

The Far Eastern Railway in the 1930s Relations and Reactions to the Repressions in the USSR

ELENA GNATOVSKAYA AND ALEXANDER KIM

Abstract: This article evaluates the relationship among the railroad staff of the Far East during the most dramatic events in the political life of the country at that time—repressions. As a rule, Russian academic literature indicates that few workers perceived the Soviet state’s mechanisms of pressure negatively. This article demonstrates that the railroad staff’s position was far more diverse than traditionally argued, which is a result of the broad variety of social groups working for the railroad in the Far East. The article demonstrates this diversity of opinions by focusing on those events that affected a significant number of railroad workers.

Keywords: Bolshevik Party, DVZHD, mass consciousness, political relations, repressions, Stalinism, USSR

Gaining the population’s support for state power is one of the main tasks of any political regime. During the 1920–1930s, the Soviet state received mass support for Joseph Stalin’s policies. However, at times, the government preferred to use force to change Soviet citizens’ social consciousness. We consider these processes in the context of the Soviet Far Eastern railroads.

We chose Far Eastern Railway (DVZHD) as the object of our research because this railroad played an important role during the 1930s Stalinist modernization in the Far East. This organization had a great number of staff (at times close to 80,000 people), with a large number of highly skilled workers (experienced workmen with pre-revolution seniority) and a high level of mobility. Moreover, DVZHD was a transport artery for the state, carrying large amounts of goods and people to many distant regions in the country. The Soviet state thus wanted to support



collective support. The result was widespread persecution of dissident staff, all the way up to executions.

However, in private many workers expressed dissatisfaction with the state's repressive policies. The merciless system of pressure fell upon many in the DVZHD staff but did result in the total submission of all railway workers.

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Notes

1. Politodel –structure, which provided agitation and propaganda activity, collected information about tendencies among staff.

2. KVZHD—Chinese-Eastern Railroad. Soviet staff, who worked for this organization, were referred to as *kharbintsy*. Almost all of these people were repressed without real reasons (Suturin 1991: 195–213).

3. NKPS—People's commissariat for ways of communication; its modern-day equivalent is Ministry of Transport.

4. At that time Lev Borisovich Kamenev was deputy of Chairman of Council of People's Commissars of RSFSR. The Chairman was Lenin.

5. OGPU—Ob'edinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (United State Political Directorate), existed until 1934, when it became the NKVD.

6. GAKhK—Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Khabarovskoogo kraia (State Archive of the Khabarovsk region). F.P. 82., Opis' 2, Delo 169, L. 78–79.