

## **OCTOBER REVOLUTION AND SOVIET CLASS STRUGGLE POLICY IN KYRGYZSTAN**

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### **Introduction**

In the middle of the XIX century, the territory of contemporary Kyrgyzstan was conquered by the Tsarist Russia. Later, in 1917, as a result of the October Revolution, the Tsarist regime was replaced by the Soviet rule. In the territory of Kyrgyzstan, it was established firstly in the southern and western regions of the country, such as Suluktu and Kyzyl-Kiya, Osh and Talas, where the largest industrial enterprises, mines, railway junctions and most of the workers and soldiers were concentrated. However, already by the mid 1918, the Soviet government managed to spread its power to the entire region of Kyrgyzstan.

In 1924, the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, established on April 30, 1918, was reorganized into a new administrative division. As the part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR), on October 24, 1924 the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was formed. On May 25, 1925 the Kara Kyrgyz Autonomous Region was renamed into the Kyrgyz Autonomous Region. Then on February 01, 1926 it was restructured into the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. On December 05, 1936 it became a separate constituent republic of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) known as the Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic. Along with other 15 Soviet Socialist states, Kyrgyzstan had been the member of the USSR for about 70 years, from 1919 till 1991.

The current paper focuses on the processes of social transformation under the Soviet regime, especially the implementation of class struggle policy and its impact on Kyrgyzstan. In comparison with the interventions from the Tsarist Russia, the social transformation process undertaken under the Soviet system was quite different. In the territory of the Kyrgyz traditional society, the Tsarist Russia made only some social reorganization, but the Soviets brought radical changes in to the socio-political organizations of the Kyrgyz people. The paper seeks to understand how the

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Soviet Union tried to reconstruct the Kyrgyz society during the 1920s and 1930s. In addition, the paper will analyze the methods and mechanisms of the social transformation processes and the measures used by the Soviet government in their socio-political ‘battles’ against the local elites, and the influence of the new system on the existing socio-economic stratification in the context of the Kyrgyz society. During the Soviet period the prevalent scientific vision about the major historical events of the time was based on the Communist ideology. Therefore, the main aim of the paper is to analyze and describe an objective overview of the history of Soviet class struggle policy. The paper is based on the research of local archival documents, published sources and oral materials.

### **Class Struggle Policy in the Soviet Kyrgyzstan**

It is claimed that the Soviet rule was rule of the working class people. The “rule of the class” and the “dialectics of class conflict” were the key concepts of the new regime. With the establishment of the Soviet power, a notion of “class struggle” had emerged and the idea of the elimination of upper class and the old order was disseminated. Every society had a ruling class (at least Bolsheviks believed so), and every ruling class had a potential challenger. The October Revolution introduced a new ruling class in to the Soviet society - the proletariat - the potential challenger of whom was the old ruling class.<sup>1</sup> The Bolshevik Cultural Revolution aimed to create a new man devoted to a new regime, denied the past life, even rejected his kinship and religious relations. The New Soviet Person was supposed to privilege the interests of the socialist collective over personal bonds of kinship. The party sought to break the family ties of class enemies.<sup>2</sup> So, it can be claimed that the official history of the Soviet is primarily based on the class theory.

As for Central Asian region, it was important to the Bolsheviks both as a source for cotton and as the gateway to "the East," the territory where they planned to ignite the colonial revolution, which would undermine the rule of the bourgeoisie in Europe and usher the revolution. Yet, these plans of Bolsheviks had failed to materialize in the immediate aftermath of the October Revolution. But ultimately, social revolution required no justification, for it led to a higher stage in the evolutionary path that all humanity was destined to tread. The ends of Soviet rule - the building of

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<sup>1</sup> Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Construction of Social Identity in Soviet Russia.” *The Journal of Modern History*, 65(4), (Chicago: The University of Chicago, Dec., 1993): 748-750

<sup>2</sup> Golfo Alexopoulos, “Stalin and the Politics of Kinship: Practices of Collective Punishment, 1920s-1940s.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 50(1), Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (Jan., 2008): 101-102

socialism and the achievement of a classless utopia - were common to all Soviet citizens.<sup>3</sup>

During Civil War (1917-1923) in October 1919 a special Commission for Turkestan Affairs was established. The members of commission arrived to Tashkent on November of the same year. Following the commission's recommendations, Moscow issued an action plan that focused on two main goals: elimination of colonialist attitudes among Russian settlers and of "feudal-patriarchal attitudes" among the Muslims. The land taken from the Kyrgyz after the suppression of the 1916 revolution was to be returned to its rightful owners. Landless peasants, regardless of nationality, were to be given land. To implement this policy, Russian settlers were to be disarmed. Speculators, former bourgeois, former tsarist policemen, and those among the old tsarist bureaucrats "who did not fit in the new Turkestan" were to be expelled or sent to the concentration camps in Russia.<sup>4</sup>

After the Civil War, the Soviet government started implementing its policies on transformation of the social structure of the Union and its consequent Republics. The major changes in the social sphere occurred in 1920-1930s. During this time period, the main goal of the Communist Party and the Soviet government was to build socialism in each and every aspect of a social life. One of the paradoxes of the Soviet system was that the project of destroying traditional society and the implementation of social engineering in order to create a new society.<sup>5</sup> Traditional society was considered as "feudal and patriarchal". In addition, the Soviet government propagated against Islamic dogma and practices as well as against the established traditions.

In Kyrgyzstan, traditional elites (*bai manaps* - economically and politically prevailing category) were considered as "class enemies", "exploiters", and they targeted for social transformation in 1920-1930. The word "bai" in the Kyrgyz language means not only *rich* but also refers to a person who possesses capital and lives prosperously. The word *manap* refers to that category of people who ruled the Kyrgyz before the Soviet period, the so-called leaders of the nation. The Russian Empire had been relying on the local *manaps* in the government of the region. Generally, most of the *manaps* were tribal leaders. They managed political and economic issues in

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<sup>3</sup> Adeeb Khalid, "Backwardness and the Quest for Civilization: Early Soviet Central Asia in Comparative Perspective." *Slavic Review*, 65(2), (Pittsburgh: Association for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, Summer 2006): 237-238

<sup>4</sup> Michael Rywkin, *Moscow's Muslim Challenge: Soviet Central Asia*. (New York: M.E.Sharpe Inc., 1990): 27-28

<sup>5</sup> Olivier Roy, *The New Central Asia. The Creation of Nations*. (New York: New York University Press, 2000):85

the region and performed the role of the judge. All manaps were accountable before the head of tribal consolidation in the Northern part Kyrgyzstan.

According to the famous ethnographer S.M. Abramzon, after the establishment of the Russian Tsarist power, the capitalist relations started to emerge in the economic life of the Kyrgyz nomadic people, which led to the emergence of new types of *manaps*, such as merchants, owners of production and capitalist manaps. S.M. Abramzon indicates that very literate people were *manaps* till 1930 and most of them worked as a teacher (also before the October Revolution preferably children of bai-manaps were getting education in school). Between 1920-1930 there were some *manaps* who worked in Soviet government bodies together with communists. Besides, at that time in local press there were discussions whether or not *manaps* could take Soviet posts.<sup>6</sup> According to some unverified sources, in 1925 in Kyrgyzstan there were more than 4 thousands *manaps*, whereas the number of *bais* was much higher.<sup>7</sup>

The Kyrgyz District Committee of CPSU (b) issued the arrangement, which provided the conceptual explanation of the class categories existing in the society during that time. According to that arrangement, “*Manap-as an economic unit is not powerful, but as a political figure has great influence. Bai is an economically strong pastoralist-landowner, who has from 200 or more rams, 35 or more heads of cattle. The middle peasant has from 20 to 200 rams and from 3 to 35 head of cattle; poor man-20-25 rams, 3-4 heads of cattle; hired worker (batrak), works like a shepherd or domestic servant an annual earnings of 50 rubles or 6 rams*”.<sup>8</sup>

The policy of class differentiation was implemented from the beginning of the Soviet rule. The Communist party in the Central Asia was responsible for carrying out the current policy of class differentiation among local dwellers. At first, it was necessary to find upper class among people so that they could fight against them according to the logic of the October Revolution. The terms “class” or “fighting against the class” weren’t clear for the majority of Kyrgyz people, since most of the villages functioned as a whole organism. Regardless of the fact that the process of class differentiation of villages was slow, the Party nevertheless realized its goals mostly thanks to the propaganda carried out during and after the revolution.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Saul Abramzon, “Sovremennoe Manapstvo v Kirgizii.” *Sovetskaya Etnographia*, no. 3-4, (1931): 44-54

<sup>7</sup> Joldoshbek Malabaev, *Borba Kirgizskoy Partorganizatsii za Ukrepleniye Sovetov*. (Frunze: 1962): 35

<sup>8</sup> The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 10, list. 1, file. 128, 40-42.

<sup>9</sup> Ishengul Boljurova, “Vostok Delo Tonkoe; Pravda o Manapah.” newspaper *Respublica*. Bishkek: no.39, 1992.

As thought by the Bolsheviks, modernity meant to replace the more “backward” forms, such as the clannish, tribal or feudal systems identifiable across the former Russian Empire. Lineages were one of the traits of backwardness that Sovietization sought to eliminate. Soviet modernization sought to eradicate lineage relations in order to build a new society freed from the so-called old relations.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet government implemented certain programmes against lineage and kin relations in the territory of Kyrgyzstan as well. Those programmes were primarily carried against *bai-manaps* who possessed the power and could influence on the local people, the kolkhozes as well as the local Soviet apparatuses.

The Soviet government aimed to destroy the lineage relations and to liquidate village soviets and kolkhozes, the representatives of which were usually from the same tribe. During the election periods to the local village soviets, the Kyrgyz tribe representatives often had conflicts over who would get the power. In his speech in 1925, I. Zelenskii, the secretary of the Party’s Central Asia Bureau, emphasized that in most of the parts of Kyrgyzstan the power of tribes and tribal leaders (*manaps*) are 10 times stronger than the power of the Soviet government. So, he stressed on weakening the power of tribal leaders and strengthening the power of the Soviets.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the Communist Party’s strong efforts to destroy kinship ties, the power and the influence of the tribal structure had been saved in the region. The chairmen of the village soviets had been elected from the strongest tribes. In 1920s, the main decision-makers in regard to the Soviet affairs were still the councils of *aksakals* (elders) in local villages. Respect towards *aksakals* and *bai-manaps* continued. The spread of the revolutionary ideas and practices to the region, therefore, remained a central goal of the Kyrgyz party organization throughout the late 1920s. The first stage of that effort consisted of eliminating the influence of traditional elites.<sup>12</sup> In 1926, a special commission on combating *manaps* was organized.

### **Measures of the Soviet Government against Local Elites and the Process of Their Implementation**

In the early Soviet years, political and economic restrictions had been applied toward wealthy people, clergy, and merchants. They were deprived of the right to vote in elections to the Soviets councils. They were obliged to

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<sup>10</sup>Isabelle Ohayon, “The Soviet State and Lineage Societies: Doctrine, Local Interactions, and Political Hybridization in Kazakhstan and Kirghizia During the 1920s and 1930s.” *Central Asian Affairs*, 3-2016, (Brill, 164): 173

<sup>11</sup>Joldosbhek Malabaev, *Ukrepnenie Sovetov Kirgizii v Period Stroitelstva Sotsializma*. (Frunze: 1969): 332

<sup>12</sup>Benjamin Loring, “Rural Dynamics and Peasant Resistance in Southern Kyrgyzstan, 1929-1930.” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe*, 2008/1, (vol. 49), (Paris) : 195-196

carry out different works (*state norms*) in agriculture and livestock farming. In comparison with other social groups, they were taxed at a higher rate. They were presented in negative ways, poors, *batraks* (hired workers) and middle peasants were agitated against these groups of people.

The deportation of the local *bai-manaps* to other republics of the Soviet Union was one of the methods to eliminate their influence on the social lives of people as well as on the Soviet apparatuses in Kyrgyzstan. Deportation was aimed at strengthening Sovietization by elimination of public, political, economic and tribal influences of the well-of category not only ordinary people but also to local Soviet apparatuses in Kyrgyzstan. In 1927, 21 and in 1929, 44 *bai-manaps* from Soviet Kyrgyzstan were deported to Russia. Since they were regarded as an obstacle to such processes as Sovietization, collectivization of the village, cultural and economic progress of the republic, the Soviet government tried to decrease the presence of their political, economic and social influences in the region by all possible means. They were accused of participation in the anti-Soviet Basmachi Movement<sup>13</sup> as well as of exploiting people and carrying out anti-Soviet propaganda and organizers of tribal fighting.<sup>14</sup>

In collectivizing the countryside, the Communist Party purged it of the kulaks (rich peasants) branded as “class enemies” (rural bourgeois) and their supporters. The word “*kulak*”, used as a political term between 1920-1930, meant a prosperous peasant who exploits people. In general, everybody who was against for collectivization was regarded as a “*kulak*”. It is important to note that kulaks experienced the process of *dekulakization* during the mass collectivization years, the process that was directly related to class struggle policy. Dekulakization was a repressive political campaign carried out in villages, which included such practices as confiscation of private property, arrests and deportations of the well-off peasants and their families to remote regions. The stated purpose of the campaign was to fight the counter-revolution and build socialism in the countryside.

In Kyrgyzstan, *bai-manaps* were also labeled as “*kulaks*” and were considered as the main target group for dekulakization. In 1928 V.Shchubrikov, the secretary of the The Kyrgyz District Committee of CPSU (b), underlined that “*kulaks in Kyrgyzstan were more dangerous than in other regions of the Soviet Union, because they mostly originated from*

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<sup>13</sup>One reason for the existence of the Basmachi Movement to the Bolsheviks was an attempt to deep the reconstruction of the Muslim society by Soviet regime. The Basmachi Movement continued from 1918 until 1934 in Central Asia. See Martha B. Olcott, “The Basmachi or Freeman’s Revolt in Turkestan 1918-24.” *Soviet Studies*, vol. XXXIII, no. 3, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1981, 352.

<sup>14</sup>The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 10, list. 1, file. 97, 122-123; The Central State Archive of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 21, list.15, file. 39, 105, 238; The Osh District State Archive, fund. 1, list.1, file.192, 309-318.

*manaps*.”<sup>15</sup> But in fact, in Kyrgyzstan, there were not many kulaks. According to the fiscal accounting, in 1928-1929 there were 3,406 farms in Kyrgyzstan, which belonged to kulaks, representing only 1.8% of the total number of farms. However, the order about the dekulakization required the elimination of at least 3% of peasant farms. It was mandatory to carry out this process in all areas without any specific analysis of the social structure of farms<sup>16</sup>.

The state policy on “eradication of the kulaks as a class” especially was strengthened during the forced collectivization of agriculture. On June 29, 1931 the Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee CPSU (b) confirmed and sent the directive to regions «About deportation of kulak’s families», and on July 21, 1931 they sent instruction on deportation processes to the Kyrgyz District Committee of CPSU (b). According to the instruction of Central Asian Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, in 1931 700 families were exiled from the northern Kyrgyzstan to Ukraine. The next deportation campaign was implemented in 1932, during which 500 kulaks’ farms were displaced from the South of Kyrgyzstan to other regions of the USSR.<sup>17</sup>

Special republican and regional commissions were organized for carrying out of the process of deportations of “anti-Soviet elements.” These processes were accompanied with widespread governmental agitation activities among the local population against *bai-manaps*. Regardless of this, the analyses of the archival documents show that the ordinary people did not take active part in the campaign work. On the contrary, they demanded to release the arrested people. For example in 1929, in the village Bel-Ayil located in Osh district, when Chokobay Sasyev was arrested, the villagers wanted him to be released. They said «either you will release Sasyev or you will arrest all of us.»<sup>18</sup> In some place deportation campaign of ordinary people was regarded as a damage for tribes.<sup>19</sup> Even there are facts about some local Soviet workers defended arrested people. In order to change the local people’s attitudes towards the deportation processes, the Soviet government undertook some measures such as handing out properties of

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<sup>15</sup> Djumadyl Baktygulov, “Kollektivizatsiya Kirgizskogo Aila: Noviy Vzglyad.” *Kommunist Kirgizstana*, no 3, (Frunze: 1990): 86

<sup>16</sup> Jenish Junushaliev, *Vremya Sozidaniya i Tragediy 20-30 Gody XX v.* (Bishkek: Ilim, 2008): 157-158

<sup>17</sup> The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 10, list. 1, file.363, 72-76.

<sup>18</sup> *Sovetskaya Kirgizia*, (Frunze, 17 October 1929), No. 237

<sup>19</sup> The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 10, list. 1, file.201, 29.

deported people to the poor. However, such kind of attempts did not bring any results.

Generally the instructions of the Communist Party on dekulakization were implemented against the laws of the local authorities. The government orders and documents related to the dekulakization were not kept not because of political and economic reason, but mainly because of such factors as resentment and tribal relationship. Some people were deported confiscated and deported because they were the others' opponent or because of their belongingness to certain tribes. People holding different Soviet state posts were also exposed to deportation. The number of deported kulaks was higher in some places. For instance, in 1931 according to the order from the center, 25 families had to be exiled from Jety-Oguz region. But *troyka* (special commission) decided to deport five additional families, so the total number of departed families had been increased to 30.<sup>20</sup> Different factors like personal hostility, mutual relations, squaring of accounts played important role in determining kulaks.<sup>21</sup> Ayish Akebay Kyzy who was deported to the Ukraine and lived there until 1937, informed that her father was only middle peasant. Her elder sister married to a man whom she did not love. Soon she declared that she would not live with her husband and came back to father's home. Then brother of her husband who worked as a local Soviet ruler accused the bride's father as a kulak and all family members were forced to exile to Ukraine.<sup>22</sup> Thus, not only wealthy category, but also middle class, sometimes even poor people suffered from the dekulakization.

Forced collectivization, class struggle policy and dekulakization campaign led to protests and onset the emigration processes to China, at certain places they also revitalized the Basmachi Movement in Kyrgyzstan at the end of 1920s - at the beginning of 1930s.<sup>23</sup> Also, the above-mentioned transformation processes (the collectivization, industrialization, dekulakization carried out during 1920s and 1930s) had negatively reflected on demographic growth of Kyrgyz people.<sup>24</sup>

At the same time, the Soviet government solved its economic problem at the expense of stocks and properties confiscated from deported people. The properties of *bai-manaps* and kulaks confiscated by the Soviet government were utilized as the main stocks of kolkhozes in Kyrgyzstan. For example, to

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<sup>20</sup> The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund.10, list.1, file.363, 87.

<sup>21</sup> Akylbek Jumanaliev, *Politicheskaya Istoriya Kyrgyzstana*, (Bishkek: 2005): 251

<sup>22</sup> Ayish Akebay Kyzy, was born in 1923, date and place of interview: 2015, Bishkek.

<sup>23</sup> The Central State Archive of Political Documents of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 10, list. 1, file. 281, 20, 114; The Osh District State Archive, fund. 79, list.1, file.14, 63-67.

<sup>24</sup> Shayir Batyrbayeva, *Epoha Stalinizma v Kyrgyzstane v Chelovecheskom Izmerenii*, (Moscow: Rossiyskaya Politicheskaya Entsiklopedia, 2010): 52

realize the plans of collectivization in 1927, 12 *artels*<sup>25</sup> for cattle breeding and agriculture were founded in the regions where deported *bai-manaps* lived before.<sup>26</sup> In 1929, 48 kolkhozes were organized based on confiscated property of the deportees.<sup>27</sup> Confiscated houses were transformed into Soviet socio-cultural offices.

## Conclusion

The history of Kyrgyzstan during the Soviet times is one of the significant periods of the Kyrgyz historiography. And the official Soviet historiography emphasized that the Great October Revolution provided the local people with freedom, created adequate conditions for the elimination of economic and cultural backwardness and most importantly saved them from the exploitation practices carried out by local *bai-manaps*. It stated that the October Revolution and the establishment of the proletariat dictatorship opened the way for the Kyrgyz people to move from the feudal-patriarchal system to socialism bypassing the stage of capitalism. But Soviet class struggle policy and social transformation in 1920-1930s also brought negative consequences for Kyrgyzstan. Through dekulakization, the destruction of the traditional elites in the Kyrgyz society took place. Most of the deportees lost their parents and close relatives in the exile. Even today, the contemporary generation does not know what happened to their deported grandparents. The analyses of the oral materials illustrate that deportee's children were subjected to discrimination. They had many obstacles while entering the university, during the employment procedures, had hardships if they wanted to become members of Komsomol, Communist party, and also hardly could get high Soviet positions. Due to these obstacles some of those people even had to hide their origin and change their surnames.

The purges of "*class enemies*" from Soviet party apparatus and kolkhozes occurred from time to time. Soviet government used and relied on the poor against *bai-manaps*. The poor were appointed to managerial positions despite the lack of education and working experience. All Soviet institutions practiced class discrimination, giving preference to the poor. So, the human resource policies during the Soviet Kyrgyzstan were implemented based on class struggle framework primarily.

I argue that the class struggle and Soviet social transformation policies carried out in 1920-1930s in the territory of Kyrgyzstan were conducted in a radical way. Social reorganizations were realized alongside with economic

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<sup>25</sup> *Artel* - is a general term for various cooperative associations. (From en.wikipedia.org)

<sup>26</sup> The Central State Archive of The Kyrgyz Republic, fund. 21, list.15, file. 39, 115-116.

<sup>27</sup> Joldoshbek Malabaev, *Ukreplenie Sovetov Kirgizii v Period Stroitelstva Sotsializma*. (Frunze: 1969): 187

transformations. At the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s forced collectivization and sedentarization were launched. Consequently, the Kyrgyz nation joined to collective farms, proceeded to a settled way of life and began to work in the Soviet industry to fulfill the industrialization program of the socialist system. Thus in the 1920-1930's, the socio-political system of the local population of Kyrgyzstan has fundamentally changed. As a result such strata as party bureaucrats, Soviet intelligentsia, workers, peasants emerged in the Kyrgyz society. Obviously Moscow centered government actively intervened in to the local social structures of the Kyrgyz and created new Soviet cadres from young educated generation.

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