99,400 <i>89,342</i>	<i>165,825</i>	<i>15,045</i>	<i>5,262,378</i>
1933	511,100* <i>451,623</i>	385,400*	1,725,100* <i>1,612,465</i>	2,803,700* <i>2,703,569</i>	136,200 <i>134,793</i>	<i>88,874</i>	<i>13,746</i>	<i>5,005,070</i>
1934	431,727	–	1,585,203	2,153,962	124,888	78,275	20,756	4,395,820

Source: Figures from Gosplan, RSFSR (GARF, 6985/1/4/38, January 1 of each year); the figures in italics are from GARF, 6985/1/19/105, and refer to numbers for June of each year.

*figure given does not include the autonomous region of Karakalpakia (where in previous years, an average of 5% of Kazak livestock had been concentrated).¹³⁴

In a report drawn up by the Kiselev Commission on requisitioning of grain, meat, hides and wool in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia, it was emphasized that although in 1931 the number of every kind of Kazak livestock was a quarter of what it had been in 1929, until the very end of 1931 there had been an enormous increase in meat requisitions.¹³⁵ These had been set at 2,334,100 quintals for the 1928-1929 year, 2,283,000 quintals for 1930, and 4,735,000 quintals for 1931. In 1932, because of the huge number of livestock deaths, procurements had also collapsed to 898,000 quintals; in 1933 they dropped a further 50%, falling to 405,000 quintals.¹³⁶ On October 19, 1932, the *krajkom* drew up a list of the nomad and semi-nomad *rajony* which, on the basis of the Central Committee’s directive VKP(b) of September 17, 1932, were exempt from meat requisitions for two years. The report added:

133. GARF, 6985/1/6/222.

134. GARF, 6985/1/4/38.

135. GARF, 6985/1/7/80-76, undated but probably prepared by the Kiselev Commission in 1934.

136. *Ibid.*

“Despite this, in practice the resolution is not respected, and consignment plans for meat quotas have been assigned to nomad and semi-nomad *rajony*.”¹³⁷ On the one hand, the state was allocating animals to people for private use, in order to offset the disaster that had occurred in previous years; on the other, requisitioning continued. In 1933, state aid to the nomad and semi-nomad *rajony* in the Aktjubinsk *oblast'* consisted of 9,925 animals, while animal requisitions were 1,347 quintals (weight referred to live animals). The Kazaks, according to the writers of the report, had come to believe that “with one hand the government gives help, and with the other it takes part of it back.”¹³⁸

5. The spread of starvation and epidemics, the flight of the Kazaks

Famine spread through Kazakstan a year earlier than in the European part of the Soviet Union, where large numbers of people began to die in the autumn of 1932: in the autumn of 1931, hunger, which had hitherto been limited to scattered areas and to some periods during the year, was already widespread among the nomads, but only in the spring of 1932 did it also spread to Europeans in Kazakstan. Large numbers of people died in epidemics (typhus, scurvy, smallpox), rendered devastating by malnutrition. Cannibalism became widespread. Whereas the famines of 1918-1924 had occurred in different provinces at different times, in the years 1931-1933 the situation was equally tragic throughout Kazakstan. In 1932 and 1933, descriptions like the one below were common:

In the Pavlodar district, in *Aul* No. 1, 40 deaths have been ascribed to hunger, the majority of them children, while in order to survive the people left are eating cats, dogs and carrion. Similar instances have also been noted in other *auly* in the same district.¹³⁹

And this is how Turar Ryskulov described the situation in March 1933:

In the report by the Moscow section of the Red Cross, currently working in the area around Aktjubinsk, it is written that the Kazaks in those areas [...] have been stuck by hunger and epidemic. The hungry go looking through refuse, they are eating the roots of wild plants and small rodents. “The last of the cats and dogs have been eaten, the refuse heaps around the huts are full of the bones of dogs, cats and small rodents burnt by cooking...” Cases of anthropophagy are cited. In this report (as in many others) it is written that in the capital of the Turgaj district (2,500 inhabitants), 728 people have contracted smallpox, with an extremely high mortality rate. [...] Based on the figures from the local bodies in the Turgaj and Batpakarinsk districts, between 20% and 39% of the

137. GARF, 6985/1/7/80.

138. GARF, 6985/1/7/79.

139. From the report by the OGPU representative in Kazakstan (January 11, 1932), cited in Ž. B. Abylchožin, “Collettivizzazione, carestia...,” *op. cit.*: 160.

population have died and the majority of the people left alive have fled. In many of the soviets in the Čelkarsk district, 30-35% of the population in the *auly* have died.¹⁴⁰

Between 1930 and 1934 the regional directors had no clear idea of how many people were actually present in the Republic. Based on the figures they had in 1934, the total population had decreased by approximately 2 million people from the late 1920s,¹⁴¹ while the number of people living in cities had nearly tripled. The number of people who had died of starvation was not established, nor was the number of refugees who had left the Republic or the number who came back each year. The population figures, drawn up by the Kazakstan Bureau of Statistics and recorded by the Kiselev Commission are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Population of Kazakstan, 1929-1934

<i>Date</i>	<i>Total pop.</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Rural</i>	<i>%</i>
1.1.29	6,456,200	549,500	8.5	5,906,700	91.5
1.1.30	6,688,200	601,400	9.0	6,086,800	91
1.1.31	6,706,500	732,700	10.9	5,973,800	89.1
1.1.32	5,877,700	1,072,100	18.2	4,805,600	81.8
1.1.33	4,906,100* [4,858,200]	1,171,000*	24.8	3,687,200*	75.2
1.1.34	5,074,800	1,272,000	25.1	3,802,800	74.9

Source: GARF, 6985/1/16/75, signed by the “head of the sector for counting the population of KazUNHU (Kazak Bureau of Statistics).”

*error in the original: the figure does not coincide with the total given. The figure indicated in square brackets represents the total of the two partial figures given in the source.

All that is certain is that entire zones were emptying of their inhabitants. Early in the spring of 1932, 25,488 families (i.e. 100,000 people) fled from the 10 *rajony* in the Alma-Ata region, half of whom may have crossed the border into China.¹⁴² The Kazaks were not the only ones to leave: many European peasants also sought safety in flight. A report on the Alma-Ata region from October 1933 noted that many European peasants were leaving, moving towards the Ukraine and Northern Caucasus, the regions they had originally come from and where they had relatives. Other peasants had fled to China.¹⁴³

140. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 170.

141. GARF, 6985/1/4/93; 6985/1/16/55-57.

142. Memorandum from the head of the organizational section of *Ispolkom* in Alma-Ata to Uraz Isaev, President of the Council of People’s Commissars of KASSR (April 3, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 137.

143. GARF, 6985/1/22/122.

Another consequence of the situation was that children were abandoned. Often their parents left them in front of militia headquarters or other government buildings. In Kazakstan in 1933 there were approximately 61,000 destitute children, either orphans or children abandoned by parents who could no longer feed them. Of these, 16,000 were pre-school and 45,000 were school age.¹⁴⁴ They were crowded into orphanages where they died of hunger and from which they sought only to escape. The destitute children were subject to the same measures of “cleansing” in entire *rajony* that struck the adult population at the same time. Turar Ryskulov wrote to Stalin in the letter previously cited:

In December [1932] and at the beginning of January (in other words the coldest periods of the year) 1,100 destitute children were sent back from Karaganda to the areas the population was continuing to flee from, as part of a “clean-up” operation that had already been carried out against adults.¹⁴⁵

In the winter of 1931-1932 there had already been thousands of deaths in the zones where the refugees were concentrated, generally cities and industrial zones. For example, during the winter, on the site of the copper mining complex on Lake Balhaš, at least 4,000 corpses of Kazaks were buried in the snow.¹⁴⁶

It is not surprising that the desperate situation led to the stealing of livestock, especially of animals that belonged to the *kolkhozes*.¹⁴⁷ The thefts by the starving Kazaks provoked angry reactions from the peasants, who resorted to violence against the former nomads to drive them out of their areas.¹⁴⁸ Among the Russians there were widespread rumors that the Kazaks were eating Russian children, and a general terror of the spread of epidemics: all this fomented peasant hostility against the former nomads.¹⁴⁹

The Kazaks were the first to be fired by the *sovkhoses* and expelled from the *kolkhozes*, whose directors, in a situation of general hardship, chose to dismiss the least skilled and useful workers. Often directors got rid of whole groups of workers.¹⁵⁰ In March 1933, *krajkom* officials ordered the *sovkhoses* to stop “mass firings” of Kazaks and ruled that any case in which a group of more than 40 people

144. GARF, 6985/1/6/34.

145. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 172.

146. From a report to *krajkom* Secretary Mirzojan by Narskij, director of party activity in light industry (July 3, 1933), in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 266.

147. See the table sent to the Kiselev Commission in GARF, 6985/1/7/164 and a letter from Baliev, Procurator in the Irgiz *rajon* to the Kiselev Commission (May 23, 1934), in GARF, 6985/1/7/168.

148. Letter from U. Isaev to Stalin (August 1932), in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 148.

149. *Ibid.*

150. From the report to *krajkom* Secretary Mirzojan by Narskij, director of party activity in light industry (July 3, 1933), in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 266. Cf. the letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 168-169.

was fired by an animal rearing sovkhos was to be subject to approval by the party committee of the local *oblast'*.¹⁵¹

The collapse of agricultural production and animal rearing, the inability to contain the social crisis triggered by collectivization, and the increasingly insistent protests arriving from the apparats in Kazakstan, especially from Kazak officials,¹⁵² convinced Moscow that Gološčekin should be removed. This occurred at the height of the famine, in January 1933.

5.1. Arrival of the refugees in other areas of the USSR

As has been seen, people began to leave Kazakstan during the first winter of requisitioning, in 1927-1928. The exodus was to continue in the years to come. People moved to cities¹⁵³ and train stations and fled Kazakstan. According to some estimates 200,000 fled to China, while another million poured into other Soviet Republics.¹⁵⁴ At the beginning of August 1931, the Kazak Bureau of Statistics estimated that approximately 35,000 families of nomads (140,000 to 165,000 people) had left the Republic.¹⁵⁵ One reason China and other regions were chosen as destinations was the presence of relatives and members of the same tribe on both sides of the border, often because they had gone there in the exodus that had taken place ten to fifteen years earlier.¹⁵⁶ The 1934 Kiselev Commission cited more reliable data, which may, however, have been underestimated for 1933. According to their figures, 286,000 families (over a million people) left the Republic between 1930 and 1931, 78,000 in 1932 and 31,000 in 1933.¹⁵⁷ The 1931-1932 exodus was

151. "On measures for settling the *otkočevniki*," resolution by the *bjuro* of the *krajkom* (March 31, 1933), in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 264.

152. As early as August 1931 Zejnulla Toregožin, People's Vice-Commissar for Supplies, had officially criticized the policies of animal requisitioning as one of the principal causes of the impoverishment of the nomads, and had been removed from office (N. Nurbaev, "Žertva kolektivizaciji," *Partijnaja žizn' Kazahstana*, 8 (1991): 89). The following year criticism of Gološčekin increased: on July 4, 1932 five Kazak officials wrote an open letter to Stalin in which they explicitly asked for Gološčekin's removal (S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 128-151).

153. From which they had begun to be expelled with the enforcement of the law passed on December 27, 1932, introducing the system of internal passports.

154. Cf. GARF, 6985/1/16/55-57. According to Kazak demographer M. B. Tatimov, during the early years of collectivization approximately 650,000 left Kazakstan. Of these, 205,000 went to foreign countries, while 445,000 moved to other Soviet Republics (E. Andreev, L. Darskij, T. Kharkova, "L'histoire de la population de l'URSS 1920-1959," *Annales de Démographie historique* (Paris, 1992): 84).

155. Report from the "Office of census and statistics" on the nomad families that had left Kazakstan (August 9, 1931), cited in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 85. This figure, however, was greatly underestimated: only 563 families were counted as having gone to China.

156. From material by the special section of the *krajkom* on population moves to China and what caused them (December, 1931) in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 92.

157. GARF, 6985/1/6/224.

the first time refugees left without taking animals with them, and the first time that large numbers of people died. A new term was coined in bureaucratic language to indicate a former herdsman who had lost his livestock and become a refugee, *otkočevnik*¹⁵⁸ (from *kočevnik*, nomad). In the years that followed (returns continued at least until 1936, but probably beyond this) 400,000 people returned or were forcefully brought back to the Republic.

Hundreds of thousands of Kazaks poured into Siberia and the Ural regions, provoking panic among the local authorities. Because the plenipotentiaries were organizing their forced reentry to Kazakstan, the refugees were traveling further and further, as far as Novosibirsk, to various areas in northern Siberia and even to central Russia.¹⁵⁹ The movement of former nomads to Western Siberia began in the autumn of 1931, while at the beginning of the new year, it became “massive.”¹⁶⁰ The Canadian agronomist Andrew Cairns, working in the USSR for the British Imperial Marketing Board from the late spring until the early summer of 1932, visited collective and state farms in southern Siberia in May 1932 and during his train journey skirted the northern border of Kazakstan: “at every station” he saw hundreds of Kazak refugees, “all thin, cold rag-clad, hungry and many begging for bread.”¹⁶¹

There was also an enormous flow of *otkočevniki* to the Ural regions. At the end of November 1932, the soviet in the city of Orenburg reported the arrival of 40,000 refugees in the city and its immediate vicinity. The city administration began to send Kazaks back, but the measures had no effect, as people continued to pour in and those who left were immediately replaced by new arrivals. The city soviet appealed in vain to the Soviet Union’s CIK to oblige Kazak officials to stop people from leaving.¹⁶²

Refugees also streamed into Kirghizia, but this happened later than elsewhere. The mass of *otkočevniki* started arriving in the region only at the beginning of the autumn of 1932. Pišpek was surrounded by a ring of Kazak yurts, whose population was estimated to be 8,000 refugees. In April 1933, an average of six or seven Kazak refugees per day died in the Pišpek train station, of the approximately 800 that had

158. In some documents the refugees are called *otkočevščiki* (cf. report by the GPU, January 28, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 105.

159. Report by the State Procurator of the *kraj* of Western Siberia to Eiche, Secretary of the *krajkom* in Western Siberia, “on the spontaneous movement to the *kraj* of Western Siberia of Kazaks from KASSR and on their condition” (March 29, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 130.

160. Letter from the Secretary of the *krajkom* in Western Siberia to the *krajkom* in Kazakstan on the movement of Kazaks to the *rajony* of the *kraj* of Western Siberia, in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 109.

161. A. Cairns, *The Soviet famine 1932-33: an eye-witness account of conditions in the spring and summer of 1932* (Edmonton: University of Alberta, 1989): 10.

162. Report by the soviet of the city of Orenburg to the executive committee of the *kraj* in the Central Volga region, November 20, 1932 (I. Vladimírsky, *op. cit.*: 133). Victor Serge, banished to Orenburg in June 1933, described seeing Kazaks dying in the city in *Mémoires d’un révolutionnaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1951).

gathered there.¹⁶³ These Kazaks were rounded up by the plenipotentiaries which organized their return to Kazakstan, seeking to convince them that the famine was over. No one (not even the Pišpek militia) knew who these plenipotentiaries were and who had sent them. According to the rumors that were circulating, however, they had been sent by the directors of a large construction site in the Ču rajon (Čustroj) to recruit workers from among the *otkočevniki*.¹⁶⁴

One of the few voices that has emerged from the mass of the moving population was that of a Kazak refugee named Aukeev, a “manual worker” who left the Karkaralinsk district and arrived in the southern Siberian city of Bijsk. In July 1932 he sent a letter complaining about the conditions of the *otkočevniki* to the Central Committee of the party and to the CIK of the USSR,¹⁶⁵ in which he related that in the Karkaralinsk area there had been a protest during the winter of 1930-1931, which included the refusal to work in kolkhozes,¹⁶⁶ and this had been bloodily repressed: revenge was taken against everyone in the area, whether or not they had participated in the protest. According to Aukeev, the livestock requisitions in 1931 had left people without any animals and it was for this reason that the famine and the exodus had begun, which in some areas had involved 75% of the population. Once they arrived in Siberia, the refugees found “special plenipotentiaries” who organized their forced return, “and they in Kazakstan are starving to death.” According to Aukeev’s letter, it was difficult for the Kazaks who remained in southern Siberian cities like Bijsk or Barnaul to find work. Factories would not hire Kazaks. The head of personnel at the Bijsk sugar factory had declared “openly: ‘we don’t give jobs to Kazaks.’ They give Russians jobs and throw the Kazaks out.” The Kazaks were not hired because of the debilitated state they were in, because they were less used to industrial work and often because they had arrived in the city with their families, which was an additional problem for the factory’s directors. This drove people to abandon their wives and children: “Some companies only hire unmarried men and those who do not have a family. [...] Because of these conditions of life, many Kazaks abandon their families, leaving them with nothing.”¹⁶⁷ In other cases troop trains of Kazak men were sent to the steel mills and mines in Siberia that needed manpower. In May 1932 Andrew Cairns saw five hundred Kazak men being transported to work in Kuznec crowded on cattle cars.¹⁶⁸

163. Report by the Procurator of the Transport Sector of the Turkestan-Siberia railway to the Transport Section of the Supreme Tribunal of the USSR (April 27, 1933), cited in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 223-224.

164. *Ibid.*

165. GARF, 1235/141/13880/258-253. The letter was written in Kazak using Arabic characters by a refugee named Umurgali Aukeev and translated into Russian by a bureaucratic official.

166. In the letter, the event is called a “strike” (*zabastovka*).

167. GARF, 1235/141/1380/253ob. This situation was corroborated by the report of the State Procurator of the *kraj* of Western Siberia to the First Secretary of the *krajkom*, Eiche, “on the spontaneous movement to the *kraj* of Western Siberia of Kazaks from the KASSR and on their condition” (March 29, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 131.

168. A. Cairns, *op. cit.* : 14.

The movement of nomads to neighboring Soviet republics caused enormous problems for the regional officials, who protested vigorously against Gološčekin and pressed the government to make Kazakhstan stem the flow. In Siberia tensions between the Siberian population and refugees were enflamed by thefts of livestock by the mass of starving people and there were numerous reports of violence against Kazaks by the Russian population.¹⁶⁹ In one of many cases of this sort, Russians from the Baevskij *rajon* “badly beat” Kazaks accused of stealing wheat.¹⁷⁰ The State Procurator for Siberia emphasized that such occurrences were often of a racist nature, that Kazaks were subject to violence “because they are Kazaks.” It appears that it was fairly common for people to pretend they were GPU agents in order to search the arriving refugees and take whatever they had (often without much success, given the destitution of those being searched).¹⁷¹

“Anti-Kazak feelings,” as they were called, spread rapidly among the population, disturbed by the presence of this mass of desperate people. There were a large number of requests to the authorities and the militia to forbid Kazaks from moving along the roads after sunset, but in many cases the inhabitants in the areas where the refugees were arriving asked explicitly that they be sent back to the regions they had come from. One reason for this was the fear of contagion: many of the refugees were ill with typhus and smallpox and the epidemics were beginning to spread to Siberians (for example in the Slavgorod *rajon*).¹⁷² Rumors spread blaming Kazaks for dire crimes, usually violence against Russian women and children, to the point that the State Procurator in Barnaul published an official statement in the local newspaper emphasizing the baselessness of such tales.¹⁷³

It was in conditions like these that Siberian officials resolutely refused to take in the refugees, fearing that the Kazaks would settle there. At the start of 1932, in Moscow, Gološčekin and R. I. Eiche, First Secretary of the Party’s Regional Committee in Western Siberia, met to examine the refugee crisis. On March 9, Eiche wrote to Gološčekin protesting against the failure to respect the agreement reached. Gološčekin had previously written to Eiche that the Kazaks arriving in Siberia were not fleeing because of famine. Eiche replied:

It seems clear that the Kazak *krajkom* is not being correctly informed by its local organizations, if you think that what is happening this year in terms of movements of people (*otkočevki*) is in any way similar to what happened in past years. This year not only did thousands of families arrive only in the [Siberian]

169. In the *rajony* where the refugees arrived, horse thefts increased twelvefold. Cf. the report by the State Procurator of the *kraj* to the First Secretary of the *krajkom* of Western Siberia, Eiche..., in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 127.

170. *Ibid.*: 129.

171. *Ibid.*

172. *Ibid.*: 132.

173. *Ibid.*: 129.

districts bordering on Kazakstan, but even in distant districts such as Novosibirsk [...] have Kazaks arrived from Kazakstan.¹⁷⁴

Eiche conceded that, as Gološčekin claimed, it was “*bai* and *kulaki*” who were carrying out counter-revolutionary propaganda among the nomads. However, he laconically added:

This is nothing new. The whole question consists in this: for what reason has the counter-revolutionary work of the *bai-kulaki* been so successful this year in particular, in managing to mislead thousands of families of *bednjaki* and *serednjaki*.¹⁷⁵

Having disposed of the clumsy ideological justifications of the Kazak Secretary, Eiche turned to the real issue: who would be responsible for the hundreds of thousands of starving people? Kazak officials were trying to postpone the refugees’ return as long as possible as they knew they lacked the means to feed them. Eiche clearly explained: “The only material help that we can furnish and have furnished, is the distribution of grain rations to those Kazaks who go back,” and he expressed his anger at the “slowness” of Alma-Ata to do its part.¹⁷⁶ Aid was in other words being used as an incentive to leave. In any case, although the situation in Siberia was not as tragic as in Kazakstan, requests from Moscow for grain and chaos in the nascent system of collectivized agriculture did not leave the Siberian officials with much space to maneuver. Eiche emphasized that something needed to be done quickly if the refugee families were to participate in spring sowing. If nothing was done, the state would have to take care of them for another year. Gološčekin had even requested that in Siberia a system of “filtering” Kazaks should be organized for separating the “*bai*,” by this time an increasingly mythological entity, in the mass of starving people, from the ordinary nomads. This smokescreen also did little to budge Eiche, who argued that culling of this sort could only be carried out in Kazakstan. During the same month, a Siberian OGPU official told an envoy from the committee of the *oblast’* of eastern Kazakstan:

You wish to transform our *kraj* into an experimental camp. We are supposed to count your citizens according to the *rajon* they come from and their social condition, produce statistics, then bring them together and feed them and, finally, send them back to you only on your request. We do not agree to this!¹⁷⁷

174. Letter from Eiche, Secretary of the *krajkom* of the VKP(b) of Western Siberia, to Gološčekin, Secretary of the *krajkom* of the VKP(b) of Kazakstan, cited in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 243.

175. *Ibid.*

176. *Ibid.*

177. Report from the plenipotentiary Isenbaev to the committee of the *oblast’* of the VKP(b) of eastern Kazakstan and to the executive committee of the *oblast’* on the *otkočevniki* in Siberia (March 29, 1932), cited in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 133.

The Kazak Secretary had complaints of his own to make about the Siberians. The first was the accusation that the Siberian sovkhoses, faced with food shortages, were firing the Kazaks that had been working for them for many years. The second was that the Siberian *krajkom* was taking advantage of the process of repatriating refugees to Kazakstan to get rid of “their own” Kazaks, meaning those who had always lived in Siberia.¹⁷⁸ Naturally Eiche indignantly rejected the accusations:

And then your allusion, according to which Kazaks are being sent to you from Western Siberia, is incomprehensible. This, in my opinion, is totally unfounded hearsay and the Kazak *krajkom* should prosecute those who are spreading rumors like this.¹⁷⁹

Eiche called on Gološčekin to draft “tough measures” for the local organizations, in line with the agreements reached, and concluded: “Certainly, this is a difficult task and will entail more victims, but Kazakstan, both with help from the center, and with only its own resources, will be able to complete it.”¹⁸⁰

5.2. The refugees return to Kazakstan

As early as March 1932, a commission was set up, headed by Isaev, President of the *Sovnarkom*, to organize the refugees’ return, in accord with the regional officials in the areas they had fled from, and provisions for their survival once they had returned. The *krajkom* also ordered that analogous commissions should be formed at the provincial level, in every *oblast’* in the region.¹⁸¹ The return of nomads who had fled occurred every year during the hot season, but regional officials had no clear idea of the actual number of people involved: the figures on the *otkočevniki* that arrived were consistently 30-45% higher than the estimates. In September 1932 the plenipotentiary of the Kazak *Sovnarkom* in the Karaganda *oblast’* wrote to Alma-Ata: “On the number of families returning there are various figures (7,000, 6,000, 9,000) — all imprecise, and some of them invented.”¹⁸² In the summer of 1934 it was estimated that 40,000 families had arrived in Kazakstan that year, but the number that emerged from a subsequent count was 140,000 families.¹⁸³

178. In 1926 approximately 138,000 Kazaks lived in the RSFSR outside Kazakstan, the majority of them in Siberia (S. Akiner, *Islamic peoples of the Soviet Union* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983): 293).

179. Letter from Eiche, Secretary of the *krajkom* of the VKP(b) of Western Siberia, to Gološčekin, Secretary of the *krajkom* of the VKP(b) of Kazakstan, cited in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 244.

180. *Ibid.*

181. Protocol n° 97 from the meeting of the *bjuro* of the *Kazkrajkom* (March 31, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 134.

182. Report to the *Sovnarkom* of the KASSR on settling the refugees who had returned to the Karaganda *oblast’* (November 3, 1932), in K. Aldažumanov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 173.

183. GARF, 6985/1/3/177.

In the majority of cases the conditions of the refugees, who returned primarily because the regions they had fled to wished to get rid of them as quickly as possible, were appalling. At the end of 1933 a health commission reported from the Ču rajon that the 500-600 former nomads who had returned to the *rajon* had been abandoned in a camp that resembled a leper colony. Here half of them had died, for lack of food and because of the conditions in which they had been forced to live. They had been crowded into six shacks without stoves for heating. The shacks had earth floors and the Kazaks, poorly dressed with a few rags, slept directly on them.¹⁸⁴

According to a regional government envoy, in the Karaganda *oblast'* the sovkhoses, companies and party organizations were guilty of not looking after the *otkočevniki* “in a human way,” in other words they let them die.¹⁸⁵ Information on some kolkhozes in the region shows that between 20% and 30% of the former nomads were incapable of working because of malnutrition and illness. Food rations were being distributed on the basis of productivity: those unable to work received nothing.¹⁸⁶

The Kazaks returning from China, almost all of them without livestock, were included in Russian sovkhoses and kolkhozes. In many cases the former nomads who came back were placed in kolkhozes with European peasants where they were immediately marginalized in the dividing up of meager resources. In a report¹⁸⁷ by the party committee for the Alma-Ata *oblast'* on the economic conditions of the *otkočevniki*, it is said that in October 1933 there had been approximately 80,000 of them in the region (17,099 families registered). Of these families 13,661 had been in kolkhozes and 1,658 in sovkhoses; 118 were working on building construction sites and 352 for other non-agricultural enterprises. Only twelve kolkhozes (of the *TOZ* type) had been founded from the start with families of *otkočevniki*. Placing the former nomads in kolkhozes where Russians lived, which had been done without taking into account whether these kolkhozes had the economic means to support newcomers, had created considerable tension. The situation was particularly serious in the sovkhoses and in non-agricultural companies, where those in charge took no interest in helping the *otkočevniki*, seen as not being productive workers, to fit in.

In a report¹⁸⁸ sent to the governing committee of a rice-growing sovkhos in the Alma-Ata region (August 1933) there is a description of a situation in which the former nomads who had returned were the lowest rung on the social ladder of the sovkhos, even lower down than the “special colonists.” They were without shelter and slept “literally under the open sky,” while in the meantime houses had been built for the “special colonists.” Their salaries were not being paid to them.

184. GARF, 6985/1/36/16-14 (December 4, 1933), “Commission of the committee of the VKP(b) of the Ču rajon.”

185. GARF, 6985/1/3/176.

186. *Ibid.*

187. GARF, 6985/1/36/14-9 (October 24, 1933), “Report to the President of the Council of People’s Commissars Isaev on the economic situation of the *otkočevniki* in the Alma-Ata *oblast'*.”

188. GARF, 6985/1/22/146-143.

Violence was widespread: the Kazaks were beaten by all the directors, “by whoever felt like it.” Food rations (proportionate to job productivity) were systematically lower for the repatriated nomads, who were suffering terribly from malnutrition when they returned and were unable to meet production norms. The Kazaks were trying to stay alive by eating grass.¹⁸⁹ As a result, 50% of the Kazaks brought to the rice-growing sovkhoz had died and this “was considered an absolutely normal occurrence.” It was, the report claimed, “a clear example of the national policy followed by the previous government” headed by Gološčekin.¹⁹⁰ The writer of the report concluded emphatically: “No English colonialist, nor even a Spanish one, was ever able to create conditions as oppressive as those, which under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and what is more in the Kazak Socialist Soviet Republic, were imposed against the Kazaks.”¹⁹¹

In the same year, 1933, it was reported that three Kazaks had been lynched in the Alma-Ata region¹⁹² (the writer of the report made the racist nature of these cases clear: “It must be made clear that this is not merely a *samosud*, it is also the worst form of ‘chauvinism of great power,’ in other words anti-Kazak racism).”¹⁹³ In a settlement in the Bel’-Agač *rajon* a group of fourteen people was found organizing systematic violence against Kazaks, especially lynching, accusing them of stealing cattle or similar crimes.¹⁹⁴ In another case¹⁹⁵ the rural soviet and the directors of a kolkhoz organized the murder of a Kazak to terrorize the former nomads and get them to leave the area. Four months later, the number of refugees in the district had decreased by nearly two thirds.¹⁹⁶

In some cases (in the *rajony* of Lapsinsk, Kurdaj and Čilinsk in the Alma-Ata *oblast’*) it was on orders from the Secretary of the *rajon* that the former nomads were driven off the kolkhozes and conveyed to uninhabited zones where it was proclaimed that a new kolkhoz for them alone was being founded. In reality they were abandoned and left without either seed or farm equipment. The non-nomads’ hostility towards the *otkočevniki* that were settled in kolkhozes and sovkhozes can be explained by their fear that the little grain there was would not suffice to feed everyone and because they were afraid the refugees would spread disease.¹⁹⁷ The

189. GARF, 6985/1/22/145.

190. *Ibid.*

191. *Ibid.*

192. After a *samosud*, a summary trial in the village community.

193. GARF, 6985/1/22/133.

194. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 187. Ryskulov made it clear that episodes like this one were also very frequent in other *rajony*.

195. In the Kurdaj district.

196. GARF, 6985/1/22/82 (Autumn 1933).

197. Cf. similar attitudes towards starving people during the famine of 1921-1922 (A. Berelovitch, V. Danilov, *Sovetskaja derevnja glazami VČK-OGPU-NKVD. Dokumenty i materialy*. T. 1: 1918-1922 (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1998): 680).

flight of 1,894 families (over 10% of the total) from the Alma-Ata *oblast'* was recorded solely for the autumn of 1933.¹⁹⁸ As usual, these figures are likely to have been underestimated, as often even a “mass exodus” was not recorded by sovkhos directors.¹⁹⁹ Not all situations were tragic: in some cases, former nomads living in kolkhozes were better off, and there were some who in a few months had managed to rise above the level of mere survival, thanks in part to “help” sent by the center.

The return of Kazaks from year to year tapered off but continued throughout the 1930s. In 1936, 24,000 to 30,000 returned to the Republic.²⁰⁰ In 1937 there were still many Kazaks who had remained in the areas where they had taken refuge during the famine. In that year in the Saratov and Voronež regions (in central Russia, distant from Kazakstan), there were over 450 families, principally employed in seasonal work. The presence of former Kazak nomads was reported in the Moscow, Stalingrad and Kujbyšev regions and in the Volga German Autonomous Republic. Many of these refugees were “re-deported” to the places from which they had fled.²⁰¹

5.3. Policies of “sedentarization” in the new conditions

With the onset of famine the sedentarization campaign turned into a program to assist survivors and those among the former nomads who returned to Kazakstan in the spring of each year. As the program was at a standstill, the figures set for families to be sedentarized were being revised upwards from year to year, until the proclamation, in 1932, that the final sedentarization, involving the remaining 278,000 nomad families, would take place the following year.²⁰² During the months of the famine, the regional offices continued diligently to draw up minutely detailed plans on the numbers to be sedentarized, in a situation in which it was not even known what the total population of the region was. Yet these “cover-up” figures went to pieces in the divisions between the various minor administrative units. A report from November 1933 by the VCIK’s section for nationalities concluded that “in the majority of cases what was being planned was the passage to a non-nomad life for ‘thousands of families’ that were anonymous, and not that of concrete [...] *auly*” in specific *rajony*.²⁰³ But how many herdsmen really had been sedentarized, i.e. settled in a stable way in agricultural or industrial work? A member of the Kiselev Commission wrote in a draft report for the Party’s Central Committee:

198. GARF, 6985/1/36/14-9 (October 24, 1933), “Report to the President of the Council of People’s Commissars Isaev, on the economic situation of the *otkočevniki* in the Alma-Ata *oblast'*.”

199. *Ibid.*

200. I. Vladimírsky, *op. cit.*: 157.

201. *Ibid.*: 133.

202. GARF, 6985/1/6/228.

203. GARF, 6985/1/5/97.

In 1932 Comrade Gološčekin [...] furnished the CC with false information, according to which in Kazakstan 230,000 nomad families had be brought under sedentarization, when instead, as the investigation on sedentarization has shown, at the end of 1933 only 70,000 families had be sedentarized.²⁰⁴

Officially (with an absurdly precise feat of accountancy, especially given what life was like in the region at the time), of the 242,208 families that were subject to sedentarization measures between 1930 and 1932, 182,600 were counted as having been sedentarized. Only 70,500 of these, however, were considered “fully sedentarized”: 40,600 had been settled in European-style settlements, while 29,900 had continued to live in their own yurts.²⁰⁵

In many newly constructed villages the homes were so badly built that the Kazaks continued to live in their yurts and used the houses for their animals. The sedentarization points consisting of yurts were large agglomerations that were intended to include up to 500 families of former nomads (an average, therefore, of 2,000 to 2,500 people each). On January 1, 1933, 2,278 points for sedentarization were chosen and it was determined that an additional 1,176 points were be selected.²⁰⁶ On paper, the number of families conveyed to these places was 290,330 but the real figures were far lower: 70,500 families were involved,²⁰⁷ from which the number of those who left the “sedentarization points” to escape starvation has to be deducted. By concentrating people and animals, the main effect the “points” that were actually formed had was to spread disease among humans and animals.

The conclusion reached by the Commission Kiselev headed,²⁰⁸ which traveled through Kazakstan in 1934, was that sedentarization “was not seen as a package of economic, political and cultural measures, but only as the registration of the population in fixed ‘points of sedentarization’.” The sole provision that was actually carried out was the construction of housing, which was, however, proceeding extremely slowly, because of shortages of funds and materials and disorganization in transportation.²⁰⁹ What is more important is that the “points” had been chosen without verifying that they could provide sustenance for animals or even whether or not there was drinkable water available for people. Reports written at the time are consistently critical of the choice of these points, most of which were located far from pastures and watercourses.²¹⁰ It is impossible not to think the

204. GARF, 6985/1/7/143 (1934).

205. I. Vladimirsky, *op. cit.*: 152.

206. The Kiselev Commission, “Agricultural reorganization in the *rajony* of sedentarization,” GARF, 6985/1/6/228-177.

207. I. Vladimirsky, *op. cit.*: 152.

208. The citations have been taken from the draft report of the Commission’s conclusions, in GARF 6985/1/6/228-177.

209. It is significant that half of the funds were to have been “paid by the population involved” in sedentarization, in other words through tax increases.

210. According to Š. Muhamedina (*op. cit.*: 178), only 13% of the “points” had sufficient land and sources of water.

Kazaks were deliberately marginalized, sent to the worst land, so that the more productive Russian peasants could exploit the lands the “unproductive” nomads had formerly occupied. Moreover, the land on which the vast newly formed sovkhoses extended was generally in nomad *rajony*, where, Turar Ryskulov wrote, “the best land was taken from the Kazaks to favor these sovkhoses.”²¹¹ Even the financing for sedentarization was sidetracked towards districts where there was stable Russian agriculture, since “the Kazaks cannot profit from it, so it needs to be used there where it will have ‘more effect’.”²¹² At different levels within the administration, even aid in the form of grain and seed subsidies for the nomads being sedentarized was given to the peasants, who it was felt could make better use of them, paying back the grain they had been given after they had harvested.

Those who had been sedentarized were not permitted to bring animals to pasture. Throughout the Republic, the summer mountain pastures were abandoned, despite the fact that, as the Commission wrote, “the sedentarized way of life not only does not prevent people from bringing animals to pasture, but on the contrary requires rational use of these pastures.”²¹³ As in most cases the herdsmen were without supplies of forage, or these had been taken from them, animals starved. In a vicious circle, the very fact that the Kazaks were left without animals made it virtually impossible to distribute forage to them: “Transporting the forage that there is in the steppes to the sedentarization points was impossible because of the lack of draft animals, and the animals died for lack of sustenance.”²¹⁴ On the other hand, those sedentarized, left without farming equipment, could not cultivate the land. The Commission concluded: “The consequence of all this is that in Kazakstan and Kirghizia, the old economic base was destroyed, while no new one was established.” As a result, the new settlements were empty.²¹⁵

A fundamental circumstance was the significant difference between the attitude of Russian officials (the majority in the region) and Kazak ones. The Russians’ attitude towards sedentarization was basically indifference: many local administrators hardly cared about what was happening.²¹⁶ Their standard response was that it was the Kazak officials who should be taking care of sedentarizing the Kazaks. The latter, in many cases, made no attempt to establish “points of sedentarization” (which in a time of famine were death traps) but instead sought to convince the nomads to flee Kazakstan. The 1934 Kiselev Commission reported their reasoning:

211. Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov..., cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 188.

212. The former *okruga* of Petropavlovsk and Kustanaj. E. Ernazarov, *Osedanie v Kazakstane* (Moscow — Alma-Ata, 1931): 6. The pamphlet criticized these practices.

213. GARF, 6985/1/6/217, the Kiselev Commission’s provisional conclusions.

214. GARF, 6985/1/6/216.

215. Report by the VCIK’s section for nationalities on the problem of sedentarization, GARF, 6985/1/5/97 (November 1933).

216. Cf. the report cited in A. B. Tursunbaev, ed., *op. cit.*, 1: 526-527.

They instigated them to flee immediately, to kill their animals or take them with them, and often they were even the organizers of the moves (for example the President and the Secretary of the Executive Committee in the Tarbagataj district; the District State Procurator, the head of the militia and the District Judge in Zajsan; the President of the Karatal district and many others working in the district, without mentioning the presidents of soviets in *auly*, presidents of *kolkhozes*, etc.). Their slogans were: “Here you are going to starve; the Bolsheviks are not going to give you anything, they don’t even give us officials anything.” “There is not going to be any sedentarization, you are already without livestock. You will all die of hunger this winter: escape to where there is grain.” [...] “Soviet power is carrying out sedentarization to count all the animals people have, in order to take them away from them with requisitions.” [...]²¹⁷

Since 1933 the policies followed in the regions with nomad peoples in the RSFSR (mainly Kazakstan and Kirghizia, where 80% of the USSR’s nomads lived) had been officially criticized by the base. According to a report by the VCIK’s section for nationalities,²¹⁸ the policy put into practice by Kazak and Kirghiz regional officials between 1929 and 1932 had deliberately suppressed not merely nomadism but livestock raising as well. The former nomads had been directed towards commercial farming (grain) and industry. The average size of a field given to a family being sedentarized to cultivate had gone from 0.8 hectares in 1929 to 5.6 hectares in 1932, i.e. the norm for grain-producing regions. Until 1933, 87% of all the families involved in sedentarization were situated in “farming” *rajony*. In addition, according to a study done by the RSFSR’s *Narkomzem* in eight *rajony* undergoing sedentarization, raising forage crops for animals was not allowed, while commercial and technical cultivation occupied 96.5% of the cultivated land.²¹⁹

The institutions which logically should have played a fundamental role in sedentarization (starting from the People’s Commissariat for Agriculture) either took no part in the process or were only marginally involved in it. A specific section put in charge of supervising the process was created by the Kazak *Narkomzem* only on November 17, 1932, nearly three years after the official start of sedentarization:²²⁰ the resolutions passed by the previous commission in Kazakstan working under the *Sovnarkom*, and without any real power, were not carried out by the institutions to which they were addressed. The number of *Narkomzem* cadres entrusted with sedentarization was still incredibly low even in June 1934. In the entire Alma-Ata *oblast’*, there were thirteen people, two of whom were agronomists and one a veterinarian, to organize the sedentarization of thousands of nomads. The situation in other regions was similar.²²¹

217. GARF 6985/1/6/225.

218. GARF 6985/1/5/101-96.

219. *Ibid.*

220. GARF, 6985/1/7/87, Decree establishing the section of the Kazak *Narkomzem* responsible for sedentarization, signed by Isaev and Gološčekin, November 17, 1932.

221. GARF, 6985/1/4/7 (June 15, 1934).

One of the bases of sedentarization was supposed to be the creation of a network of “stations of farm machinery and haylofts” (*mašino-senokosnye stancii*, or MSS). In the end, 50% of the sedentarization points were set up beyond the range where they could be reached by the stations, 81% of which were located outside the *rajony* being sedentarized.²²² In a session of the VCIK’s section for nationalities held in October 1933, it was explained that in Kazakstan two systems of equipment stations existed. One was the MTS network (stations with farm machinery and tractors), the other the MSS: “The MTS are in charge of grain and cotton, while the MSS do not know what to do.”²²³ Further confirmation of the total abandonment in which the cultivation of forage crops had been left.

5.4. “Aid”

The autumn of 1932 was marked by the recognition, on the part of the center, of the disaster in Kazakstan. Starting early in the following year, the government began sending grain shipments to stem the disaster and make it possible to set the former nomads to work. In the spring small amounts of seed were distributed to guarantee a minimum harvest during the year. Officially, in November 1932 grain was distributed to 46,000 families.²²⁴ From October 1, 1932 to October 1, 1933, 9,137 quintals of “aid” arrived in the Alma-Ata *oblast’*. The vast majority of it was distributed during the spring sowing period (in April something was distributed to 53,050 families; in October the number fell to 3,333), to enable people to work and pay the state back (with interest) when the harvest was made. The number of families that received aid in the spring months was three times the official figure of *otkočevniki*, which confirms how difficult it was for everyone, not only those who had left and returned, to get sufficient food. In addition, as usually happened, the region’s nomad *rajony* (Balhaš, Čubartau and Kounradskij) were sacrificed when aid was distributed: in the Balhaš *rajon* the grain that arrived was half the quantity officially set, while the Čubartau *rajon* set a negative record with one fortieth of the grain promised arriving at its destination. In addition to grain, tea, sugar and fish were also distributed.

The writers of the report calculated that in the *oblast’* at the end 1933, 17,068 families of *kolkhozniki*, as well as 5,400 families of *otkočevniki* were left completely without grain.²²⁵ In addition to these 22,468 families, there were 6,675 families of seasonal workers, who were also dependent on state aid. The ration established for distribution for the seven months which followed (December 1933 to June 1934) was 40 kilograms per family per month. This, according to the committee

222. GARF, 6985/1/5/98.

223. GARF, 6985/1/5/72 (October 16, 1933).

224. Letter from Mirzojan to Stalin and Molotov, dated March 29, 1933, cited in S. Abdirajmov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 196-200.

225. Of which 3,900 had returned from China and 1,500 from Kirghizia (GARF 6985/1/36/9).

in the Alma-Ata *oblast'*, meant that the total quantity of grain consumed by the 29,143 families counted would have been 81,600 quintals,²²⁶ which corresponded to a consumption (for both food and sowing) of 96 kg of grain per person per year, half the normal average consumption in country areas in Russia. This figure thoroughly illustrates what life was like for the *kolkhozniki* in 1934. At the end of 1933, it was reported by a sovkhos in the Alma-Ata region that in a ten-day period in October, 107 nomad families had returned, each of which had only two or three sheep or goats with them.²²⁷ In the same sovkhos, a family of *otkočevniki* received 81 kg of bread a year, a quantity “far from meeting the minimum basic need.”²²⁸

A total of 118,640 tons of grain was distributed in Kazakstan between October 1, 1932 and January 1, 1934.²²⁹ A considerable part of the “aid” distributed to the former nomads was not given as subsidies, but rather as “advances” to be used for sowing. The seed sent was supposed to be returned, with interest, after the harvest. A resolution passed by the People’s Commissars of Kazakstan established: “The cost of 50 to 55% of the food aid will have to be paid by the beneficiaries.”²³⁰

Although officially there was supposed to be a distinction between “food aid” that did not need to be repaid (*prodpomošć*) and loans of seed, in most instances the former did not reach those it was destined for. Most grain shipments were stolen en route, with the connivance of — or direct organization by — the local authorities who should have supervised their distribution. In a report from January 1933 it was claimed: “A considerable part of the food aid does not get to the kolkhozes, to the families. The theft of grain along the route has reached enormous proportions. [...] In the transporting of grain from Akmolinsk to Žana-Arka, of the 3,000 puds sent, 300 arrived.”²³¹ No one who stole grain ever stood trial. Most of the grain which did arrive at its destination was then used by the sovkhos and kolkhoz directors exactly as though they had been making loans, and was distributed to workers on the basis of how much work they did. In many of the sovkhoses the food subsidies were sold rather than distributed.²³²

226. GARF, 6985/1/36/9.

227. GARF, 6985/1/27/31.

228. GARF, 6985/1/27/27.

229. GARF, 6985/1/16/38. Based on the quantities of grain shipments (figures given in R. W. Davies, M. B. Tauger, S. G. Wheatcroft, “Stalin, grain stocks and the famine of 1932–33,” *Slavic Review*, 3 (1995)) it follows that in the first six months of 1933 Kazakstan received approximately 3% of total shipments made in the USSR. This figure roughly corresponds to the annual grain requisition in Kazakstan (in 1930–1931 the Republic furnished 4% of the total requisitions). Cf. CA FSB RF, 2/8/681/238–241, “Table of the information section of the OGPU on the plan for requisitions of cereal crops [...] in 1930–31” (September 9, 1930), cited in V. Danilov, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 666–667.

230. GARF, 6985/1/16/45, Resolution of the Council of People’s Commissars of the KASSR (March 3, 1934).

231. A. B. Tursunbaev, ed., *op. cit.*, 2: 22.

232. GARF, 6985/1/27/31 (kolkhoz in the Alma-Ata *oblast'*, late 1933).

Starting in the spring of 1933, officials began importing animals from China in an attempt to overcome the loss of the region's livestock resources.²³³ In 1933 approximately 55,000 head of livestock were bought and distributed.²³⁴ In general in the Union, the state was trying to offset the death of a large number of animals and the lack of draft animals for farm work by importing livestock, at a time when mass production of tractors was still impracticable. In many places, the animals distributed were killed and eaten or otherwise sold to procure grain. Even in 1934, although deaths had decreased, in many *rajony* in Kazakstan and Kirghizia there was still a fall in the number of animals, especially horses and camels. The Kiselev Commission reported many cases similar to this:

In the Keles *rajon* in the southern Kazakstan *oblast'*, 3,442 animals were distributed to 35 *kolkhozes*, 1,474 of which were sold. In the "Berlik" *kolkhoz*, of the 52 families that received animals, 48 sold them; [...] in the soviet in *Aul* No. 17 in the Irgiz *rajon*, 14 calves were received, eight of which were killed; [...] in the soviet in *Aul* No. 15 in the same *rajon*, 5 horses were received and 4 of them were killed; of the 212 sheep distributed, 54 were killed, etc.²³⁵

5.5. Requisitions during the famine

Requisition and procurement polices underwent no substantial change, even when the famine was at its height. Starting in mid-1932, the regional government began to take steps in the direction of partial correction of the worst errors committed the year before. These measures had no effect, however, and constant pressure from the center, which in the midst of famine was demanding enormous amounts of grain, left no room for maneuver.

The turning point occurred on September 17, 1932, when in Moscow a directive that permitted private ownership of a larger number of animals by herdsmen in Kazakstan was issued. This directive was not, however, seriously applied until the end of the year, and was publicized in Kazakstan only more than a month afterwards. The region's most important newspaper, *Kazakstanskaja pravda*, published it on October 26, 1932.²³⁶

On November 8, 1932, Gološčekin received a telegram signed by Stalin and Molotov threatening repressive measures similar to those adopted in the Northern Caucasus, if grain quotas were not met.²³⁷ In Kuban' a wave of terror had been unleashed which involved the deportation of thousands of Cossacks, in addition to a freeze on food supplies to villages that "did not consign grain."²³⁸ In Kazakstan, only two months after

233. Letter from Mirzozan to Stalin and Molotov, dated March 29, 1933, in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 199.

234. I. Vladimirsky, *op. cit.*: 128.

235. Conclusions of the Kiselev Commission, GARF 6985/1/6/221.

236. GARF, 6985/1/9/2.

237. Telegram cited in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 231.

238. Cf. T. Martin, *The affirmative action empire...*, *op. cit.*: 325-327.

the directive aimed at offsetting the animal deaths was issued, the intensification in grain confiscation moved in the opposite direction, given that the death of the animals had been caused not only by livestock requisitions, but also by those for grain, which at various levels in the apparatus had been “deflected” towards the Kazaks.

Grain quotas continued to be based on imaginary figures and seriously influenced the fall in numbers of livestock. In 1933 the *kolkhozniki* were once more forced to sell their animals to meet the grain quotas set. The Kiselev Commission accused the competent organs of “errors” not only in determining productivity and estimating the harvest but also in establishing the grain tax. For example, in the “grain balance sheets” of the *kolkhozes* in the Urdžar *rajon* in the Alma-Ata *oblast*, the requisitions were so exorbitant that the amount owed was 25% higher than the entire harvest (cf. the “grain balance sheet” drawn up by the head of the political section of an MTS in the same *rajon* given in Table 3).

**Table 3. “Grain balance sheet” for *kolkhozes* served by an MTS in the Urdžar *rajon* (Alma-Ata *oblast*)
September 1933 (in quintals)**

Assets	
Total production	66,000
Debits	
Payment in kind to the MTS	6,749
Seed for autumn sowing	9,745
Seed for spring sowing	21,484
Food distribution for 3,561 families (14,515 people), calculated at 1 quintal per person per year	14,500
Advances to <i>kolkhozniki</i>	2,900
Consignment plan	37,023
Deduction of 2% for tax on grain	740
Total debits	94,103
Deficit	28,103

Source: GARF 6985/1/7/77 (errors of calculation in the original).

In the private farming sector of this *rajon*, the plenipotentiary of the *oblast*’s committee calculated a harvest of 17,839 quintals (of all types of grain), while the consignment plan called for 23,300 quintals.²³⁹ This pressure was also caused by

239. GARF, 6895/1/7/77.

the failure of the attempt to increase cultivation: according to official data, between 1930 and 1934, in Kazakstan land under cultivation decreased by 4.2%.²⁴⁰

The new heads of the regional party, who took office in January 1933 after Gološčekin had been removed, quickly came to adopt policies that were little different from those followed by their predecessors, although they took some measures that lessened pressure. The most widespread form of kolkhoz was once more the *TOZ*, the large livestock-rearing *arteli* formed in 1931 were disbanded (those that had not already collapsed when their Kazaks fled),²⁴¹ while the policy of concentrating nomads in vast “European-style” settlements, begun in December 1931, was declared erroneous by the new Kazak administration in March 1933.²⁴² Although after the 1933 harvest conditions improved slightly, it was only one year later that there were improvements in the animal raising sector: in December 1934 the *krajkom* decided to increase the number of animals that could be privately owned.²⁴³

6. The question of the chain of command

The policies involved in the offensive launched against nomad society in Kazakstan between 1928 and 1930 were the product of interaction between various institutional entities and various territorial levels of government, in conditions of a structure of command based on collusion between the Moscow Stalinist group and its trusted representatives in power in peripheral regions.²⁴⁴ The ways these attacks were carried out raise three inter-related questions. The first is whether depriving Kazaks of their means of sustenance was planned and, if it was, at what level in the administrative and command apparatus the decision was taken. The second is to what extent the decision reflected the anti-Kazak prejudices of local officials and plenipotentiaries, the majority of whom were Russian. The third is what the institutional mechanisms were

240. GARF, 6895/1/4/3.

241. GARF, 6895/1/7/146, Project of a resolution of the VCIK’s section for nationalities on the sedentarization of the nomad peoples of the RSFSR, 1934.

242. “On measures for settling the *otkočevniki*,” resolution of the *bjuro* of the *krajkom*, March 31, 1933, in K. Karažanov, A. Takenov, eds., *op. cit.*: 263.

243. The new Party Secretary in Kazakstan, Mirzojan, told the assembly of the section of the party in Alma-Ata that the number of head of livestock that could be privately owned would rise from 100 to 150 sheep and goats and from 5 to 7 cows. The previous numbers had been set by a resolution of the Central Committee in September 1932. Kazakstan underwent yet another economic-administrative subdivision: this time it was divided into three large economic areas. In the first (animal-raising *rajony*), it would be possible to own the number of animals listed above; in the second (mixed-economy *rajony*), the number was 5 cows and 40 to 50 small animals; in the third (cotton and grain-growing *rajony*), the number was 2 to 3 oxen, 2 to 3 young pigs and 15 head of sheep and goats. GARF, 6985/1/9/133, article from *Kazakstanskaja pravda* (December 20, 1934).

244. Analogous to what James Hughes argues was happening in Siberia between the grain-requisition crisis and collectivization. Cf. J. Hughes, *Stalinism in a Russian province. A study of collectivization and dekulakization in Siberia* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1996); J. Hughes, “Re-evaluating Stalin’s peasant policy in 1928-30,” in J. Pallot, ed., *Transforming peasants. Society, state and the peasantry, 1861-1930* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1998).

that led to the failure of what was meant to be “sedentarization,” but turned out to be the plunder and marginalization of the nomads.

I believe that the logic of the situation naturally led in the direction of plundering the Kazaks, beyond racism and ethnic tensions (which, however, made the outcome worse), within a system of administration based on intimidating its underlings, creating shortages at the local level, and extracting the most resources possible from the population. If we concentrate on the logic of relationships of power within the chain of command and on the input that came from above, what emerges is the following pattern. The plenipotentiaries or officials in a Kazak province received orders from Alma-Ata (which had in turn been threatened by Moscow) to collect an unrealistic amount of grain. The Russian peasants worked the land and grew grain, while the herdsmen ate grain but did not grow it; instead they had large numbers of animals that it would be possible to use on the land being brought into cultivation to increase production (all the more necessary since the peasants had killed much of their livestock during their first winter under collectivization). Given that the consignment quotas were extremely high and the official was obliged to implement harsh policies, it was preferable to protect the grain the peasants had been left with as long as possible, so they would not be without seed for sowing the following year: if this did not happen, the year afterwards there would be no harvest and the official would be removed for not meeting quotas. If he turned towards the grain in Kazak hands, and moreover taxed them for an amount of grain that was far higher than what he suspected they had, this would force them to sell their animals, which would be conveyed towards the sedentary agricultural sector. The result would be threefold: there would be more draft animals for farm work; there would be a decrease in the number of animals the Kazaks owned, a source of continual conflicts with the peasants over pasture rights, herds ruining the peasants’ fields, etc.; the Kazaks would be forced to abandon nomadic animal herding, an economic form that was not highly productive for the state. The impoverished Kazaks would want to be “sedentarized,” they would till previously uncultivated land, or could be sent to work in mines and on industrial construction sites, or as was more likely, they would simply flee the district and become refugees and the problem they represented for the official who headed the district would be resolved.

Above and below this intermediate level, there was a variety of strategies: the peasants benefited in some degree by plundering the nomads and competed with them to avoid starvation; the regional officials in Alma-Ata, attempting to satisfy the ever increasing demands from the center, intentionally set going the mechanism of funneling resources away from the nomads or in any case backed the dynamics unleashed at the lower levels of the administrative pyramid. From the small amount of information available on how the chain of command worked, we learn, for example, that in Kazakhstan, unlike what was done in the rest of Central Asia, in 1930 no quotas were set for the collectivization that was to take place in each province: the initiative was at the discretion of the local officials.²⁴⁵ The

245. M. B. Olcott, “The collectivization drive” . . . , *art. cit.*: 129.

responsibility for the mass death which occurred therefore hovers somewhere on the border between state and society, where the center's transforming directives (issued to make the construction of its military-industrial complex possible) were handled by minor officials for their own ends, in such a way as to redistribute the damage caused by the input from above.

But how well was this input, these orders from the center, understood at ground level? How did the peripheral institutions, flooded by an indigestible number of central government directives,²⁴⁶ decide an order of priority for orders that could not all be carried out? These questions lead us to the third question raised above: why was sedentarization never really attempted?

According to Terry Martin, the way the center was able to get the lower levels of the apparatus to carry out policies that involved recourse to violence was by having "hard line" institutions send signals that were vague, but whose meaning was unmistakable.²⁴⁷ Local cadres had to decide which questions deserved priority, and to do this they had to interpret the signals arriving from Moscow and understand which policy had the support of the "hard line," and therefore should immediately be put into effect, and which only had the support of the "soft line," and could therefore be postponed.²⁴⁸ Martin feels that the processes of collectivization and dekulakization were carried out in this way, with a combination of vague directives from the Party's Central Committee and terror unleashed against prearranged sectors of the population by the OGPU. Local officials, desperate to avoid accusations of "right-wing deviationism" (in other words being too soft), threw themselves into the campaign, setting absurdly high norms and involving as many members of the targeted population as possible. Afterwards, limited sanctions against local "excesses" in "hard line" actions were issued by the center (perhaps after an investigation carried out by a commission from a "soft line" institution).

Keeping in mind the approach indicated by Martin, the impression one gets when reading the documents collected by the Kiselev Commission in 1934 is that the term "sedentarization" in the years from 1930 to 1934 had two different meanings, which correspond to two different periods: the two years from the beginning of 1930 to the end of 1931, and the two years that coincide with the famine, from the autumn of 1931 to the 1933 harvest.

Sedentarization, understood as settling nomads in agricultural and animal-raising villages, was throughout the years 1930-1931, a low priority policy, which no local organization put actually into practice and which even official propaganda ignored.²⁴⁹ During this period the real policies towards the nomads were enforcing

246. T. Martin, "Interpreting the new archival signals. Nationalities policy and the nature of the Soviet bureaucracy," *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 40, 1-2 (1999): 117.

247. For the division in the Stalinist bureaucracy between "hard line" and "soft line" institutions, see Terry Martin's article cited in the previous note.

248. T. Martin, "Interpreting...", *art. cit.*: 117-118.

249. The committee for sedentarization in the Pavlodar *okrug* in session on July 5, 1930 complained that there had been "no propaganda preparation for sedentarization;" and that "the newspapers and unions had done no preparatory ground work" (GARF, 6985/1/5/28).

grain and livestock requisitions, accompanied by their marginalization on poor quality land. "Sedentarization" existed almost only in bureaucratic documents and official speeches.²⁵⁰ Local officials fully understood that their first task was extracting grain and economically reinforcing the kolkhozes, and that the herdsmen were the social group that least contributed to these ends.

In the second phase, after famine had struck, what began to be called sedentarization was the policy of moving Kazak refugees (*otkočevniki*) into agricultural and industrial jobs. The prevailing attitude, which emerges in numerous reports, was indifference towards the nomads, first when sedentarization was being undertaken, then when mass starvation struck.²⁵¹ The Kiselev Commission, the emanation of a "soft line" institution, in this case the VCIK, was merely the last in a series of commissions of this sort, for example, the one headed by Ernazarov in 1930 on conditions among herdsmen in the Balhaš district. Its scope was to gather information on the situation in Kazakstan in 1934, but it had no real political power. Kiselev did his duty, tardily censuring the excesses inevitably committed by regional officials in Kazakstan and Kirghizia, against whom the accusations ranged from sabotage "financed by British imperialism" (the Kirghiz officials), to "left excesses" (Gološčekin and his staff).²⁵² And yet, it was surely not because of "excesses" in dealing with the nomads that Gološčekin was removed from office, excesses that went on for five years and that nearly every year, at the end of every requisition campaign (then at the end of the collectivization ones), were followed by sterile condemnations by ad hoc commissions — the first in 1928 on the events in Semipalatinsk, had been headed by Kiselev himself.²⁵³ In reality, Gološčekin thought he could manage the impending social crisis,²⁵⁴ but failed to protect at least some of the herdsmen's resources from being funneled towards the collective farms and in the effort to increase grain production. Livestock died, an appalling famine ensued, and Kazakstan had to be supplied with grain so that the former nomads could be put to work. For this economic failure, Gološčekin was removed from his post at the beginning of 1933.²⁵⁵

250. I agree with Š. Muhamedina, who wrote: "In reality, sedentarization, as a mass campaign, never existed" (*op. cit.*: 118).

251. Turar Ryskulov reported that *rajon* administrations had demonstrated "an attitude between indifference and apathy towards the enormous number of Kazak deaths." (Letter dated March 9, 1933, from Turar Ryskulov.... cited in S. Abdirajymov *et al.*, eds., *op. cit.*: 170).

252. GARF, 6985/1/4/93.

253. In his speech at the Fifteenth Panrussian Congress of Soviets (May 1929) Kiselev precisely echoed Gološčekin's slogans, declaring that in the national republics "October was only achieved last year." (Š. Muhamedina, *op. cit.*: 77).

254. A crisis that was partly foreseen, as at the 1927 Kazak Party Congress Gološčekin was speaking about a fall in the number of head of livestock "in the passage from the natural economy to the socialist one."

255. In January 1933 Gološčekin was recalled by Moscow and temporarily assigned to the College of the Commissariat for Worker and Peasant Inspection. In October 1933 he was made head of the official arbitration body within the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, an appointment which in reality represented a demotion. At the Seventeenth Congress (February 1934) he was not reelected to the Central Committee of the USSR. Unlike the majority of those in

7. Collectivization, etatization and nation building

Under the First Five-Year Plan, while the government was putting into effect policies directed at including Kazaks within the structures of the Soviet state and at building a Kazak “nation” incorporated within the community of Soviet nations, the annihilation of part of this same Kazak “nation,” favored by the state’s “affirmative action” policies, was being carried out. This slaughter was not planned by a totalitarian state that held total control over the chain of command and its peripheral power, but was instead made possible by weak control of the territory by a government whose efforts were dedicated to a chaotic process of industrialization. Mass extermination, in the case of the Kazaks, was not an objective the policies the center set out to reach, but rather the price they were prepared to pay as long as they could achieve their goals of transformation and political and economic control over the region.

To this end, in local situations in the immense Soviet territory, extracting resources from the population fell most heavily on different social groups on the basis of the specific power relations existing in peripheral societies deeply divided from the social, economic and cultural points of view. In Kazakhstan extracting resources took the form of forced grain requisitions, which, paradoxically, hit hardest those who produced no grain — herdsmen — and set in motion a process that led to the near total destruction of the region’s livestock.

In the early 1930s the Kazak refugees found themselves on the lowest rung in the hierarchy of productive usefulness for the state. Deprived of the principal source of wealth they were capable of exploiting, their animals, rendered ill and needy by a state they had necessarily to turn to for help, they were seen by the state as being even less valuable than deported “kulaks” or the “special colonists” abandoned on barren lands or sent to work in vast sovkhoses and in the mines alongside the *otkočevniki*. The herdsmen’s animals and lands were expropriated by the state and they were excluded, as subjects that were no longer productive, from the sphere in which the state was interested in their survival.

At the same time, propaganda was proclaiming that the nomad peoples had been included within a project of Soviet modernization (passing to a more civilized non-nomad way of life, schooling, inclusion in industry — “the birth of the Kazak working class”).²⁵⁶ In effect, Moscow and Alma-Ata policy makers made an effort to convey Kazaks towards the state in sectors of the economy other than animal raising. For much of the 1920s and 1930s the nativization policy effectively favored Kazak access to jobs in the party-state, in factories, on construction sites, and in mines. There were quotas reserved for Kazaks, which were never fully filled yet encouraged hiring. While the interests of factory directors and heads of building

power with him in the party in Kazakhstan (and even his successor Mirzojan), he survived the “Ežov period,” during which practically all the members of the Kazak Central Committee were killed. He was arrested, however, on October 15, 1939, and shot on October 28, 1941.

256. Cf. M. Payne, “The forge of the Kazakh proletariat? The Turksib, nativization, and industrialization during Stalin’s First Five-Year Plan,” in T. Martin, R. G. Suny, eds., *op. cit.*: 223-252.

sites tended to run counter to hiring Kazaks, who as workers were less used to both industrial and agricultural labor, which created tension with European workers (ethnic segregation was commonplace on work sites and in factories during the First Five-Year Plan), it was in the political leaders' interest to create an outlet for the mass of former nomads that were being expelled from the countryside. Nativization did not in fact stop during collectivization: in 1929 heads of industrial companies were made personally responsible for filling nativization quotas. In the field of industry it was specifically with the launching of the First Five-Year Plan and accelerated industrialization that the quotas of native workers, in various republics, began to be filled.²⁵⁷

The process of etatization of Kazak society can therefore be divided into two different phases. The definitive inclusion of the majority of Kazaks in the Soviet state's institutions (bureaucracy, army, educational institutions), was preceded and made possible by their losing ownership and control of their own economic resources. This loss turned into economic disaster, even by Moscow's criteria, and was part of the overall economic failure of collectivization. The destruction of the socio-economic fabric in the countryside was, however, successful in extracting the resources and freeing the manpower that made it possible to construct a powerful military industrial complex and to bring all the Soviet territories and their heterogeneous peoples under the economic and political control of the state. Turning the "backward" peoples in the USSR into rag-clad refugees who were totally dependent on state "aid" was a way of incorporating these societies. Collectivization and famine accomplished this, too, not merely the subjugation of peasants.

Translated by Susan Fimmel

*Scuola Europea di Studi Avanzati
Istituto Universitario Suor Orsola Benincasa
via Suor Orsola 10
80135 Napoli (Italy)*

pianciola@yahoo.it

257. G. Liber, "Korenizatsiia: restructuring Soviet nationality policy in the 1920s," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 14, 1 (1991): 17.

