

**RPTSS 2018**  
**International Conference on Research Paradigms**  
**Transformation in Social Sciences**

**IRKUTSK OFFICE OF SPECIAL STATE POLITICAL AGENCY  
OF ECONOMIC CONTROL IN 1920S**

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*Abstract*

The article analyzes the activities of the Soviet security agencies of economic control in Irkutsk province in the 1920s. The historical experience helps assess the role of force methods in economic management. The special state political agency was a state security body and a tool of the class policy of the Communist Party.

Along with maintaining the political regime in the region, Irkutsk office protected economic facilities, dealt with economic and official crimes. In Irkutsk office of the USPA, most tasks were performed by officers of the economic department of the secret and operative unit.

To solve the economic tasks, the employees of the economic department collected various data on economic activities. Their sources were data from secret agents of Irkutsk office of the USPA, heads of companies and organizations, statistical data. Based on their analysis, the economic department assessed the economic situation in Irkutsk region. Special attention was paid to the activities of regional enterprises: Cherembastrust, Lena gold fields and railway enterprises, public, cooperative and private trade companies.

Its officers monitored production plans, economy regimes, controlled labor discipline in the public and private sectors, price levels and other indicators. The activities of Irkutsk office prevented serious violations.

One of the main tasks of the USPA in the economic area was to protect key economic objects. To this end, the officers of Irkutsk office monitored security conditions at industrial enterprises and transport facilities.

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**Keywords:** Irkutsk, Irkutsk office, Special state political agency, New economic policy, the Bolsheviks.



## 1. Introduction

The Russian Revolution of 1917 providing the Bolsheviks with public authorities triggered a mixed response and divided the Russian society into supporters and opponents of the Soviet regime. The numbers of the supporters and opponents were comparatively small. The majority of the population adopted a wait-and-see attitude.

To implement the Marxism principles of proletarian dictatorship and transition to socialism, the Bolsheviks needed special bodies to restrain opponents, control the population and force people to participate in socialist transformations.

At the same time, the opponents of the Soviet government who lost the tools of public powers due to their small number did not have opportunities to stand up to the Bolsheviks. Therefore, they used illegal methods of struggle creating anti-revolutionary conspiracy organizations, hatching plots, organizing rebellions, etc. These organizations used the support of the Allies which felt hostility towards the Bolsheviks (Footman, 1962; Mawdsley, 1987; Naumov, 2006).

## 2. Problem Statement

The victory of the Bolsheviks in the Civil War, the end of the intervention of the Allies and international recognition of the Soviet state required abandonment of the emergency measure, red terror policies and transformation of public security agencies.

The need for the economic recovery, transition to the New Economic Policy (NEP), recreation of currency and freedom of trade, permission of private economic activities, implementation of a for-profit model, international cooperation and concession policy of the Soviet state set a great number of new tasks for public security agencies and extended their authorities (Naumov, 2011; Naumov, 2017).

## 3. Research Questions

On February 6, 1922, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic abolished the All-Russian Special Commission and created the State Political Agency of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. On November 15, 1923, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the USSR issued a ruling on unification of the republican security agencies into a united all-union department and foundation of the United State Political Agency (USPA) of the Soviet People's Commissariat.

Describing the reorganization of public security agencies in the beginning of the 1920s, one should note that the federal authorities shifted focus of the SPA to the public security as a social institute.

At the same time, the public security agencies preserved functions of a control and punitive body (Khvalebnov, 1923; Kuznetsov, Naumov, Novikov, Gurtovoy, & Nikoluk, 2017; Khristoforov, 2017).

After the publication of the Ruling of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of February 6, 1922, the reorganization of departments of the All-Russian Special Commission into SPA departments began in Siberia and other parts of the country. The Siberian authorized representative office of the All-Russian Special Commission was transformed into the representative office of the SPA (since 1923 – the USPA) for Siberia. It was headed by I.P. Pavlunovsky. In December 1925, when the division of Siberia

into districts came to an end, the Siberian representative office was renamed into the Authorized Representative Office of the USPA for Siberia.

In Irkutsk province, the provincial department of the All-Russian Special Commission was transformed into Irkutsk province department of the SPA (since 1923 – the USPA). The subordination scheme did not change. It was subordinated to the Authorized Representative Office of the SPA (USPA) for Siberia (since 1925 – for the Siberian krai) in Novonikolaevsk (since 1925 – in Novosibirsk).

The first head of Irkutsk provincial office of the SPA was the chief of the Provincial Special Commission M.D. Berman who was holding this office until August 1923 or October 1923 (the information is inconsistent). After M.D. Berman had been transferred to another position, Ozolin headed Irkutsk provincial office of the USPA. From March 1924 till 1926 when it was reorganized, the office was headed by D.V. Shlenov.

The structure of Irkutsk provincial office of the SPA (USPA) was similar to the structure of the Province Special Commission (Belousov, 1970; Gurtova & Logunov, 1982). In the beginning of 1922, when the department was created, there were 286 employees. The local public security bodies were reorganized. In May 1922, according to the Order of the Authorized Representative of the SPA for Siberia, district political bureaus were abolished. Instead, an institute of district authorized representatives was created. According to Order 110 of Irkutsk Provincial Department of the SPA of May 22, 1922, the following staffing positions were created: a district commissioner - 1, an assistant commissioner and information commissioner - 1, an assistant commissioner and political party commissioner - 1, an investigator - 1, a secretary - 1, a document controller - 1, a type-writer - 1, a supply manager - 1, a delegator - 2, a cleaner - 1, a groom - 1, district commissioners for different needs - no more than 7. According to the Order, only the members of the Russian Communist Party can hold positions in the SPA except for some auxiliary positions. The communists who were former members of district political bureaus and did not become district commissioners held secret positions officially working in other agencies.

In 1926, the administrative and territorial division of Siberia changed (Yurtsovsky, 1929; Mints, 1976. P. 133; Novikov, 2014). The Siberian provinces and oblasts were abolished. Instead of them, the united Siberian krai was created. It was divided into districts which were divided into sub-districts. The area of Irkutsk province was divided into three districts: Irkutsk, Tulun and Kirensk.

According to the changes of the administrative and territorial structure, Irkutsk office was transformed into Irkutsk district office of the USPA. It preserved the functions of the provincial agency as it controlled the whole territory of former Irkutsk province. Kirensk and Tulun district offices were controlled by Irkutsk office (e.g., they had to present copies of all reports to the Authorized Representative Office of the USPA for the Siberian krai). Until May 1927, Irkutsk district office of the USPA was headed by D.V. Shlepov. After he had been transferred to another region, S.V. Zdorovtsev headed the office. In 1930, shortly before its abolishment, Shevchenko headed the office.

Among various functions of Irkutsk office of the USPA in the 1920s, the key ones were protecting economic objects, controlling their activities, fighting against economic and other crimes, controlling activities of different agencies in Irkutsk region. The Ruling of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic of February 1922 on the creation of the SPA determined the functions of security officers.

In Irkutsk office of the USPA, most tasks were performed by officers of the economic department of the secret and operative unit. In the 1920s, the department was headed by J. Bebrekarkle, Roytgering, S. Melnikov et al. The functions of the economic department were rather diverse. They dealt with various economic anti-revolutionary activities.

To solve the economic tasks, the employees of the economic department collected various data on economic activities. Their sources were data from secret agents of Irkutsk office of the USPA, heads of companies and organizations, statistical data (Sokolov, 1924). Based on their analysis, the economic department assessed the economic situation in Irkutsk region. The assessment was included in periodical information reports of Irkutsk office of the USPA. Besides, the economic department published their own bulletins for informing the heads of the department, higher-level bodies of the USPA and regional party and government officials. Each bulletin dealt with only one industry or one large economic object.

The officers of the USPA monitored production plans, controlled the economy regime and labor discipline in public and cooperative sectors, salary and price levels and other economic indices which were assessed. Special attention was paid to the activities of regional enterprises: Cherembastrust, Lena gold fields and railway enterprises, public, cooperative and private trade companies. Their main efforts were aimed to identify different disadvantages preventing from stable economic development and direct violations of economic laws, and to protect economic objects.

To the drawbacks of the regional economy, Irkutsk office referred violations of the economy regime and mismanagement of different government agencies (Vorzhhev, 1960). In particular, it was the reason of failures of Lena gold fields (before they were granted to concession in 1925 to the former owner of the English company "Lena-Gold-fields"), where mismanagement, nepotism and heavy drinking were typical practices. A lot of violations existed in the market. According to the officers of the USPA, during the NEP era, "government agencies sold goods to individuals on credit without any obligations of the latter" which caused large-scale embezzlements. Goods were unloaded untimely and stored for months losing their properties. As a result, trading organizations experienced losses. Irkutsk central labor cooperative society is an example. In 1927, the officers of the USPA wrote: "the CLCS pay a lot for the car detention. For example, from May 1 to June 1, they paid 1000 rubles". Mismanagement was a typical feature of the industries as well. For example, in 1926, the officers of Irkutsk office of the USPA identified an uncontrolled distribution of dynamite in Cherembastrust which caused mass embezzlements (mainly for stunning fish in the Angara river).

According to Irkutsk office of the USPA, another important factor of non-stable economic activities was poor labor discipline. The USPA reports contain data on regular no-shows on Christmas and Easter. For example, according to the USPA, in Tannage 1, 98 workers and 10 clerks out of 131 employees and in Tannage 2, 132 workers and 5 clerks out of 192 employees were absent during the Christmas days of 1924. No-shows had negative effects on production results. For example, in May 1926, due to no-shows of 50% of workers, Cherembastrust carried out only 77.8% of its production plan.

According to the USPA, the outrunning growth of wages in relation to labor production had a negative effect on the regional economic development in the 1920s. At the same time, salaries of engineers which were lower than in other regions caused the fluctuation of professional employees and loss of

performance (for example, the salary of a mine captain in Chermbastrust was 190 rubles, while in Kuzbas it was 225-250 rubles).

Finally, Irkutsk office of the USPA said that one more negative factor was misunderstanding and disregard of current decisions of party and state leaders. These phenomena were identified in 1927 during the national campaign aimed to reduce food and ware prices. The Bulletin of the economic department contains a lot of facts of unwillingness of heads of trading and industrial enterprises to reduce prices.

In its documents, Irkutsk office of the USPA specified causes of these drawbacks. For example, among the causes of no-shows in Cherembastrust, the USPA identified a lack of accommodation near coal mines, the beginning of summer field works (30% of Cheremkhovo workers were peasants of neighboring villages) and a summer period decreasing willingness to work. The main cause of no-shows was a lack of education activities and labor discipline promotion measures of the district commission of Mining workers. To the causes of engineering staff turnover, the USPA referred low salaries and hostile attitude of the Cheremkhovo workers to non-party managers as a result of the class policy of the Communist party.

Irkutsk office of the USPA regularly reported all problems and their causes to the higher authorities and local party and labor leaders. Irkutsk office also provided practical violation elimination recommendations. For example, in 1926, when analyzing the activities of the local industries, the economic department of Irkutsk office suggested 1) to dismiss the director of Telma cloth factory or to transfer him to another position due to his wastefulness. 2) for Tannery No 3: to improve the quality of products, to report the delivery of raw materials to the Provincial Internal Trading Agency. They wrote about Cherembastrust: "The facts of no-shows were observed in March. We reported them to the Provincial Labor Council, the secretary of the Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of the Bolsheviks, emphasizing the need for taking urgent actions. ... Besides, in June, we had conversations with the head of the trust Paramonov and reported him all violations identified, who suggested taking urgent actions". At the suggestion of Irkutsk office, the head of the dynamite warehouse of Cherembastrust was dismissed and the dynamite distribution procedure was made tougher (it decreased the consumption of dynamite).

In the first part of the 1920s, Irkutsk office continued to identify economic damages caused by the foreign intervention and Civil war. To this end, they visited different districts of the province where local government agencies had to provide relevant information.

One of the main tasks of the USPA in the economic area was to protect key economic objects. To this end, the officers of Irkutsk office monitored security conditions at industrial enterprises and transport facilities. The results of these inspections were discussed during secret sessions of Irkutsk provincial (district) executive board. Based on the results, decisions on protection and security system improvement were made. The most typical problems were sleeping security guards and violation of fire regulations. Special attention was paid to the protection of railway facilities - bridges, tunnels, sheds, and water-towers.

In the 1920s, the crucial function of Irkutsk office of the USPA was to struggle against illegal trading and gold and currency-related crimes. The NEP, currency circulation restoration and free trading along with disorders contributed to illegal trading and gold and currency-related activities. In the first half of the 1920s, Irkutsk office reported the stable growth of theft of gold in Lena gold mines. The crimes were committed by both Soviet and foreign citizens. The officers of Irkutsk office of the USPA did their best to prevent these crimes. They managed to prevent a lot of violations. For example, in 1923, they detected illegal

activities of Irkutsk producer of counterfeit gold Abram Svistunov who sold that gold for genuine one or fur. A USPA agent ordered him twenty slides of genuine gold. Svistunov was arrested with these slides by Irkutsk provincial criminal investigation department. The USPA officers were surprised when he was released two days later on the ground of pettiness of the crime. Then the same agent ordered 16 kilos of gold and the criminal and his protector in the provincial criminal investigation department were proved guilty. In 1925, Irkutsk office arrested Chinese citizens Ma Chin Tzyan and Van Din Chen who bought opium and exported it to China. In 1926, the illegal smuggler Bernstein was caught red-handed. She worked in a Soviet trading company in Harbin and regularly imported scarce goods (cosmetics, perfume, underwear) into the USSR and sold them in Irkutsk. To import these goods, she registered them as her belongings.

In the 1920s, Irkutsk office also fought against racketeering and street crimes which had a negative effect on the political and economic situation in the region. The Russian Revolution and the Civil War, the destruction of the traditional lifestyle and economic collapse, criminals who were released by the new government authorities and a large number of guns possessed by citizens contributed to criminal activities. In Irkutsk and other towns of Irkutsk province, crimes were committed every day. Almost every day the operative reports of the USPA fixed murders, attacks, armed robberies in the 100-thousand city.

In the 1920s, Irkutsk office of the USPA carried out activities aimed to improve the efficiency of government authorities. The officers identified violations, cases of abuse of power and alcohol abuse as well as class hostility of civil servants. They reported these facts to the Party leaders of the region and suggested taking repressive measures (the USPA forced them to report measures taken). For example, in January 1923, twenty-three civil servants were penalized, twenty civil servants were convicted (they were mainly chiefs and members of rural councils and executive committees). Lawbreakers, drunkards and interlopers were identified and dismissed during regular purges of government agencies and by the reports of the USPA. For example, in January and February 1927, as requested by the USPA, in Kachug district, three civil servants were dismissed for abusing alcohol. Among the causes of dismissal are class motives, discrediting of the Soviet power, and plunder of public property.

In general, the activities of Irkutsk office of the USPA in the 1920s contributed to the purge of government agencies from class aliens and individuals interfering with normal work.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the article is to analyze the activities of the Soviet security agencies in the economic area in Irkutsk province in the 1920s.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The methods used are general scientific, general historical and specific historical. The general scientific methods used in the research are as follows: induction, deduction, transition from abstract to concrete, analysis, synthesis, description, measurement, explanation, analogy, and comparison. At the general historical level, the principles of historicism and objectivity are followed. The specific historical methods used by the author are historical genetic, historical comparative and historical systematic.

## 6. Findings

Activities of Irkutsk office of the USPA aimed to improve protection and security helped prevent serious economic violations.

## 7. Conclusion

In the 1920s, the officers of Irkutsk office of the USPA were dealing with various challenging tasks allotted by the authorities of the Soviet PSPA.

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