



# HOKKAIDO UNIVERSITY

Title	GENDAI SOREN NO RODO SHIJO [Labor Market of the Current Soviet Union], By Sadayoshi Ohtsu, Tokyo : Nihon Hyoron-sha, 1988,xx+376pp., ¥4,800
Author(s)	HAKAMADA, Shigeki
Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 8, 209-210
Issue Date	1990
Doc URL	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/2115/8016">https://hdl.handle.net/2115/8016</a>
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	KJ00000034184.pdf



GENDAI SOREN NO RÔDÔ SHIJÔ [Labor Market of the Current Soviet Union]. By *Sadayoshi Ohtsu*. Tokyo : Nihon Hyoron-sha, 1988, xx + 376pp. ¥4,800.

Although there are several books and treatises on the subject of the Soviet economy and no matter how detailed their analysis they may be, most of them fail to convey a real image of either the workings of Soviet management or the labor situation. Studies by Soviet economists tend to be largely academic and they describe the real situation of the people working and living in Soviet society. *Sadayoshi Ohtsu's* volume is a rare achievement which makes up for many of these shortcomings and serves to bridge the gap between discussions on policy / system formulation and sociological analysis.

The value of this study lies first of all in its extensive analysis of existing treatises and other studies, and secondly, in the author's efforts to avoid commonly-held views of the socialist economy. For example, *Ohtsu* criticises that the methodology of dividing the labor problem into two segments, a market economy and a planned economy, which fails to portray the real picture of labor activities and employment problems behind the theories, a criticism with which I am in total agreement. Recently there has been much talk about the "human factor" of Soviet society, but past studies were largely ideological abstraction of human psychology and behavior. *Ohtsu's* work is an attempt to correct these faults.

The people and enterprises of a socialist nation are not merely pawns, moving according to orders, but independent units that operate on the basis of their own patterns of behavior, of profit and loss. Therefore, in understanding the role of labor in the Soviet economy and industry, a sociological examination of corporate and individual behavior is essential. Some Soviet scholars are aware of the problem ; *T. Zaslavskaya*, for example, has proposed adopting methods such as "economic sociology." *Ohtsu's* studies are really an extension of this trend.

The following is an outline of the contents this volume :

- Chapter 1 Planned Economy and the Labor Market
- Chapter 2 The Structure of Labor Supply
- Chapter 3 Determining Factors and Structures of Labor Demand
- Chapter 4 The Wage System and Incentives
- Chapter 5 Periphery Labor
- Chapter 6 Soviet Labor Policies, Part 1
- Chapter 7 Soviet Labor Policies, Part 2
- Supplement on Soviet Wage and Employment Statistics

The question raised in Chapter 1 is whether the theory of labor as a commodity is valid in socialist nations. While Soviet reformists such as *Shmelev* and *G. Popov* advocate this theory, in general, the tendency is to shy away from such thinking. *Ohtsu*, however, offers this insight : "Labor in the Soviet Union cannot avoid the idea of being a commodity, and basically, the market distribution will follow the same trends as seen in capitalist systems," the observation with which I am in full agreement.

At this point I would like to point out two or three difficulties that I find particularly interesting in the text.

I was most concerned over the Chapter 2 in which the problems of labor training and educational reforms are outlined. Like many other projects in the Soviet Union, educational planning does not often proceed as intended. As the author points out, there is a wide gap between the supply and demand of engineers. Educational reforms have much to do with the

problems of labor training, and the 1984 school reform in particular emphasized labor education and training. Although the author basically agrees with these measures, many Soviet scholars and reformists criticized the programs as anachronistic, and in fact the reform measures were later publicly denounced. I get the impression that the author did not fully grasp this shift in Soviet attitude.

It has been the norm for Soviet institutions to demand that educational facilities produce ready-made specialists for industry. Thus, the schools are expected to do more than is possible. On the other hand, Soviet business is not seen as functioning to train workers, and hence, compared with Japanese firms, Soviet enterprises have a remarkably low level of in-house training. This is because the firms themselves are not subject to severe competition. Currently, efforts are being made to bring industry and educational system closer together and thereby to improve the development of human resources. However, simply bringing industry and education closer together against the background of the current Soviet economic system will not prove effective. I wish the author had touched on this point in his work.

In the Chapter 4 the writer's views on socialism come clearly to the fore. He regards the tariff system of equal work / equal pay as a fair and logical method of wage distribution. In reality however, the tariff system produces great injustice on the practical level. For example, the employees of a business which has seen a dramatic rise in profits due to the hard work of both management and labor receive the same wages as those of a company which has made no such efforts, on the grounds that both firms are engaged in the same kind of work. This surely goes against the principles of justice and equality. I suspect the author may see the current economic reform policies as starting from the basic tenets of socialism.

On wage reforms, the author raises a question: "With today's self-finance system, how can companies raise the funds necessary to reform wage?" Here, I think, he is very much on target. Many companies under the new wage system think that they simply cannot raise sufficient funds to pay for proper wages. Ironically, under this self-finance system, many companies have been forced to *decrease* wages owing to a lack of funds, a fact which is apparent in the deep dissatisfaction which the labor class feels towards the Gorbachev reforms.

Today, world attention is concentrated on the reforms and modernization measures of the Soviet Union and how Mr. Gorbachev will cope with the labor dissatisfaction that is a by-product of the shift to a new economic system. It is apparent that the new system will be the cause of severe disturbances in the labor market, and the problems outlined in this work will continue to grow in the near future. The book itself is a landmark in Japan's Soviet studies. With limited resources and information, it is almost a miracle that the writer produced such an in-depth piece of work. Ohtsu deserves great respect for his achievement.

Shigeki HAKAMADA  
Aoyama Gakuin University