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Demographic Development of the Soviet Far Eastern Economic Region (FEER)

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Demographic problems in the Soviet Far East are among the most acute social-economic issues, and because of today's socially oriented economy they assure a high priority.

Unlike other parts of the country, the Soviet Far East is characterized by some specific features which influence the concept on increasing the number of these regional residents :

- remoteness of the Far Eastern territories from historical and cultural centers of the country ;
- extreme unstable climatic conditions in most of the regions where people live and work ;
- deformed structure of settlements ;
- a much lower level of social infrastructure, if compared to western parts of the country, and its uneven development.

These factors have always adversely affected migrants striving to get accustomed to the region as their permanent residence, and have contributed to a tense situation. All these factors have had an effect on the demands, value orientation, and patterns of behaviour. The strategy of the region's demographic development was determined by the concept of its economic development, which in its turn, determined the demand for labour force, and in the end—the total population. Its dynamics can be represented by data from the censuses for years: 1926—1.6; 1939—3.0.; 1959—4.8.; 1970—5.8.;¹⁾ 1979—6.8.; and for 1989—7.9²⁾ million people.

These high indices of increase in population, if compared to the other economic regions of the country, are characteristic of the demographic development in the Soviet Far East. For the last thirty years the number of residents here has increased by 64.3%; in the Russian Soviet-Federational Socialist Republic (RSFSR) 25.4%, and in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), 37.3%. The average annual increase was 2.1%; in Russia it was 0.8%. This increase of the population can be attributed to a high natural migration due to a rather young resident-structure, and to migration that could provide a labour force in the Soviet Far East for jobs created here. This was typical of the past, but in the 90's the

situation has changed. The natural rate of increase per 1000 people decreased from 11% in 1986 to 10.4% in 1988.³⁾ This tendency will be maintained as the number of youth remains constant but the number of older residents increases and becomes a factor in the natural decrease of population.

Increase through migration is also falling. During the previous decade (1970–1978) migration brought in 45.6 thousand people annually, but in 1979–1988 it accounted for only 33.3 thousand people. Within this period its share has dropped from 39.5% to 29.7%. Due to migration from 1986 to 1988, the absolute average increase was about 20% in relation to this index for 1981–1985. The Soviet Far Eastern region began to lose to other regions in the share and growth of migration; that is to say—it began to lose its attractiveness. Therefore, the total coefficient of migrational increase has been reduced from 5.7% in 1981–1985 to 2.7% in 1986–1988.⁴⁾ The best years for migrational increase were the 70's when construction of the BAM was in full swing, formation of the TPC (Territorial and Productive Complex) was under way, and what is the most important—the other territories of the country could redistribute the extra labour resources in favour of the Soviet Far East.

Currently it is the great amount and lower effectiveness that are characteristic of the people's migration to the Soviet Far East. The reasons are as follows: the regional market cannot meet the population's demands for foodstuff and manufactured goods; the Far Easterners' living standard is low; housing and social infrastructure have become very acute and complicated problems.

According to the aforementioned, two interrelated tendencies have taken shape in the demographic situation. On one hand, practically all characteristics of migration have been decreasing. On the other hand, the role of natural reproduction of the population has increased as a result of reduced migration. In major demographic parameters the Soviet Far East is approaching the average of those in the republics, and tendencies for a stable population have taken shape.

However, this process is not homogeneous in territories of the Soviet Far East. First, it cannot live according to the laws, say, of Siberia or of the Chernosem zone, and some of its territories can't be alike. The principle on which a single region exists lies not in homogeneity, but in substational diversity. The region is characterised by a structural differentiation of demographic indices on the development of the krajs (districts) and oblasts (states) due to differences in the national economic complex. One can speak about worsening of the demographic situation in the Northern zone of the Soviet Far East, such as the Magadan and Sakhalin oblasts. However, given world experience in the development of Northern territories, it is a normal process rather than abnormal, and preference should be given to expedient economic development of such territories with minimum use of labour. It is undoubtedly interrelated with the solution to problems of scientific and technical

progress, and with the removal of technically obsolete jobs and production which has always produced tense migration to the territory. In this view it will encourage the population's departure from particular territories, such as the Northern ones. In perspective, the numbers of Soviet Far Eastern residents will depend upon the model for development of the productive forces and upon the national economic structure of the region.

Structure of the Population in Urban and Rural Areas

The Soviet Far Eastern economic region is among few in the country where the ratio of urban population is high and permanently increasing. The percentage of city dwellers in the total population is as follows:

1926—23.4%; 1939—46.5%; 1959—67.5%; 1970—71.5%; 1979—74.5%; 1989—75.8% against 77.5 in Japan, 74—75% in the USA, 76% in Great Britain, and 94% in FRG.⁵⁾

The increase of urban population in the Soviet Far East can be attributed to natural increase, to migration, and to administrative-territorial reorganisation.

The ratio of natural increase and migration depends on economic-geographical location, functional type, and density of urban settlement. Therefore, the cities of most suitable economic-geographic locations are multi-functional and attractive. Their growth is determined by migration. They are the krai and oblast centers of the FEER. Migration to large-scale cities has been continuing due to a better everyday food supply and transport services. Such cities are given priority in solving social problems, though a person feels at ease ecologically in a small city.

Unlike many economic regions of the Republic the rural population of the Soviet Far East has recently been increasing, but the major source of growth is natural migration. During the last 10 years the number of rural residents has increased by 10.4%, and the average annual rates of increase have been stable —1.1 ~1.2%. But the structure of Far Eastern rural districts is very specific, whose residents are employed in forestry, mining, etc., —mostly residents of non-agricultural enterprises. This is increasingly peculiar to the Khabarovsk krai, and to the Kamchatsk and Magadansk oblasts. It is evident from the size of arable land per resident. The index is 1.1 hectare in the RSFSR, 0.42 in the Soviet Far Eastern region, and 0.16 in the Khabarovsk krai.⁶⁾

Age, Sex, and Matrimonial Structures

The Soviet Far East is rather young in its economic development and settlement. It is therefore characterized by specific features in sex and age structure of the population as compared with that in the country, republic, and other economic

regions. Males settled in the country and in the Russian Federation make up 47%.⁷⁾ The number of males settled in the Soviet Far East is higher than the number of the females, but there are also noticeable differences in the territories between urban and rural districts. For instance, in the Khabarovsk krai there are 1000 women per 1000 men, but in the urban districts 971; and in the rural, 1111.⁸⁾

In age structure, 60% are of working age, 30% are younger, and 10% are too old to work. As in Hokkaido, an increase in the number of elderly citizens is to be observed.

Structure of the younger population if compared to that in the country or in the Republic, is a factor in the increasing number of registered marriages per 1000 residents (FEER—10.7.; the RSFSR—9.5.⁹⁾; the USSR—9.4.¹⁰⁾ The age structure in Japan is similar to the index here—5.8%.¹¹⁾ But matrimonial relations look unstable, and there are many unsolved problems in family policy. Divorce indices are rather high. 5.2 divorces occur per 1000 residents of the Soviet Far East, as compared with 3.9 in the RSFSR.¹²⁾ Childless families as well as families with children have been disintegrating, and this can only bring about social tension, cause migration away from the region, and, therefore, “work against” formation of a permanent population. In Japan 1.3 divorces occur per 1000 residents,¹³⁾—the lowest index among advanced capitalist countries. Accordingly, the number of matrimonyes in the Soviet Far East is twice the number in Japan, but they have been disintegrating at 4 times the Japan rate. Matrimonial structure of the population and the stability of marriages could become a basis for scholars of the Soviet Far East and Japanese Universities in joint research.

Currently, the tendency toward increase in the number of second marriages, incomplete families, and then extramarital birth rate is taking shape. In 1988, for instance, of the total number of mothers giving birth 16.8% were not married; in the RSFSR they made up 12.1%.¹⁴⁾ Unstable marriages have brought on an increase of abortions. In the country at large, 181 women per 1000 agree to have an abortion. With regard to this index, the USSR is the leader, eclipsing even such countries as Romania and China, to say nothing of the advanced capitalist countries.¹⁵⁾

Natural Migration of the Population

In the Soviet Far East there are 17.9 births per thousand residents. This exceeds the index in Russia (16%).¹⁶⁾ The index has a tendency to decrease, i. e., with regard to the character of reproduction the Soviet Far East is becoming more like the Soviet Union itself. Therefore, it is not accidental that in the structure of population the ratio of young people has been decreasing.

With regard to the death rate, the Soviet Far East is among the safer regions.

Here 7.5 deaths occur per 1000 people (in the RSFSR—10.7)¹⁷⁾ But here infant mortality (younger than one year) is high.

Very often the Far Easterners suffer from diseases of the respiratory and digestive systems. Frequent accidents, poisoning, and industrial injuries are also common.

Sickness and birth rates are conditioned by socio-economic and ecological factors, such as the quality of food and structure of nourishment. Traditionally, meat and milk are our primary food products. But local production cannot meet residents' demands. The production of meat and meat products in the Soviet Far East is equal to 38 kgs per capita, but the consumption is 74 kgs per capita.¹⁸⁾ Likewise, the production of milk and milk products is 172 kgs per capita, but consumption is 382 kgs per capita.¹⁹⁾

Health care can be regarded to a certain extent through the prism of hospital beds, doctors, and nurses. These indices have been calculated in terms of 1000 residents without distinction among the regions. With this approach to the social infrastructure, the location of its facilities makes no difference. Everything is identical whether it is a newly-built city for young residents in the European part of the country, in Middle Asia, or in the Soviet Far East. There exists, differentiation, of course, but it embraces a minimum of differences. Therefore, with regard to health care indices, the Soviet Far East looks not worse than Russia, but sometimes even better. Decentralised management may save us from treatment as robots. But nowadays the population has been dispersed in such a way that "one can get to" many settlements "only by plane" (particularly in spring and autumn). That is why the number of visits to outpatient clinics in the Soviet Far East is lower than that in the RSFSR. Accordingly, the control of resident health is lower.

Health is affected also by ecological environment. Approximately 80% of diseases are regarded as conditioned by natural environment. The latter is very tense in the Far East. In 1987 the release of poisonous matters into the atmosphere made up at least 344.6 kgs per urban resident. However, while in the Republic this index has been decreasing since 1985 (375.4 in 1985), in the Far East it has been decreasing also (317.2 kgs). The most unfavourable situation is characteristic of Magadansk (637.6 kgs) and in Sakhalinsk oblasts (477.8 kgs)²⁰⁾ The increase of production that disregards scientific research of the environmental potential can bring on ecological disaster, which, in its turn, leads to deteriorated health and reduces duration of human life. We are aware that today in order to save human health we need ecological protection along with social. Japan can serve as an example. In the mid—70's and early 80's she increased spending for ecology which raised life expectancy to 78 years, with expenditure for health care stable (75 years in the USA, 69.5 years in the USSR)²¹⁾ and a twofold decrease in the death-rate of infants. Today the degree of society's development and the level to which it has

been civilised are not identified by space development but by the duration of human life. Life duration for those born in 1988 is expected to be 70 years in the USSR, 75 in the USA, and 78 in Japan.²²⁾

Migration. The aforementioned overview of the Far East's demography was characterised by an increasingly low role of migration attributed to a low living standard in the region. Some other reasons to specify large degrees of migration and its low effect are worth mentioning.

Huge migration to the Far East is conditioned by the need to attract labour force due to a continuous shortage of it. But why is the effect so low? As a rule, the enterprises attract migrants for non-prestigious jobs of low skill. Therefore, migrants' demands could be met neither in labour nor in wages. Many of those oriented for permanent residence in the Far East became disappointed. It looked as if the problem of labour supply was solved, when a planned circulation of labour force around non-prestigious zones brought on migratory tension in the territory.

"A vacant post is hardly filled because nobody has any interests in finding good positions. Everything that causes people to movement is to go through their heads".²³⁾ It appears that living conditions and migration are interdependent processes. Migration is affected by opportunities to meet demands in the infrastructural sphere as well. Among the most important demands are housing and consumer goods.

At present, housing and its improvement is an acute problem. According to 1987 statistics, 13.1 sq. m. of actual living space is allotted to every resident of the Soviet Far East (15.5 sq. m. in the RSFSR),²⁴⁾ which is worse than the Republic's level of improved collectivised apartment houses, particularly in rural communities. Eighty-eight percent and 93% of the urban apartment houses are equipped with water pipes in the SFEER and in the RSFSR, as compared with such low percentages of rural apartment houses equipped with water pipes as 31% in the SFEER and 43% in the RSFSR. In gas facilities, there is a disparity between urban and rural communities, too; 29% and 73% of urban apartment houses are installed gas systems in the SFEER and in the RSFSR, while 41% and 75% of rural apartment houses in the SFEER and in the RSFSR respectively.²⁴⁾ Improper supply of everyday necessities can only negatively affect formation of demographic potential and migratory movement. It is this reason that accounts for a non-equivalent exchange of skilled workers in the Far East with the rest of the country. The fixed average monthly wage of workers and employees in the Soviet Far East does not compensate high expenditures for staying here, though wages are 50% higher as compared to the country at large (1988—219 roubles)²⁵⁾ and is negligibly higher than this index in the central region. In Moscow, for example, the average monthly wage is 269 roubles.²⁶⁾

In the Far East, residents' deposits in savings banks are practically the same as in the RSFSR (1048 roubles in the Soviet Far East and 1037 roubles in the

RSFSR), and in the southern zone of the region even lower (in Maritime (Primorye) —928 roubles, in Khabarovsk krai—876 roubles, in Amursk oblast—796 roubles).²⁷⁾

Another factor which negatively affects staying in the Far East is an unsatisfactory supply of consumer goods. The share in total industrial output is increasingly diminishing (32.4% in 1980 and 29.3% in 1987), and consumer goods produced per capita are worth 805 roubles (in the RSFSR—1119 roubles.)²⁸⁾

All this is not in favour of permanent residence in the region and, undoubtedly, does not allow us to achieve the major target in territorial development—to provide historically a normal type of population reproduction.

With regard to the index of stable residence, the FEER is characterised as a region low in indigenous population: more than 2/3 are newly arrived, i. e. migrants of the whole period of development and settlement, but at least half of these are those who have lived in the region for more than 10 years. According to the existing classification of a stable population, they are regarded as permanent residents. Hence, migration was a tangible component in the formation of population in the Far Eastern economic region.

Employment. The number of workers and employees in the Far East is 4 million people. In employment policy, priority was given to labour force in the national economy. Nevertheless, it was not always so when balance between labour force and jobs was achieved. Most of all it concerns industry and production, where the existing techno-economic parameters do not meet the increased demands of the population for good working conditions.

What is the reason? At the Far Eastern enterprises, many facilities are morally and physically outdated, and manual labour is widely used. For instance, in industries of the Khabarovsk krai in 1989, manual labour made up 47.8%, construction—58.2%, and agriculture—65%.²⁹⁾ There is no practical incentive for labour results among this portion of the working people. Release of the labour force is negligible. Rationalization of production and refusal from outdated and excessive jobs are slow. All this has resulted in low growth rates of labour productivity. In Khabarovsk krai in 1989, only 24.5% of the working places at the enterprises were attested, and only 43% of those to be renewed were reconstructed in accordance with requirements.³⁰⁾

The Soviet Far East has witnessed an increase in the demand for manpower but not in its economy. This phenomenon is aggravated by a high coefficient of staff turnover. In regard to personnel replacement, the Amursk oblast is first in the FEER. The second place is the Khabarovsk krai where every sixth worker is dismissed from his enterprise. At such as the meat processing and packing factory in Bikin, the dairy plant in Vyasemsk, and the wood chip plant in Vanino, every 3rd worker was replaced during the first half of 1990. The turnover of labour force at the tyre repairing and woodprocessing plants accounted for 63%, at the marine-

repairing shop in Nikolaevsk—59%, and at the timber industry enterprise in Shelekhovo—44%. In the first half of the year 3,000 were dismissed from the enterprises in the Khabarovsk krai for absenteeism and violation of labour discipline.³¹⁾

Unemployment may increasingly become acute due to reduction in the number of people able to work. According to forecasts for the development of production forces in the context of labour force imbalance and jobs, the national economy's demand for labour resources will substantially increase. Therefore, we are to achieve an increase in growth rates of labour productivity by reduction (approximately by 2–2.5 times) and further elimination of manual, low-skilled jobs, by equipping industries with modern machinery, and by introducing advanced forms of labour. The number of working places is to be limited at the expense of newly built productions (excluding a base for the construction industry, energy, and social infrastructure). A mechanism to release and redistribute workers should also be improved.

However, even if the abovementioned is put into effect, the increase in population and labour force required will not be realized without migration. Attraction and settlement of migrants is rather expensive. Meanwhile, local labour resources are not attracted to the full. For instance, in the Khabarovsk krai during the first half of 1990, the number of absences accounted for 31 days per 100 workers (in 1989—26 days). In terms of all losses of working hours in the industries (idle time, absenteeism, compensatory leaves), the share of absences accounts for 41%. As a result, the krai's industrial enterprises during the first half of 1990 manufactured 8,217,000 roubles' worth of goods less than the same period of 1989.³²⁾

New conditions for economic management and transition of the territory to self-management and self-financing may have a substantial impact on the region's demography. Transition to intensive management, new requirements to work payment due to the intensified STP (Scientific and Technological Progress) aimed to reduce manual and low-skilled jobs may release labour resources from the national economy. The latter will be a reserve in the national economy's demand for manpower as well as a factor for decreasing the migratory movement. The question arises: will it not lead to unemployment? The Employment Act now under discussion in the Supreme Soviet makes provision for avoiding unemployment as a phenomenon incompatible with socialism, or at least for adopting legislative enactments to lessen social tension caused by the release. Full employment, and jobs sufficient to meet the increase of labour resources is a problem on the state level in terms of social protection. Nowadays, one can argue that social safeguard is an aspect of social ecology.

The present employment policy suggests retraining and provision of jobs as not every production will be in need of those released. For instance, in Moscow

there are 400,000 unemployed, while 120,000 jobs are vacant.³³⁾ In terms of a market economy it is the skilled labour to which priority will be given. Unskilled and inefficient work will be excluded in the first place. Inefficient jobs will be eliminated. The situation may become very complicated for employees of low-profitable or unprofitable enterprises which may practically go bankrupt, while employees will face the problem of new applications for their skills.

In terms of a market economy, labour resources may be applied in the spheres of various forms of property. Individual or family work activities, cooperatives, stockholders or leaseholders, and various forms of economic cooperation are the means by which we may help find a solution to the employment problem. Socially important will become such forms of employment as children's upbringing, care of the sick, etc. This suggests that employment policy in the region is to become part and parcel of the social-economic policy at large.

Social development in the Soviet Far East suggests creation of social and economic conditions that will be favourable for future progressive reproduction of human life on a large scale. One cannot delay intensification of production, scientific and technical progress, and the raising of living standards which have much bearing on normal demographic development.

In perspective, the demographic development of the FEER implies extended reproduction of its own demographic structures, and gradual reduction in the increase of population through migration and full employment.

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