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The Suppression of the 1916 Uprising and the Trials in the Amu Darya Division

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Abstract: The article analyzes the measures taken to suppress the popular uprising that took place in 1916 in the Amu Darya Division of the Turkestan region, as well as the arrest, investigation, and trial of uprising participants by military courts. Based on archival information, memoirs, and collections of documents cited in the dissertation, it examines resistance movements in Chimbay, Davkara, Terbenbes, and the Aral Sea region, the activities of punitive detachments, and inequalities in labor conscription. Attention is drawn to the fact that figures relating to local events differ in scope from the overall judicial statistics for Turkestan. The article shows that, although court decisions and administrative punishments were intended to stop the uprising, they did not eliminate public discontent completely.

Keywords: Amu Darya Division, 1916 uprising, labor conscription, tsarist administration, military court, punitive detachment, Chimbay, Karakalpakstan, colonial policy.

1. Introduction

At the beginning of the twentieth century, political and socio-economic contradictions in the Turkestan region became even more acute during the First World War. The burden of war expenses on the population, the increase in taxes and obligations, inequalities in land and water relations, and the self-interest of local administrative officials intensified the discontent of working people. The decree announced on June 25, 1916, which provided for the mobilization of the indigenous population of Turkestan and other regions for rear-area work, was one of the factors that turned existing contradictions into open resistance. The failure to take local conditions and the population's customs sufficiently into account during mobilization, together with injustices in drawing up the lists, further intensified the discontent [1].

Interpreting the events of 1916 in Karakalpakstan and Khorezm solely as protests against labor conscription does not fully reveal their substance. These movements also expressed opposition to colonial administration, abuses by local officials, and inequalities in economic and labor relations [2]. The uprising in the Amu Darya Division was distinctive in that resistance spread across villages and volosts, involving peasants working in fishing enterprises, pastoralists, and people hired as laborers. The course of the movement was influenced both by the political situation in the Khanate of Khiva and by the mobilization policy of the Turkestan administration [3].

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The relevance of studying the history of the 1916 uprisings is not limited to the course of armed clashes. Mass arrests, military investigations, and punitive measures carried out after the uprising are important historical evidence of how the colonial authorities responded to the crisis. Therefore, court cases, official reports, and local memories need to be studied comparatively. Later collections of documents devoted to the events of 1916 also emphasize the need to view the uprisings not as a single generalized event, but as a set of processes that had their own causes and consequences in different regions [4].

The aim of the article is to examine the suppression of the 1916 uprising in the Amu Darya Division, the administrative and judicial punishments imposed on its participants, and the impact of repressive measures on the lives of the local population[5]. The object of the study is the popular movement in the Amu Darya Division in 1916 and the measures taken against it. Its subject comprises arrests, investigations, military courts, the activities of punitive detachments, inequalities in the labor-mobilization process, and the social situation after the uprising. The analysis uses the principles of historicism, objectivity, and systematic inquiry, as well as chronological examination of events and comparison of sources[6].

While retaining the research aim and objectives set out in the introduction to the dissertation, this article focuses primarily on the suppression and judicial proceedings described in Section 3.3. The figures cited in sources may not refer to the same territory or the same reporting period[7]. Therefore, information on individual cases in the Amu Darya Division is analyzed separately from the general statistics for the Turkestan region. This approach makes it possible to understand the mechanisms of repression more precisely without exaggerating the scale of local events.

2. Materials and Methods

Discontent in the Amu Darya Division became apparent in several areas from the summer of 1916. Injustices in the lists drawn up for labor conscription, the hiring of other people in place of those listed, and problems concerning the pay and supplies of those to be mobilized reduced the population's trust in state institutions. In some cases, people were selected from peasant and poor families, while the children of wealthy households and local officials were left off the lists. This turned mobilization from a merely military-administrative measure into a process that intensified social inequality.

The official purpose of the decree was to recruit labor to build defensive structures and military communication routes behind the front. In practice, however, the procedure for implementing it was in the hands of local officials, and abuses during mobilization increased public discontent. The official text of the imperial order issued in July 1916 is an important source for studying the content and legal basis of the decree. Although recruitment under the order was designated for specific types of work, for the local population it meant the risk of being taken for compulsory labor and the possibility of losing the means of supporting their families.

Reports from the administration of the Amu Darya Division recorded fear and distrust among the population, people avoiding land-surveying work, meetings being held secretly, and people leaving for areas around Khiva or for the reed beds. A notice dated August 16, 1916, reported that land-surveying work in the Biybazar volost had been suspended because no labor force could be found. The administrative document linked this situation to the population's fear and negative attitude toward the authorities. Such records indicate that discontent was not limited to isolated clashes but also affected everyday administration and labor processes.

The situation also became tense in places where fishing enterprises were located, such as Muynak, Terbenbes, Urge, Uchsay, Zayir, and Toqpaq Ota. Enterprise owners sought to have local peasants exempted from labor conscription, presenting fishing as an industry that helped supply food to the army. However, the demands of local workers concerning wages, working conditions, and exemption from mobilization were not fully resolved. As a result, forms of resistance such as damaging enterprise property and

stopping work emerged.

Following the order of the Turkestan Governor-General dated August 28, the military district command sent a unit of the reserve Siberian Regiment, 66 soldiers, and two officers to Muynak, Urgench, and other locations. Measures were also taken to arm some Russian and Ukrainian enterprise owners in the southern Aral Sea region. Although the administration regarded these actions as a means of restoring order, they created conditions for the formation of armed groups among peasants refusing labor conscription. Thus, instead of eliminating resistance immediately, a policy based on the use of force led to its further complication in some areas.

3. Results

In early September 1916, tensions over gathering laborers at designated assembly points led to clashes between local and Russian workers in Terbenbes. On September 6, at the request of the head of the Amu Darya Division, the head of the Turkestan Military District ordered an infantry detachment to be sent there [8]. The following day, discontent among nomadic pastoralists in Davkara volost, near Terbenbes, intensified. The administration described them as refusing to provide workers, disobeying the demands of local authorities, and hiding in the Kyzylkum. On this basis, it planned to send a punitive detachment, arrest those who resisted, and confiscate their property if necessary.

These reports reflect the administration's viewpoint at the time; therefore, descriptions such as "disorder" or "disobedience" should not automatically be accepted as objective accounts of events. Telegrams portrayed the population's movements as a threat and used this to justify the need for military measures. Yet the same sources also recorded people's opposition to mobilization, their departure from villages, and their refusal to cooperate with administrative offices. Comparing the sources helps distinguish the official document's security perspective from the population's demands concerning work, payment, and freedom of movement.

In the second half of September, under pressure from punitive detachments, some insurgents agreed to provide men for labor conscription and began returning home. However, peasants in the Chimbay district remained unsettled. In October, demands were raised again at the designated points for gathering laborers: recruits demanded full payment and the provision of food, utensils, and clothing. Reports that 43,000 manats allocated for the needs of laborers from the Amu Darya Division had not been used for their intended purpose also increased discontent with local officials. These figures show that problems with material provision, and not only compulsory recruitment itself, were important in the mobilization process [9].

In the Chimbay district, some groups refusing labor conscription, including a detachment led by Kokarazhanov, resisted the tsarist soldiers. Soldiers were used to bring people to mobilization points. Nevertheless, sending more than three thousand people by the end of 1916 proved extremely difficult. It is recorded that discontent continued along the way among those who had been mobilized. These events show that, although the administration's punitive and coercive measures secured compliance with some demands in the short term, they did not resolve the population's principal grievances.

The continued refusal of labor conscription and resistance to administrative offices were not unique to the Amu Darya Division. Reports of events in the Semirechye and Turgay regions also affected the mood of the local population. It is said that Kazakh pastoralists arriving from other regions brought experience of opposing labor conscription and raised the morale of local workers. At the same time, it is incorrect to present events in different regions as one and the same uprising: their starting times, participants, and demands differed. A comparison of information in document collections shows that it is necessary to consider both the common colonial context of these movements and their local characteristics.

The suppression of the uprising was followed by mass arrests and criminal prosecution. According to information in the dissertation, approximately 150 people were criminally prosecuted as participants in the 1916 movement in the Amu Darya Division. A

total of 103 participants in the uprising, including 18 women, were first detained in Chimbay and later in Petroalexandrovsk. These figures are presented as data relating to local events and must not be combined with the number of people tried throughout Turkestan. The fact that women were also detained shows that the repressive measures were not limited to male participants who had taken up arms.

A separate court case concerning the Saribiy uprising records that 28 people were punished. Yusup Matjanov, Asmet Abdullaev, Sharimbet Khojaev, and Qadir Avazboy Jaliev were sentenced to death; Qalandar aksakal Ibaydullaev, Abul Djabaev, and Irjan Avezbayjaliev were sentenced to life penal servitude; and another eleven people were sentenced to twelve years of penal labor. Later, fearing the emergence of new disturbances, the authorities reduced some sentences: the death penalty was commuted to twenty years of penal servitude, life penal servitude was reduced to ten years, and twelve people were acquitted. This information shows that judicial decisions did not end with the initial verdicts but were reconsidered in light of the political situation.

Based on memoirs from 1926 preserved in the archive of the Jokargy Kenes of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the dissertation reconstructs the names of 18 people connected with the events of 1916. They include Temirkhan Bazarbay uly, Zhuginisbay Akhmet uly, Zhaksimurat, Kulimbet Zharimbet uly, Hakimniyaz Toreniyaz uly, Yerimbet Izbasar uly, Izeke aksakal, Allamurat aksakal, and others. Recovering names through memoirs makes it possible to view the participants in the uprising not merely as numbers in administrative case files, but as individuals belonging to particular families and communities. At the same time, information in memoir materials should be used with due regard to when they were compiled, the circumstances in which they were recorded, and how they were transmitted later [10].

Military and criminal provisions of imperial legislation were used to bring participants in the uprising to trial. The account states that special military courts composed of officers of the tsarist army were established on the basis of Article 1308 of the Military Court Regulations. The courts were allowed to examine cases related to the uprising swiftly and to begin proceedings against some defendants as soon as information about them had been collected, without waiting for the investigations of others to be completed. Although the authorities justified this as an expedited procedure, in practice such an arrangement could negatively affect the verification of charges, comparison of witness statements, and protection of defendants' right to a defense.

According to the dissertation, some participants in the uprising were tried under Article 100 of the Code of Criminal Laws; the judicial authorities interpreted the movement as an attempt to detach part of the empire's territory. Articles 262 and 269 were used to impose penal servitude, imprisonment, and other punishments. When charges were linked not only to participation in armed clashes but also to disobedience to administrative demands, political dissent was treated as a criminal act. This shows that, within the colonial authorities' legal system, the tasks of maintaining public order and suppressing political resistance had become intertwined.

It is particularly significant that trials were often held behind closed doors and the fate of defendants was decided within a short period. The dissertation notes that, although some case files consisted of hundreds of pages, indictments were prepared within two or three days. Such speed in itself raises questions about the extent to which evidence was thoroughly examined during the proceedings. Debates on the uprisings in the Russian State Duma also brought to public attention complaints from the region, measures taken against the population, and the activities of the administration.

Overall statistics for Turkestan indicate that 35 court proceedings were held in connection with uprising cases and that 933 people were tried. Of these, 346 were acquitted and 587 were sentenced to various punishments. It is recorded that 201 people were initially sentenced to death, but only 20 were executed during the process of confirming the verdicts. Another account states that, between July 25 and December 15, 1916, the military prosecutor opened 148 cases concerning mass disturbances and more than three thousand people were prosecuted. According to that account, 40 cases concerning 587

participants were brought to court; 201 people were sentenced to death, 104 to penal servitude, and 182 were imprisoned. After the verdicts were reviewed, some reports state that 51 death sentences remained in force and the number sent to penal servitude reached 162. These figures may reflect different reports and stages of the proceedings; therefore, they cannot be added together or interpreted as one unified statistic for the Amu Darya Division.

After the verdicts were reviewed, the sentences of some people condemned to death were replaced with long-term imprisonment, while in some accounts the number sentenced to penal servitude reached 162. The reconsideration of sentences was associated with fear of another uprising and the intention to maintain administrative stability. Studies of the punitive policy applied to the uprising in Kazakhstan likewise show that the imperial administration's tendency to use force and impose severe punishments was one of the broader features of its regional policy[11].

4. Discussion

The suppression of the uprising by military force did not eliminate the economic and social tensions in the Amu Darya Division. It is recorded that disputes over gathering laborers continued in the autumn of 1916, that difficulties arose in meeting the demands of local officials, and that measures were taken to send people who refused mobilization by force [12]. The arrest of 64 people from the Amu Darya Division in January 1917 and the division chief's statement on February 19 that it was difficult to gather laborers in the Chimbay district by the appointed time show that resistance continued for a long period. Thus, punitive detachments and courts failed to eliminate the main causes of local discontent [13].

The dissertation reports that, by the end of 1916, evidence had emerged in connection with bribery allegations against the authorities and administrative representatives in Khiva, including Colonel Kolosovsky, head of the Amu Darya Division. Despite the emergence of information about corruption, the official's remaining in office indicates problems of accountability and oversight in the local administration. The population's complaints about the embezzlement of mobilization funds, inequalities in drawing up lists, and arbitrariness by officials formed the social basis of the discontent. This situation cannot be reduced solely to the guilt of individual persons: the political interests of the local administration were closely connected with the empire's overall mobilization policy.

The events of 1916 were also reflected in oral folk tradition. Historical songs such as "Jeti üyden bir beldar," "Mardikar," "Nayleyin," and "Tapsyrdym" express experiences of labor conscription, separation from family and homeland, injustices in drawing up lists, and attitudes toward bribery. In the work "Mardikar," attributed to the poet Qudaybergen, the person leaving for labor service bids farewell to parents and relatives, while the anguish caused by inequality and the pursuit of justice are also reflected. The historical value of these works lies in their revealing emotional experiences that are less visible in official documents; however, folklore materials should not be used as the sole source for confirming exact administrative dates and figures [14].

Songs and memories about labor conscription preserved the impact of the uprising in people's consciousness. They depict the effect of the state decree on family life, the fear of a person being sent to compulsory labor, failure to receive proper payment, and distrust of officials. These motifs correspond to complaints recorded in archival sources. In this sense, studying written documents and oral folk tradition together helps reconstruct both the political dimensions of the movement and its impact on people's lives. Studies specifically devoted to labor mobilization also show that these events had profound social consequences beyond administrative decisions [15].

It is incorrect either to separate the events of 1916 in the Amu Darya Division from the uprising across Turkestan as a whole, or to force the experiences of all regions into a single pattern while disregarding local specificities. On the one hand, measures such as the imperial administration's mobilization decree, punitive detachments, and military courts

were similar mechanisms. On the other hand, conditions associated with fishing enterprises in the Amu Darya Division, riverside settlements, nomadic pastoralists, and local administrative bodies had a distinct influence on the development of the uprising. Therefore, these events should be assessed through a joint analysis of regional documents, local memories, and general imperial records [16].

5. Conclusion

The suppression of the popular uprising in the Amu Darya Division in 1916 and the subsequent trials show that the Russian Empire responded to local discontent mainly through coercion, arrests, and punishment. Inequalities in labor conscription, the misuse of allocated funds, abuses by local officials, and the demands of working people formed the social basis of the uprising. Although the dispatch of armed detachments and the forced gathering of people at designated assembly points weakened resistance in some cases, they did not eliminate the causes of discontent.

Information on court cases shows that repression took various forms: arrests, trials before military tribunals, the death penalty, penal servitude and exile, as well as the subsequent mitigation of sentences. The information that approximately 150 people were prosecuted in connection with the Amu Darya Division and that 103 people were detained should be assessed separately from the general judicial statistics for Turkestan. Indicating that these figures cover different groups is essential to the accuracy of historical analysis.

While archival documents show how the administration described the uprising, memoirs and historical songs express the suffering experienced by the local population, its attitude toward inequality, and its understanding of justice. Studying these two types of sources together provides a fuller picture of the political meaning of the uprising, the characteristics of the judicial proceedings, and the social consequences of repression. The events of 1916 in the Amu Darya Division occupy an important place in the history of national liberation movements in the region and require study that takes into account the scope and reliability of the sources.

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