

WAY, WHICH THE WAR INTERRUPTED

Belogurova, Tatiana A. – Ph. D. (History), associate professor of Smolensk branch of Moscow State University of Railway Engineering (MILT), Smolensk, Russia.

ABSTRACT

The author explores production and socio-cultural reality of the first post-war years on the Western Railway. Its greatest extent accounted for Smolensk region, subjected to large-scale destruction during World War II. Reconstruction became a key objective for 1946–1950 years. Rail transport embarked on reconstruction of roads, mechanization and automation of heavy works. Implementation of such a labor-intensive program in the personal plan seemed impossible without the full exertion of not only physical but also moral strength. In this connection, attention is focused on social factors, public moods of that period. The study is based on the documents of State Archive of Contemporary History of Smolensk region.

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Background. In 1946, the Soviet Union adopted a first postwar five-year plan. According to the documents of the party organization of the Western Railway, on the restoration of rail transport 40 billion 60 million rubles were allocated, i. e. 1,6 of all capital investments of the vast country [3, p. 27]. At a meeting of the central party committee of Vyazma station it was stated: «The historical significance of the new five-year plan is to resume, interrupted by the war, a way to completion of construction of a classless society and gradual transition from socialism to communism. The Soviet Union began to address the basic economic task – to catch up with and surpass the leading capitalist countries economically, that is, in the production of goods per capita» [11, p. 13 rev.].

Objective. The objective of the author is to investigate production and socio-cultural situation of the postwar period on the Western Railway, in Smolensk region.

Methods. The author uses historical method.

Results.

«Demolished to the root»

The task of rebuilding had to be solved in conditions where at Smolensk lines remained 12% of the cores of all buildings and they were taken to brick for a new construction. In Vyazma at the time of the liberation from the Nazis preserved 11,6% of municipal housing. Station management had to admit: «It is easier to say that Vyazma railway junction was demolished to the root» [11, p. 24 rev.].

One of the objectives of management of the Western Railway was the following: «Workers have to be provided with cars of the Western European type for their living in order to send a skilled labor force to other locations as needed» [3, p. 27]. Many workers lived in dugouts or slept in the workplace. «The most unacceptable are facts of failure to provide demobilized soldiers, lying around on the desk in the office, with dormitories» [3, p. 71]. The lucky ones received beds in the dormitory, of course, turned out to get in places of little use: «In dormitories there is no radio, no portraits ... No one apartment still got the wood for the kitchen. Cube does not provide hot water for dormitory residents. In the rooms under beds people keep potatoes, cabbage ...» [3, p. 110, 112]. In addition, «... in dormitories there are no locks, no protection, and as a result thieves can break into the building» [5, p. 4]. Four years after the end of

the war in the dormitory of train depot at the station Smolensk-sorting sometimes up to five families with children lived in the same room [1, p. 153].

It is easier to go through life difficulties in case of obvious or apparent equality of others. Separation factor of a small layer of people having some advantages irritates. Surely it went public that «... a number of heads of the Railway Directorate, despite the difficult situation with apartments, have 2 apartments – in Moscow and Smolensk» [3, p. 23]. Maybe this information was based on hearsay and speculation, as a hotel-type accommodation might be needed for leaders during their trips to the capital.

The inevitable post-war inflation defined pricing inaccessibility of the market. Under the conditions of an urgent need for the construction of housing price of wood for the year grew from 124 rubles up to 170 rubles, there was shortage of wood, glass, varnish, and the remaining building materials were out in general [3, p. 27]. In Vyazma construction was provided by brick and wood on the 4% [11, p. 13]. But there were no vehicles to transport all this. State of the locomotive economy was such that washing of locomotive was made during two weeks instead of two days. Qualitative coal lacked, and there was excess of fuel consumption.

Yet by March 1946 in Smolensk a kindergarten was opened for 25 seats with the nursery department, baths began to work regularly, and houses, with the exception of standard Finnish buildings were electrified [3, p. 26, 71]. In Vyazma in the first half of the year, it was restored and built 72 houses, power station began to work [11, p. 5]. In that year according to reports, a new small town appeared, but construction of barracks left unfinished.

Restoration of transport was impossible without skilled workers. The shortage in the postwar years was the weak point in the practice of the railways. In 1946, their staff took 522 people, resigned 2055 [3, p. 87]. Worries about the turnover did not leave a railway management even a year later, when in the administration of construction and restoration works entered unqualified people, «who were poorly trained, so the plan was not carried out» [5, p. 62]. On the Western Railway lacked 1000 employees, and the highest turnover was in the track service.

By means of criticism and self-criticism

Of course, in those years, activity of any group was not possible without the pathetic appeal: «With the help of criticism and self-criticism shall we reveal defects in all our work. This will help us to quickly eliminate these shortcomings and will be a guarantee that our party will successfully cope with the tasks set before the Soviet people by our great leader Comrade STALIN» [5, p. 116]

Inflation did not spare prices on vital goods and products. There were attempts to provide railway workers with potatoes and vegetables of subsidiary farming, but it was a weak opposition to high prices. Vyazma railway workers in the first quarter did not receive 9 tons of fats and 23 tons of meat products [12, p. 1st vol.]. This situation worried the management of the Western Railway.

Post-war 1946 is a card-distribution system. Loss of cards became a tragedy for the family, but some citizens dared to purchase products over the





limit. This was noticed by Smolensk railway workers: «Let's take at least our limit shop № 36; situation with purchasing with cards is bad, a small amount of products is offered, for 2 days they are distributed, and if you failed to get products on that day, you fail to purchase products with our cards. The shop makes some very limited stocks of products, such as sugar, canned food, etc. in significant quantities of up to 60–70 kg. Head of the shop stated that supposedly these products are for the head of the railway and his deputies» [3, p. 23].

Going back to the hard reality with cards, it can be said that for villagers this situation does not seem so severe. Later Vasily Shukshin wrote in his autobiographical story «Airplane»: «Urban guys did not like us, the villagers, laughed at us, despised ... Did not they know that there is also hunger in the village? They've got at least some cards, they are thought about, for us – nothing, survive as you can» [13, p. 383, 384].

In railway stations there were farms, having a supporting role in providing workers with food. However, they could not have been a great help in supplying people with food. They required much attention and care: «The farm of Casn has 18 cows, very emaciated, 8 pigs: 1 died, 3 were slaughtered, and the rest in a low state. Calves and horses are also low fatness. If they do not feed up, they will die prior to sowing. Tractors are still being repaired, there is no fuel. Workers are not provided with the cards, and there are no internal resources for product delivery. In other farms the situation is not better ... From available 7 tractors only 4 are repaired» [5, p. 56–57, 58]. A year later, the difficulties remained: «We failed with one tractor. Now we repair the second tractor, captured of American production, but I now cannot give a guarantee that it will work the whole summer. By April 15, we will put this tractor together, I think that it will provide plowing of the land» [5, p. 33].

Vyazma junction managers also had to deal with such difficulties. Despite the fact that the crop area was divided into separate sections, there were available seeds of potatoes, barley and oats, «there are only 6 people for field works» [12, p. 177]. Fertilizer degraded land required 540 tons of manure in the presence of 40–50 m. Was not enough in the economy shovels, manure forks, hoes, «But we will make it on their own in the train station, we have a blacksmith» [12, p. 177]. The local director of a subsidiary farm was much more worried about the complete lack of fuel, because for the sowing 200 liters of gasoline and 600 liters of kerosene were required.

Some feared gimp, others overlooked something

In December 1947, the Soviet Union canceled the card system. Many considered it as the end of all-inclusive restrictions, especially in nutrition. Those responsible for the work of subsidiary farms had an idea that now it would be possible to provide people with food without labor-intensive agricultural departments: «In the current year, due to the cancellation of the card system, some of the leaders of business units want to get rid of subsidiary farms, since there is a lot of difficulties with them» [6, p. 28]. This decision was justified as follows: «Our subsidiary farm of railway management receives annual decline, we have nothing from our gardens, but our workers help during the harvest» [6, p. 29]. Nevertheless, the situation did not change for a long time.

Moral and psychological state of society was very heavy. There was no one who could help people

who had seen many deaths, maimed, bereaved. The role of healer of souls obtained the art. Of course, the most popular of its kind was cinema, the most visited cultural institutions – clubs and cinemas. After the war, the Soviet people saw the so-called captured American and German movies «Sun Valley Serenade», «Girl of My Dreams», «The Great Waltz» in which beautiful, smartly dressed characters sang and danced, bewitching audiences with unprecedented luxury and splendor.

Railway workers spent their short leisure time in the departmental club, bringing there often not only the thirst for beauty, but also an inevitable consequence of war – roughness and ferocity of manners: «The club has demonstrated 164 film shows ... Our amateur enjoys a good reputation in the city, but it needs serious help. In particular, no properties and scenery. Participants of amateur are poorly dressed when performing ... There are often fights and hooligans in the club» [3, l. 73].

War and postwar childhood of almost an entire generation was at best a half-orphan. We should pay tribute to those who at least in public events helped orphans. In 1947, workers of the Western railway gathered for them 17 443 rubles, took patronage over the house of the child «Tantsova Grov» and six foster children [5, l. 52].

Help was provided periodically for half-orphans, whose parents worked on the railway. Three maintenance sections of Vyazma junction helped 7 children, the car section – 10 children from four families who had lost their fathers. Car workers deducted 1% of the salary in their favor and collected money for the purchase of children's clothing and shoes. Assistance was also in supply of cabbage, to needy families potatoes were planted at the rate of 5 acres on a child [12, l. 232].

In the first postwar five-year period the rail transport was given a task to achieve the mechanization and automation of heavy work. According to the documents, one of the obstacles in the implementation of such a complex plan was its rejection by many railway workers. Despite the huge size of devastation and loss of life unemployment took place in the country. Because of a catastrophic shortage of men in heavy work, where soap and work clothes were not given, a huge number of women were employed, and they were afraid to lose a piece of bread. Railway management, responsible for performing work-related tasks in a short time, faced a difficult problem to overcome hostility to technical improvements: «... on the track work ... there is not a decisive struggle with the existing anti-mechanical moods» [4, p. 69].

After the war, people wanted to get a work place on the railways not only for the sake of earnings, but also to extract additional profit of illegitimate properties. Freight transportation and urgent food supply of railway workers was associated for people with criminal tendencies with the idea of the possibility of theft, which was again reported at party meetings:

«There are many cases when people not wanting to engage in socially useful work, often come to work on railways trucks for perpetration of theft. In 1946 312 people were convicted of theft, of which 58% of rail men. Among them there are even communists and Komsomol members ...» [5, l. 2, 3, 4].

Engineers grow nowhere

After the liberation of the region and the beginning of the railway traffic in Smolensk on the site of the destroyed stations Orel-Vitebsk and Moscow-Brest



railways a temporary wooden one-story building was built. Of course, it was not permanent, which was largely due to the same consequences of inflation and the total deficit. Perhaps the passengers, who were at the station for a limited time, tolerated the fact that «... the station has defects, the roof leaks, the whole winter the snow lay on the ceiling, moisture penetrated into the station, and the station was covered in mold. Furnace heating was wrong» [3, p. 83]. Such working conditions were hard for workers of this object, and in 1948 «... the station building at Smolensk station began to fall apart ... There are many stopping points, which are currently needed, but their recovery is not provided ... On the landside area the statues of Lenin and Stalin are in disrepair, it is necessary to make emergency repairs, leaving them in such a state is unacceptable» [6, l. 20]

Construction of a new station in Smolensk began in 1949. Over the regions many railway terminals were constructed at both large and small stations.

Serious ideological campaign of 1947 in the Soviet Union was a struggle against kowtowing to the West. Railway workers, along with all had to note worship of the bourgeois world. Of course, an example of a responsible attitude to what came from the West, had to be provided by the intellectuals

At this time, the intellectuals met their spiritual needs also with difficulties, because it required considerable resources. In the 1940s they were primarily the books. Libraries also were poor, and had to confirm to the industry leaders: «A letter to the Central Committee of the CPSU correctly and timely noted shortcomings in the work with our intellectuals ... Our library is very poor, and it is visited very rarely. On technical topics there were no lectures» [5, l. 127]. But this fact cannot be from the point of view of both the central and local authorities an excuse for manifestations that were incompatible with the

spiritual aspect of the Soviet intellectuals: «The reason for this infamous case, which was informed in the letter of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b), is that our press often refers to overseas equipment. Our engineers stop working on their further technical growth ... examples of servility and adulation can be found in everyday issues. The townsfolk is willing to praise overseas thing, despite the fact that it is much worse in quality, but our communists do not fight with that kind of attitude – of servility» [5, l. 128].

Interestingly, in this case the performance of an engineer, recorded in the minutes of the party meeting: «I graduated from the Institute in 1942. Since 1942 I have been working for 4 years in Directorate, but during this period I technically did not grow up, and even I can forget what I have known. In addition to my work, I do not deal with any technical issues. As a head of the department I sit and write all sorts of references: to do that, I did not have to study for 15 years. Our engineering staff should be released from a simple paperwork, it must be made to work more on developing new technical issues» [5, l. 128]. This engineer further refers to the following facts: «For learning I as an engineer have absolutely no conditions. I live in a dormitory, there is no light, it is cold, and there are no elementary conditions – for further technical education. Party bureau is little engaged and interested in the life and work of our intellectuals, and especially those living in dormitories» [5, l. 128].

A teacher from a dugout

Restoration of the railway system of education continued. In 1946, Vyazma railway school was attended by 900 people who studied in four shifts from 8 a. m. to 22 p. m.. An increase in the number of students to 1500 was expected, but the premise of the old school, of course, could not contain them. By September 1, it was planned to complete the





construction of a new building, but in July a progress report stated: «If you look now at the school, the windows are already broken, people live in the school and have pigs in the room ... No keeper» [12, l. 57–58].

A daunting problem remained the lack of basic conditions for the study: «... a teacher Skorobogatov has higher education, does not have housing conditions, a teacher Pavlova lives in a dugout ... At school there are no teachers with higher education in the subjects Mathematics, Physics. There were a few cases when children missed school because they did not have shoes and clothing» [12, l. 57 rev.]. The aim was to allocate apartments for teachers. In this catastrophic situation with housing it was almost impossible to provide respected people with any habitable room.

In Smolensk, the first students entered railway college which prepared locksmiths to repair locomotives and cars, as well as carpenters. Roslavsky college trained turners, welders and locksmiths to repair cars. In 1948, the department of education of the Western Railway Directorate stated: «All main professions are staffed, and we can to accomplish a plan. But there are disadvantages, such as: road technical schools have no workshops, students' preparation for classes is weak. In Roslavsky college there is a bad situation with practical training; the college lacks two specialist teachers. Teachers-pluralists are not prepared for the lessons» [10, l. 1]. Of course, it was impossible to report about full readiness for the educational process soon after the war; a bad preparation for studies of both students and teachers was largely explained by the employment

of people at work, the lack of literature and difficult living conditions.

In 1949, on the Western Railway learning problems still remained unsolved. With a shortage of teachers they were sometimes dismissed also as politically unreliable.

Impact on the consciousness of the workers was carried out through various forms of political education. Visiting courses and study groups was considered voluntary, and an example of a conscious effort to acquire communist knowledge had to be given by communists and Komsomol members. But it is not so easy to stimulate the desire to learn something abstracted from everyday life. Vyazma party committee noted: «Party education of Komsomol members and leaders of party organizations is conducted mainly through ongoing seminar, existing node at party office of the railway junction ... there are 31 people. A total of 48 lessons. Now we proceed to the study of chapter 10, «History of the CPSU (b)». Attendance of the seminar is 50–60% ... A communist, not increasing his political outlook, easily converts into a nobleman, political boors» [12, l. 12 rev.].

Conclusion. In general, of course, production and socio-cultural reality of 1946–1950 years on the Western Railway corresponded to the general situation of the recovery period in the USSR. On the other hand, it was exacerbated by the vastness of the destruction, which were the result of combat operations in Smolensk region. And in these circumstances, neighbored working gust, enthusiasm of those who rise the railway sector from the ruins, and poor living conditions of workers, specialists and their families.

Keywords: rail transport, Western railway, consequences of war, restoration of destroyed, five-year plan, food supply, subsidiary farming.

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Координаты автора (contact information): Белогурова Т. А. (Belogurova, T.A.) – beloguro@yandex.ru.
Статья поступила в редакцию / article received 27.03.2014
Принята к публикации / article accepted 22.06.2014