

Hostages of an authoritarian regime: The fate of the "numerically-small peoples" of the Russian North under Soviet rule

Victor A. Shnirelman*

Résumé: Otages d'un régime totalitaire: le sort des «petits peuples du Nord» pendant la période soviétique.

Le discours officiel a longtemps vanté les mérites de la politique de l'État soviétique à l'égard des petits peuples du Nord. En réalité, les populations autochtones ont profondément souffert de cette politique et leurs problèmes commencent à peine à faire l'objet de discussions franches en Russie. Cet article présente les principales tendances démographiques et socio-économiques en Sibérie orientale au cours des quelque cinquante dernières années. Il documente l'échec de politiques qui ont, en fait, privé les peuples du Nord du contrôle de leur développement.

Abstract: Hostages of an authoritarian regime: The fate of the "numerically-small peoples" of the Russian North under Soviet rule.

Official ideology has long praised the Soviet State policy towards the numerically-small peoples of the North. In the field, however, these indigenous peoples have deeply suffered because of this policy and their problems are only beginning to be addressed with fruitfulness in Russia. This paper presents the major demographic and socio-economic trends that have affected eastern Siberia over the last fifty years. It shows the failure of policies that have alienated indigenous peoples from control over their own development.

Introduction

For a long time, the development of the so-called numerically-small peoples of the Far North under Soviet rule has officially been considered as clear evidence for the correctness of USSR nationality policy. Soviet authorities used it to demonstrate to the world how generously the State cared for the survival and prosperity of the small cultural groups who jumped to socialism straight from the stage of primitive communalism, thus

* Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Leninskij prospect 32-A, Moscow 117334, Russia.

skipping the whole intermediate evolutionary stages (Zibarev 1972, Uvachan 1977, Sanzhijev 1980). Western experts were somewhat more critical with respect to Soviet policy towards the northern peoples. They examined whether this policy was a continuation by the Soviets of the Tsarist pre-revolutionary policy (Svensson 1978) or not (Bartels 1980) and debated whether western concepts for cultural development and treatment of cultural minorities in the modern world were relevant to the Soviet context (Balzer 1983, Bartels and Bartels 1986), for instance, whether the Fourth World concept was appropriate for the description of the Soviet situation (Bartels and Bartels 1988). The most widespread opinion among western scholars was that the Russian northern indigenous populations were treated more generously than, say, Native Americans. On the other hand, some researchers (Svensson 1978, Balzer 1983) rightly brought to light tensions that spelled trouble for northern peoples in the future.

The unfavourable consequences of the nationality policy became obvious in the 1970's-1980's and called for a shift from theoretical futurological discussions to practical evaluation of the current situation. Actually, the negative trends that had been building up for many decades became visible enough to make some Russian scholars and intellectuals of indigenous origin worry about future developments. However, open discussion of these problems was not possible until the late 1980's when censorship, under pressure from the growing democratic movement, began to lose its former power. Since that time numerous reliable publications have appeared in the Soviet academic press and mass media documenting the disastrous results of the quasi-uncontrolled predatory industrial activity of various State ministries and agencies in the Far North (Pika and Prokhorov 1988, Sokolova 1990, Karlov 1991, Sangi 1988, Taksami 1989, Alipin 1991, Korobova 1991 among others). While trying to inform the public about the tragic situation in the North, (Korobova 1991, Stenogramma 1992), the authors of these publications have not produced a deep analysis of what led to this situation. Such analysis would be badly needed at this juncture when the Russian government is developing a new concept of the nationality policy. It would also be useful from a western perspective as well since northern development creates similar problems everywhere, on which Soviet experience can be enlightening. This is one of the reasons why a number of Western scholars have recently started fieldwork in Russia (Anderson 1993, Balikci 1991, Schindler 1991, 1992, 1993, Schweitzer 1993, Slezkine 1992 among others).

In this paper I will focus on the main demographic and socio-economic trends in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic territories of eastern Siberia, during the last 50 years or so. A comparative study of what happened in various particular areas seems especially important because centralized decisions made in Moscow were differently implemented and sometimes produced different results at the local level. We will see that 1) it is not correct to talk about a single uniform Soviet policy towards Northern peoples; 2) the ideological pretention to maintain traditional northern cultures was by no means substantiated in the actual economic, demographic and social policy of the Soviet State; 3) paternalistic measures intended to improve daily life of the indigenous peoples were generally a failure because they did not address the peculiarities of the local environment, and, 4) the unsatisfactory results of Soviet northern policy were largely due to the alienation of the indigenous peoples from the vital decision-making mechanisms.

In the 1920's Soviet policy focused essentially on providing economic assistance to northern peoples to alleviate their impoverishment and improve their living conditions. From the late 1920's through the late 1930's, Soviet authorities made an attempt to simultaneously transform the economic, political and social structures of the indigenous peoples radically and raise their education and literacy levels (partly in native languages). Thus, intellectual culture was artificially separated from other cultural aspects which caused confusion and cultural disintegration. From the late 1930's the main goal of the central authorities was to finalize integration of the ethnic minorities into mainstream society. Gradually the problems of the numerically-small peoples of the North began to be assimilated to the problems of Northerners, or even of the Soviet people, in general. Thus, an ideological foundation was forged for an unlimited predatory exploitation of northern resources in the interest of "all the Soviet people", *i. e.* in the interests of the Soviet State and its bureaucracy rather than for the benefit of local inhabitants. One can distinguish between two periods in the development of this policy: 1) from the late 1930's till the early 1960's and 2) the 1960's-1980's. The latter period was especially disastrous for the North — both for the indigenous populations and for the natural environment. It will be shown that the collapse of the Soviet regime in the late 1980's-early 1990's was far from an accident and that its causes were deeply rooted in the previous decades.

The indigenous numerically-small peoples of eastern Siberia and their traditional way of life

In 1925 the Soviet government grouped the 26 peoples of northern Eurasia under the category of "the small peoples". The peoples in question lived in the Arctic tundra as well as in the vast taiga regions. They were mainly involved in hunting land- and sea-mammals, fishing and reindeer herding. Consequently, they led a nomadic or semi-settled way of life with specific social and cultural patterns. Fifteen of these peoples inhabited territories eastward of the Yenisej river and Tajmyr peninsula. They were relatively small in numbers. In the late 20th century, only four of them (Evenks, Chukchis, Evens and Nanais) numbered for more than 10 000 persons each; the size of the others ranged from several hundreds to several thousands persons. Population density was also low. For instance, in the 1970's there were 0,03 pers/sq. km in the Evenk Autonomous District, 0,1 pers/sq. km in the Koryak Autonomous District, 0,2 pers/sq. km in the Chukchi Autonomous District, and 0,4 and 2,1 pers/sq. km in the Magadan and Khabarovsk provinces respectively. These numbers were much lower than in the USSR in general (12,2 pers/sq. km). The Evenks are still the largest population and they are scattered throughout the taiga and some taiga-tundra zones eastward of the Yenisej river up to the Okhotsk Sea and the Amur river valley. This territory covers about 25 % of Siberia. Evens (Lamuts) are their close relatives. They inhabit the northeastern part of the Yakut-Sakha Republic as well as parts of the Magadan, Kamchatka and Khabarovsk provinces. Nanais (Gol'ds) occupy territories along the lower Amur river southwards of

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Komsomol'sk-na-Amure, along the right tributaries of the Ussuri river in the Khabarovsk and, partly, Primorije provinces. Ulchis live also along the lower Amur river northwards of the Nanais. Udege areas are situated along the right tributaries of the Amur and Ussuri rivers. Their close relatives, the Oroches, are settled along the small rivers of the Khabarovsk and Primorije provinces adjacent to them. Orokes live in the eastern part of the Sakhalin Island. Nivkhs (Giliaks) occupy the Amur river south, the adjacent sea coast and the northern part of Sakhalin Island. There is a substantial population of the Negidals in the Azure and Amgun' rivers valleys. The Chukchis are the most numerous people in the northeast Siberia. They inhabit, primarily, the Chukotka peninsula and the adjacent northern areas of the Kamchatka peninsula and northeastern part of the Yakut-Sakha republic. Koryak territories are situated to the south of them — in northern Kamchatka and adjacent parts of the Magadan province. Itel'mens now live in the central western Kamchatka. A unique group of Asiatic Eskimos inhabit southeastern Chukotka and Wrangel Island. The Aleuts occupy the Komandor Islands since the very early 19th century when they were resettled there by the Russians from the Aleutian Islands. Yukagirs inhabit primarily the Kolyma river valley and adjacent areas of the Magadan province. Until recently one could distinguish several groups among these peoples according to their traditional subsistence economy (Sokolova 1989: 14): 1) tundra reindeer herders: some Chukchis and Koryaks, whereas the Yukagirs occupied an intermediate position between the reindeer herders and the tundra and taiga-tundra hunters; 2) taiga hunters: the Evenks and Evens, who formerly used the domesticated reindeers only as draught animals; it is also possible to consider the taiga and taiga-tundra reindeer herders, hunters and fishermen (Oroches, Orokes), and the taiga and taiga-tundra hunters and fishermen (Udeges as well as some Yukagirs and Evenks) as intermediate types; 3) settled or semi-settled river fishermen: Itel'mens, Nivkhs, Ulchis, Nanais; 4) sea-mammal hunters and, part-time, fishermen: Eskimos, Aleuts, coastal Chukchis and coastal Koryaks.

Various traditional subsistence systems differed from each other in terms of persistency. The highly opportunistic multi-resource subsistence of taiga hunters, fishermen and reindeer herders was more persistent, but it required higher mobility, was less efficient and permitted only low population density. River fishing and sea-mammal hunting supply people with a substantial surplus in good years, leading to higher population density and a settled way of life. On the other hand, these subsistence economies suffered regular crises as a result of natural climatic fluctuations (Krupnik 1989, Shnirelman 1992: 29-30, 1994). The indigenous peoples maintained most of their traditional life-styles and cultural traditions well into the 1920's.

The national State policy towards northern indigenous populations in the Soviet period

During the Soviet period, the national State policy towards northern indigenous peoples changed several times (Sergeev 1955, Gurvich 1971, Schindler 1992). Initially the Soviet northern policy maintained some pre-revolutionary features. It is true that the indigenous peoples were excused from all the former debts and the main uniform tax

(*yasak*) was abolished at the end of 1917. However, it is worth mentioning that simultaneously new taxes were introduced which, as early as 1923, exceeded the volume of the former *yasak*. That was a time of hardship in the North as fish catch dropped and reindeer herds were in poor conditions. Some Soviet civil servants in the early 1920's were ashamed with the predatory State economic policy in the North and demanded changes (Zavalishin 1991: 51). Of course the impoverishment of the northern peoples did not fit well with the proclaimed Soviet ideology.

Thus, from 1920-1925 the Soviet State tried to demonstrate a special care for these peoples: a governmental program was developed to protect them against abuse and exploitation, to supply them with foodstuffs and other goods, and to settle the problem of the ownership of reindeer pastures and fishing and hunting territories. To accomplish this task the government subsidised the development of the State trade network and the building of flour storehouses to prevent famines; they also established strict control over trade in alcoholic beverages and indigenous peoples were partly exempted of the taxes. But in 1930 their tax privileges were abolished once again and a uniform national tax was introduced.

In 1925 the northern indigenous peoples were exempted from conscription and labour duty and in 1927 the extensive reindeer grazing areas and fishing and hunting grounds were returned to them. At that time, they also received some important hunting privileges and they were involved in the establishment of natural reserves. A "Committee of assistance to the northern peripheral peoples" (or "Committee of the North") was established within the Soviet government in 1924 to work out and implement assistance programs. It is worth noting that the Committee attempted to stimulate creativity and initiative among northern peoples themselves. Its local organs, established in 1925, had to include representatives of the indigenous communities.

A new phase of the northern policy began in the late 1920's when the Soviet regime shifted away from economic assistance to indigenous peoples to the development of modern political and social structures among them (Zavalishin 1991: 56). To further this goal, ethnic regions (*natsional'nyj rayon*) with their ethnic-territorial Soviets were established: Ulchi region, Chukchi region, Aleut region, Eskimo region, West-Sakhalin region, several regions for the Evenk people, etc. (Sergeev 1955: 23g, Zibarev 1968: 146 ff.). Evenk, Chukchi, Koryak and some other ethnic districts (*natsional'nyj okrug*) were established in Eastern Siberia in 1930¹. In 1931 all the ethnic political-administrative units had been set up in the Russian Far East (Zibarev 1968: 260 ff.). However, as one can observe from what happened later, this ethnic autonomy was more formal than substantial. At that time the indigenous people were largely illiterate and inexperienced in terms of modern administrative activity; accordingly they were unable to use the new institutions effectively. Even if indigenous politicians were members of the local Soviets and sometimes formed the majority, their real participation in decision-making was highly restricted. As pointed out by A. Ye. Skachko, who was an assistant chairman of the Committee of the North in 1934, it was the appointed Russian secretaries of the local Soviets rather than the elected indigenous chairmen who in fact ran the show.

¹ The District (*okrug*) was much larger in territory than a region (*rajon*), and it is not an accident that the great majority of districts, unlike regions, survived after the mid-1930's.

Furthermore, the Russian local civil servants were not eager to give up their positions and only some 30% of the local administrative bodies in the North consisted of indigenous people in 1939 (Zavalishin 1991: 61-62).

The situation remained the same until very recently. Even in the 1970's, elected officers of native origin could not fulfill their duties effectively because they lacked the necessary training and experience, and they had been pushed into a modern environment where their traditional knowledge and skills did not work (Bojko 1977: 63). Moreover, as it was stressed recently by indigenous intellectuals themselves (Rytkeu 1991: 16, 26, Gaer 1991: 75), the indigenous bureaucracy was more loyal to the central authorities than to their own communities and emphatically supported the decrees and regulations introduced from outside regardless of their relevance to the local situations. Besides, the local Soviets had in fact very little power and to a large extent depended upon the powerful State ministries and economic organisations such as Sojuzpushnina, Integralkooperatsija and the like. This balance (or rather, imbalance) of power was maintained until the late 1980's.

The most important decisions on northern development were being made by the central Russian authorities and had to be implemented by the local administrators without any question asked. Central authorities produced only general decrees and acts that could not address the specific and concrete needs of the various indigenous communities at the local level. Although the local Soviets had a right of appeal to the central authorities for amendments to the decisions that didn't meet local requirements, very rarely did they use this right in practice and when they did, they were hardly listened to.

It is therefore not a surprise that all these formal local political structures with their limited power were not much viable. Already in the 1930's they had become an object of manipulation for the command-administrative system. The first attack was launched against the Committee of the North because it hindered the actions of Soviet bureaucracy: it lost its wings in 1930 when its local sections were closed and was finally abolished in 1935 (Pika 1989: 314-315). For some time the central board of the northern Sea Route controlled northern development after which, on the eve of the Great Patriotic war, power was once again relocated within the local Soviet executive boards. The encroachments by State organisations, and specifically by Sojuzpushnina, on the subsistence grounds of indigenous populations were then intensified, which was made possible by the lack of legislation to protect indigenous territories. Thus, the basis was established for unlimited plunder of northern territories by the State. It is worth noting that in the 1920's-early 1930's, Russian scholars engaged in northern studies (Petri 1926: 6-7) and the Committee of the North (Zibarev 1968: 212-213) protested against the mass migration of new-settlers to the territories of the indigenous peoples. However, after the Committee was abolished, these migrations were even encouraged by various State organisations that were engaged in northern "development".

The establishment of ownership by the State of all lands and natural resources opened the way for exploitation of renewable and non-renewable resources by various State organisations and agencies, without regard for the interests and needs of the indigenous inhabitants. The first well-known case of encroachment involved the activity of the

Dal'stroj, a huge corporation responsible for industrial and highway constructions in some areas of northeastern Siberia. The Okhotsk-Evenk Ethnic District that had been established in 1930 for the development of the local Evenk and Even communities of the Okhotsk sea coast was seen as an obstacle by Dol'stroj and so it was abolished in 1932. Although the central authorities invested substantial financial resources for development in the Okhotsk region, Dal'stroj used the money mainly to develop a mining industry (Popova 1981: 242-243, 263). Actually, all the State organisations that increased their level of activity in the postwar years, behaved in this way. It is therefore not a surprise that the 1940's witnessed a decline in the number of Ethnic Districts in eastern Siberia.

An analysis of the legislative acts of the Soviet government for the period 1935-1970 (Sokolova 1971) demonstrates that the huge financial investments of the Soviet State into northern development were intended to support economic activity of any group of people living in the North, be they of indigenous origin or not. Initially this was profitable for indigenous peoples because newcomers were mainly teachers and physicians. But later the majority of immigrants were workers who came to improve their own material status rather than to devote their life to the welfare of northerners. The reason for the introduction of the northern extra-salaries was explained recently by V. N. Manannikov (Stenogramma 1992) at the 6th Congress of the people's deputies of the Russian Federation: in 1956 northern development was on the brink of a crisis because prisoners were being released and consequently there was a potential lack of manpower. Thus to encourage the influx of a new labour force, the government was forced to introduce higher salaries in northern areas.

On the other hand, legislations on northern employment benefits were regularly adopted during the 1940's-early 1950's (Sokolova 1971), which was certainly related to the development of the industrial-military complex in the North, at the time of the Cold War. The national State was interested in the intensive extraction of the northern natural resources (electricity, oil, natural gas, coal, non-ferrous metals, timber and the like) and encouraged the development of whole networks of industrial firms. These industries required a lot of well-trained labour resources that couldn't be provided locally. A special incentive policy had to be introduced to stimulate mass migrations to the North, primarily from central Russia. As a result, an urban population consisting mainly of newcomers has grown enormously in the Evenk, Koryak and, especially, in the Chukchi Districts between 1940 and 1980 whereas the rural population, that included primarily indigenous inhabitants, has grown much more slowly. As result, the ethnic composition of northern population changed significantly. A similar process had already taken place in the Khabarovsk Province in the 1920's-1930's perpetuating the former mass migrations from central Russia and Ukraine to the Far East that had been encouraged by the Tsarist government. Needless to say, the bulk of government expenditures in the North went to meet the needs of these urban populations.

In general, indigenous peoples experienced demographic increase during the Soviet period, although at different rates according to specific groups and periods. Between 1926 and 1959, some peoples (Evenks, Chukchis, Koryaks, Eskimos, Nivkhs, Negidals) even declined in numbers. On the other hand, between 1959 and 1989, all groups increased at rates (ranging from 0,74 to 2,95%) that were in general higher than for the USSR as a

whole (0,8%). Population growth was especially high among the Koryaks, Eskimos, Ite'l'mens, Yukagirs, Aleuts, Evens, Nanais, Ulchis, Udeges, Oroches and Orokes during that period. It slowed down somewhat in the 1970's and then increased once again in the 1980's (Sokolova 1989: table 1, Bojko 1973: 11, 1987: 37, Shnirelman 1991). But the growth rate of the newcomers was even faster. Suffice it to say that when the Evenk, Koryak and Chukchi Districts were established in 1930, a majority of the inhabitants were of indigenous origin. At the outbreak of the war, newcomers already outnumbered indigenous inhabitants by a 2 to 1 ratio. Migrations continued after the war although with different intensity in various areas — more slowly in the Evenk and Koryak Districts, but significantly faster in the Chukchi District. As a result, the indigenous peoples became ethnic minorities that accounted for no more than 8 to 18% of the total population in 1989. The new situation was acknowledged by the Soviet Constitution of 1977 in which the northern Ethnic Districts were renamed Autonomous Districts.

Demographic change had even more dramatic consequences in the Khabarovsk province where the indigenous groups account for less than 1,0% of the population. The migrations of non-indigenous newcomers to eastern Siberia were especially intensive during recent decades. For instance, in the 1960's-1970's, newcomers accounted for 35-40% of the growth rate (Narodnoje, 1977: 9, 210, Chislennost' 1984: 10-11, Chichkanov 1981: Table 1). At the same time, some indigenous inhabitants began to migrate outside of their traditional territories. For example Chukchis, Koryaks and especially Evenks used to resettle not only throughout their traditional territories outside their Autonomous Districts but also outside these territories. These processes developed even more intensively among those northern peoples who had no Autonomous Districts at all. Thus, substantial numbers (10-35%) of Evens, Nanais, Ulchis, Udeges, Eskimos, Ite'l'mens, Orokes, Oroches and Yukagirs now live outside the territories of their compact settlements. These changes set the stage for assimilation, Russification, loss of traditional cultures and native languages. In addition, some areas were even threatened with depopulation (Pika 1987, Zolototrubov 1989, Sokolova 1989: 4-10).

Socio-economic structural changes during the Soviet period

The northern indigenous peoples had a very archaic infrastructure in the early 20th century and their involvement in the market economy was very limited. Promoting their socio-economic development was a priority of the Soviet northern policy. This objective was pursued with a two-pronged approach: first, through the establishment of large communal economic organisations (*kolkhoz* and *sovkhos*) in rural areas, and secondly, through an economic development that was supposed to attract indigenous inhabitants into the modern industrial world and system of values. It would be naive to treat this policy as if it were essentially an act of generosity: in fact, the national State was primarily interested in the intensive extraction of natural resources (90% of Russian natural gas production, 40% of coal, 60% of apatites, 50% of fish is concentrated in the North). The North represents 60% of the territory of the Russian Federation, and accounts

for 20% of the overall Russian economic production². That is why some powerful State organisations were so much interested in northern development.

How was modernisation introduced and carried out in the North? What did it bring to the northern peoples? The kolkhozes were established among the great majority of the settled and semi-settled fishermen and sea-mammal hunters during the early 1930's. Collectivisation took much longer among the nomadic hunters and reindeer herders (some Evenk, and Even groups as well as reindeer Chukchis): it was not completed before the 1950's. The first kolkhozes were formed on the basis of the former local communities. They were monoethnic in composition and headed by indigenous inhabitants. However, because of their small size and limited labour force, and because of their inability to buy and use mechanical equipment, they could not be as profitable as the State had hoped. To put it another way, they were efficient enough in terms of subsistence economy, but not enough to supply the State with the expected surplus. Besides, they were widely dispersed throughout the less developed territory and could not be strictly controlled. That is why the State policy towards native kolkhozes during the 1930's-1960's aimed at enlarging them. The result was that in the 1950's-1960's many fishing kolkhozes of the lower Amur river and Kamchatka peninsula grew in size and became strong enough to have their own sea fleet, fish-processing enterprises and refrigerators and to practice fishing in the open sea on a year-round basis. *Prima facie*, this development could have largely improved the living standard of the indigenous population. However, in fact, its effect was quite the opposite.

While unifying several dozens of the remote communities, the enlarged kolkhozes required a significant increase in bureaucratic staff. According to the new kolkhoz rule, the appropriations for administration and investment in new technology, *i.e.* salaries for bureaucrats and purchases of machinery increased significantly while real wages decreased, by as much as 50% in the lower Amur river area. A shift in the occupation structure in terms of ethnic identity was another consequence of the new policy. Unlike the kolkhozes of the 1930's, the enlarged kolkhozes of the 1960's were multiethnic, and the newcomers (primarily Russians) predominated on their executive boards. Development of the deep sea-fishing and fish-processing industry also called for skilled workers who were also mainly recruited among newcomers (Rosugbu 1976: 24-36, 64-68, Kile 1986: 101-102, Kuzakov 1971: 297-303, Bojko (ed.) 1988). Also, inevitably the rigidity of the State policy resulted in a few absurdities.

In Kamchatka, for example, this policy encouraged an increase in fish catchment which the local fish-processing enterprises, with their highly limited capacities, were not prepared at all to store and process. Therefore, the authorities had to artificially restrict the catchments and there followed a decrease in fish landings in the early 1970's. In the lower Amur river, the catchments had already dropped in the 1960's. As a consequence, the unemployment rate increased among indigenous fishermen: the development of industrial fishing was accompanied by an increase of the number of newcomers engaged in it, whereas the indigenous inhabitants played only a subsidiary role.

² All these calculations were referred to by speakers at the 6th Congress of the peoples' deputies of the Russian Federation, April 1992.

Over the last fifty years, sea-mammal hunting significantly lost its importance among many indigenous groups and it has even disappeared almost completely in some areas (among the Itel'mens, for instance). Newcomers looked down on sea-mammal flesh and regarded it as "unhealthy food". On the other hand, some non-indigenous crews used to slaughter seals and whales in a wasteful way, keeping only their bones and the authorities had to introduce a special legislation to prevent a complete extermination of sea-mammals. The significance of sea-mammal hunting among the natives of Chukotka in the 1960's-1980's also decreased because of low prices fixed by the State organisations, low wages for the sea-mammal hunters and the remoteness of the traditional hunting grounds from the modern settlements (Leont'jev 1973: 60-70, Krupnik 1981, 1984, Rytkeu 1991: 25).

Settlements growth was also one of the main reasons for the decline in land-mammal hunting that occurred almost everywhere in the lower Amur river area (Smoliak 1971: 320, Rosugbu 1976: 21-22, Krushanov (ed.) 1989: 117), in Kamchatka (Gurvich & Kuzakov 1960: 215-221, Starkova & Turajev 1990: 53-56), in Chukotka (Leont'jev 1973: 71-74, Krushanov (ed.) 1987: 180-181) as well as in other regions of east Siberia. A number of remote hunting grounds were deserted as a result and the closer areas were threatened with devastation because of an increased exploitative pressure.

About 45% of the traditional hunting grounds were already out of use in the Tigil' area of the Koryak District in the 1950's. Only about 50% of the local Itel'men families were involved in hunting in the late 1950's vs. 96% in the 1920's. In the 1980's there was only one State economic organisation in the Tigil' area that used to employ professional hunters. A similar process could be observed also in Chukotka where only 200 professional hunters were employed in the 1980's vs. 534 in 1962. The transportation of hunters to remote hunting grounds by helicopter was widely introduced in the 1960's, but it could not improve the situation. Moreover, fur-mammal hunting was especially unprofitable because of the artificially low fur prices that were fixed during these decades (Bojko (ed.) 1979: 74).

Some State organisations even practised a segregation policy against the indigenous hunters as it occurred in the *gospromkhoz* "Lazovskij" (Khabarovsk province) from the late 1960's through the early 1980's. Fur prices were somewhat raised there in 1968 to encourage more intensive and more stable hunting. This contradicted Udege traditional norms and the local administration began to hire newcomers, giving them a lot of privileges (higher wages, better hunting grounds, etc.). The Udege hunters began to leave the State enterprise and their hunting activity declined during the 1970's (Krushanov (ed.) 1989: 118-120). Reindeer-herding still serves as an economic basis for many native people in eastern Siberia and it could potentially be a very efficient and profitable activity. However, its development was marred by contradictory trends.

The collectivisation of the 1930's surely hurt the reindeer economy of the Siberian indigenous peoples (Pika 1989: 319-320, Zavalishin 1991: 57-58). The Chukchis reindeer-herding activities recovered only by the mid-1940's and the Koryak reindeer herd never reached its 1926 level. The prolonged unfavourable situation among the Koryaks was, at least partly, rooted in the attempts of the local administration to introduce

industrial farming and livestock-raising, despite the fact that they were actually three times less profitable than reindeer-herding (Gurvich and Kuzakov 1960: 190-197).

All over the North, the State of the reindeer economy was a disaster by the end of the 1950's. The Russian government was forced to issue a special decree in 1958 with emergency measures to improve the situation (Gurvich 1971: 38, Sokolova 1971: 101). Seasonal camps were built along the reindeer routes, veterinary services were improved, special measures against the gadfly were taken successfully, the reindeer herders were supplied with motor vehicles like snowmobiles, the pastures began to be protected more efficiently against fires (Gurvich 1971: 38-39). Since that time, the reindeer industry has improved, albeit at different rates in the various regions. The largest reindeer herd today is in Chukotka : in the 1970's-1980's its size (up to 553 000 heads) was sometimes quite close to or even exceeded the carrying capacity of the grazing grounds. That is why even a slight natural deterioration can have a disastrous effect as it did at the turn of the 1980's. To cope with this situation, an attempt has been made in the 1980's to introduce intensive reindeer technology (Leont'jev 1973: 51-60, Zadorin 1983, Krushanov 1987: 168-172).

Be it as it may, reindeer herding still represents an aspect of the traditional economy that has not been entirely eroded by modernisation. Moreover, it has even expanded to occupy more land. Its future is of critical importance to the indigenous ethnic peoples because it constitutes the most reliable basis for the survival and development of their cultures (Pika and Prokhorov 1988: 78, Sokolova 1990: 23). On the other hand, because of poor technology, the reindeer economy still suffers heavy losses. The labour and living conditions of the herders are unsatisfactory and the wages remain very low. That is why the profession has lost much of its prestige and the average age of herders has been rising steadily since the 1960's.

In terms of education level, the herders have increasingly fallen behind the rest of the indigenous population. Their family conditions have been far from perfect. For instance, about 50% of the herders were bachelors in the Magadan province and those who had families were forced to leave them for long periods of time, which created serious problems (Bojko 1986: 15-19, Bojko and Popkov 1987: 145-150, Lashov and Litovka 1982: 64-65, Leont'jev 1973: 58-60). In some areas, the newcomers began to force the indigenous inhabitants out of the reindeer economy. For instance, the number of Russian herders grew so much in Chukotka in the 1970's that in some areas they accounted for up to 45% of total herders (Leont'jev 1973: 47-48). Accordingly, in all regions of eastern Siberia, the 1970's and 1980's have witnessed an increased in the unemployment rate of native reindeer herders (Bojko 1979: 69-85, Bojko and Popkov 1987: 94, Karpov and Chipizubov 1986: 81-84).

The introduction by the State of farming and livestock-raising was carried out to meet the needs of the newcomers who preferred their own foodstuffs to those of the local inhabitants. There had been attempts to establish farming and/or livestock-raising kolkhozes in the lower Amur river area, in the northern Primorije region, in northern Kamchatka and some other territories of eastern Siberia already in the 1930's-1940's, and in Chukotka in the early 1950's but these decisions, based on central Russian experience,

did not take into account local natural conditions and cultural traditions. For instance, the idea of involving all the indigenous inhabitants of the Khabarovsk province in industrial agriculture was rather popular in the 1930's (Sokolov 1930: 52), but industrial farming could not survive in the lower Amur river area, among the Evenks of the northern Amur region, among the Koryaks and Evens in Kamchatka and among some other groups. As a result, the Russian government had to resort to a special decree in 1957 to put an end to the misguided policy of turning northern indigenous inhabitants into farmers and livestock-raisers (Sokolova 1971: 81-84). On the other hand, one may observe that some gardening and livestock-raising were feasible in certain northern areas and whenever possible, natives started to practice them as subsidiary occupations.

Gardening had been introduced to the Udege people, first by the Chinese and then by the Russians already in the late 19th century. At about the same time, Itel'mens learned from the Russians to grow potatoes and to raise cows. Somewhat later, potato-growing and livestock-raising were borrowed by the Nanais, the Ulchis and to lesser extent, by the Nivkhs. This trend continued in the 19th century involving more and more native people who considered these new foodstuffs both as an important addition to their traditional diet and as an emergency food in some circumstances. The second half of the 20th century saw the development of green-house farming as well as dairy and poultry production (and more recently, pig raising). Of course, almost everywhere these new activities were of secondary importance for the indigenous people; they were more common among the newcomers.

Vegetable and dairy production became important economic sectors among the southern Evens of the Okhotsk sea coast and the upper Kolyma river Yukagirs only during recent decades. On the other hand, successful development of these new activities was impeded by inefficient State regulations. For instance, the area of private plots and number of animals raised were sharply reduced in 1956-58, which caused a fast shrinkage of the gardening activity and a decline in livestock-raising. This regulation was repealed only in 1964 after N. Khrushchev was dismissed (Vedomosti 1964, N 46: 815, Sistematischeskoje sobranije 1968, vol. 8: 79-83). Since the late 1950's, the northern peoples are highly dependent on imported foodstuffs which makes them hostages of the central authorities.

To maintain the fur industry when trapping was declining and to reduce unemployment among indigenous inhabitants, the authorities attempted through several decrees (1956, 1957, 1966, etc.) to introduce fur-animal raising all over the North (Sokolova 1971: 76, 83 93, 95-963). The results were very disappointing more frequently than not. Feeding conditions were inappropriate for this kind of industry in most of the northern regions, equipment was almost non-existent and the workers lacked training. That is why this venture turned out to be unprofitable almost everywhere. For instance, fur-animals were fed valuable reindeer and other farm animal flesh as well as fish and sea-mammal meat, whereas people themselves had to eat canned meat and fish of worse quality.

The profits from the fur trade fell short of the amount required to cover the investments, by as much as 50% in Chukotka (Leont'jev 1973: 70-71, Pika and

Prokhorov 1968: 78, Rytkeu 1991: 29, Bojko (ed.) 1979: 75-78, Lashov and Litovka 1982: 85). Nevertheless, despite its obvious lack of economic sense fur-animal farming was emphatically supported by the State bureaucracy: its only advantage was to provide inhabitants with jobs. Another ill-fated attempt by the Soviet bureaucracy to achieve radical change consisted in orienting some Udege groups towards deep-sea fishing in the 1930's. As a result, the economy of these groups was almost devastated in the 1940's-1950's. The experiment was stopped in 1957 when the Udeges were permitted to return to a more familiar mixed hunting-fishing economy (Krushanov 1989: 122-123).

Over the last decades unemployment increased among the indigenous inhabitants because traditional activities were hit by a severe crisis while the new economic activities, imposed by force, could not provide the natives with full-scale employment. For instance, in the 1970's among the Nanais, only 17,3% of the able-bodied population (primarily men) had a permanent job, mainly as unskilled worker, 22,4% found employment in seasonal jobs; and more than 34% (primarily women) had no job at all. In the early 1980's approximately 20% of the indigenous inhabitants were employed in traditional activities on the northern Sakhalin Island: 10% in fishing, 5% in reindeer herding and 5% in traditional crafts. One could observe the same pattern in the Koryak District where the employment of natives in the traditional sectors dropped from 37% to 28% between 1969 and 1983. This unfavourable trend affected all regions and by the early 1980's, only 60-65% of the able-bodied indigenous inhabitants of rural areas were employed in farming or food-gathering activities. The situation was actually even worse because of the competition between natives and newcomers. Due to their better training, the latter were gradually forcing the former out of those economic fields that were more mechanised (especially fishing) (Lashov and Litovka 1982: 81, 114-118). For instance, the Nivkhs were practically excluded from industrial fishing and hunting which made their living conditions very difficult indeed (Sangi 1988, 1991).

Prospects for the future

The transformations discussed above increasingly pushed native youth into non-traditional economic fields and stimulated migrations from rural and the urban areas. For example, by 1980, between 20% and 45% of the lower Amur indigenous peoples lived in urban areas. In Chukotka, however, where urbanisation was of the oasis type, the indigenous inhabitants were not inclined to move far from their lands and to abandon their traditional way of life.

In general, all over the North men used to find employment mainly in the logging and building industries as well as transport whereas women were employed as teachers, physicians and cultural workers. Also indigenous persons felt uneasy under systematic labour and strict discipline conditions and they were less trained for the highly mechanised industrial jobs. That is why a majority persons of indigenous origin, especially youth, were employed primarily in less prestigious unskilled manual labour with low wages. The managers of the large industrial enterprises tended to hire relatively more people of

non-indigenous origin. The indigenous people were therefore at risk of "lumpenization" (Pika and Prokhorov 1988: 80).

Feelings of alienation, passivity and pessimism grew among them because they were deprived of their traditional and economic base and were excluded from social decision-making. A process of ethnic stratification (Shibutani and Kwan 1965) has developed in the Soviet North, and by the 1980's it was pregnant with inter-ethnic conflicts. Moreover, some indigenous peoples of the North were threatened with a famine in 1992 for the first time in many decades. The sudden increase in air transport prices combined with difficulties in navigation deprived them of essential supplies because northern inhabitants, both natives and non-natives, were by then completely dependent upon imported foodstuffs (Stenogramma 1992).

The weakening of the central power during recent years dealt a terrible blow to the North. The transformation of indigenous populations into ethnic minorities on their native territories, the enlargement of the settlements and kolchozes, intensive industrialisation and urbanisation as well as the increase in interethnic marriages led to a wide expansion of the Russian language. As a result, many indigenous populations (in the first place, Aleuts, Itel'mens, Negidals, Nivkhs, Udeges) almost lost their languages in the late 1980's. In sharp contrast to the claims made by officials about the special care of the indigenous northern peoples by the Soviet State, these peoples were in fact faced with assimilation and culture loss (Krupnik 1987, Sokolova 1990: 27).

The native peoples of Siberia still view with distrust policies mixing protective measures for traditional activities and "internationalisation" (Bojko 1989) or "modernisation" of their way of life (as stated in the preliminary version of the ethnic policy of the Russian Federation, presented in summer 1992). As V. M. Sangi, president of the Association of the numerically-small peoples of the North, expressed to the 6th Congress of the people's deputies of the Russian Federation in April 1992, the indigenous peoples do not want to depend on the central State organisations any more; they insist on building their own States within Russia and meanwhile they have formed their own ethnocultural associations. They demand ownership of their traditional lands to benefit from the exploitation of natural resources. It must be added that they also distrust Russian businessmen and would rather welcome joint ventures with foreign enterprises.

The problems of indigenous peoples in the North are specific and cannot be equated with problems of all northerners in general. Indigenous peoples have so far had little participation in public decision-making northern development and if Russia is to free herself from the burden of her totalitarian past, she must listen to the voice of the numerically-small peoples of the North.

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