

The power of people to understand and esteem

The Great Patriotic war is one of the most significant events of national and world history, in which the Soviet people managed to withstand and even achieve a victory. To understand the role and significance of this victory in the bloodiest war in the history of mankind is becoming even more challenging as new details and evaluations come up concerning various aspects of the tragic and glorious page of our history.

The current topical selection of papers touches only a few issues, which coverage or interpretation have for a long time been influenced by ideological dogmas or prejudices, namely:

a) a problem of change of attitude of anti-Hitler allies to our country; the role in this process of development of defense industry potential in the geographical center of the country – in the Urals and Siberia (paper by K.I. Zubkov);

b) problems of transition to mobilization economy from the point of view of pre-war and post-war development of the country (that is most exigent for the Urals, Siberia and the Far East);

c) evaluation of approach to producing weaponry and military equipment on various stages of Soviet military industry development in 1941-1945 (the paper of N.S. Simonov).

It is impossible to comprehend or fully appreciate any of these problems if one fails to recognize a leading role of people's power, i.e. the will, efforts and self-sacrifice of the citizens fighting at the front and building the country's economy for the victory and after the war.

Despite the difficulty of measuring, this power of people was and remains an immensely significant component of the country's development contributing to the traditionally monitored productive, economic, political and military factors. That is why the purely technical or quantitative ratio analysis of weaponry at various war stages fails to account for results of military operations (as became clear last year in our publications on the battle of Kursk). This very power 'rectified' many errors in production of military equipment and plans of strategic military actions.

The ‘power of people’ revealed itself not just on the fronts or in selfless labor behind the lines. It is necessary also to recall the multimillion army of Soviet prisoners of war in countries occupied by the fascist Germany. One of those was Norway that Germany controlled in order to ensure supplies of iron ore from Sweden. To prevent its capture by the enemy a German paramilitary construction company started building a system of engineering and defense objects in the north of Norway. This company widely used the labor force of prisoners of war, mostly Soviet and Yugoslavian (in 1944 – 100000 and 4000 respectively; over 20000 of them died) .

In 2017 a technical museum in Oslo set up an extensive exhibition entitled “They built the future” . The exposition explained in great detail how the hard labor of our countrymen (mostly removing huge rocks in extreme Nordic conditions) laid down the foundations of the future engineering and transport infrastructure along the North-West coast of Norway.

It was the prisoners of war that did the hardest and most dangerous work – preparing clearings in the rock mass, terminals, tunnels and roads that later (especially at the time of oil boom) became the basis of modern communication network. It is noteworthy that new construction in 1970–1980 was financed out of the state oil fund that later started to be referred to as the Global Pension Fund (to the confusion of many). This may be the best recognition of inhumanly hard labor in the war time when its fruits go on to create conditions of decent living for next generations.

This sad and illuminative example shows how significant can be war economy as well as its projects for the post-war social and economic development of territories. Our country also has such examples, albeit few. One of those is the railway ‘Road of courage’ Stary Oskol – Rzhava that was built in 1943 as preparation for the Kursk battle. Later on, it became an important thoroughfare for development of Kursk magnetic anomaly projects – the Lebedinski and Stoilenski mining processing plants.

There are interesting showcases in the Urals and Siberia too. In the first five year plans the centers of the Urals and Siberia developed heavy industry and machine building plants serving heavy industry needs as well as regional agriculture and natural resource exploration in the Far East. In the years preceding war most civil machine building works turned to produce military purpose goods. During the

war this went further – the industrial centers of the Urals and Siberia housed thousands of enterprises moved here from the European part of the country. This maneuver, both before and especially during the war, demonstrated once again ‘the power of people’ – capacity to work extremely hard for the future.

Unfortunately, for most industrial centers of Siberia this future followed directly the wartime past: almost all plants that launched military production before the war and especially those moved during the war retained their military specialization later on. The problem of large-scale remodeling of the mighty industrial capacity towards the task of reclaiming and development of vast territories has not been resolved until now (and hence the huge share of machines brought from outside including import).

At first, creating the ‘middle of the country’ military industrial basis of the USSR in the East strengthened its influence in the border regions of Asia and at the same time served as a factor of keeping some Japanese forces tied from joining the Pacific theater of war, while later it was dependent on the general geopolitical circumstances of cold war at first and growing tension on our eastern borders later (the paper by K.I. Zubkov).

Meanwhile it was noticed a long time ago that “...transition of economy to a war mode evokes a short-term explosive economic growth, in the long term it denotes non-productive use of resources and leads to major disproportions in the national economy “ (the paper by V.I. Klistorin). The economy of the industrial belt of the East of the country fully confirms these observations: in the post-war years less priority was given not only specialized sectors of civil machine building but also project of infrastructure development of a vast territory.

Unfortunately, inversely to Norway, in “fat” naught years Russia was averse to investing in modern communication networks in the East of the country and preferred saving oil and gas proceeds in the National Wealth Fund. As a result, the economy of the industrial belt of the Urals and Siberia with rare exceptions is joining the ranks of outsiders. With all ensuing consequences – in the form of processing industry stagnation and adverse balance of human migration.

Admitting the significance of the “power of people” has, in our opinion beside important historic and moral components one quite pragmatic reason in current circumstances – Russian people contain

colossal capacities and energy for creativeness. This notion is not identical to the idea of ‘human capital’ borrowed from the course of Economics – it is broader and includes many more aspects such as love of one’s land, a birth place and the ability to sacrifice oneself and create for the future. Underestimation and misunderstanding of these faculties forced analysts and experts to make mistakes in military, political and economic fields. But then again, including this component in algorithms for resolving urgent tasks our country is facing today will allow overcome many hardships on our way. The experience of the Great Patriotic war is a vivid testimony of this.

Editor in chief of ECO

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kryukov', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

KRYUKOV V.A.