

Is the society the owner?

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The time that has passed since the publication of the previous issue of the magazine has been marked by many remarkable events in various fields and spheres of both domestic and international political and socio-economic life.

Undoubtedly, the most important event in August, which attracted the attention of all, was the meeting of the leaders of Russia – President of Russia V.V. Putin and – and the United States – President of the United States D. Trump. Of course, first of all, the interest in terms of real progress towards peace and mutual understanding on the Ukrainian issue. At the same time, a certain part of Russian society (primarily those involved in the socio-economic development of the Arctic region) is interested in the “melting of ice” in relations between our countries due to the opportunities that cross-border cooperation between the two countries located on different shores of the Bering Strait has opened up and is opening up.

According to observers and international experts, the meeting of the Presidents of our countries was held in Alaska precisely because its history and proximity demonstrate firsthand the “predisposition” of our countries to cooperate and search for common mutually acceptable solutions¹.

The author was lucky enough (alas, back in November 1993) to get acquainted with the experience and approaches to solving the problems of regional socio-economic development of the state of Alaska for several weeks. This trip was organized by the District Council of People's Deputies of the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous Okrug (with the active assistance and support of Norwegian colleagues from the Fridtjof Nansen Institute).

What we saw firsthand in the approaches to solving the problems of Alaska's socio-economic development convinced us all (back then!!!) The fact is that not only market mechanisms and approaches decide and determine what needs to be done, how and when, but also the role of society and citizens who are sick and defend the interests of the territory and its inhabitants is extremely important. I and the members of our delegation were lucky enough to have the opportunity to meet with the Governor of Alaska, Walter J. Hickel. Hickel is a unique figure in terms of not only (and not so much) representing and defending the interests of the state of Alaska (before the largest oil and gas companies, as well as federal authorities), but, above all, because he wrote a wonderful, one might say, honest book, “Problems of Public Property. Solutions in the case of Alaska”².

¹ Russia – USA Summit in Alaska (2025)

² Hickel J. Walter Crisis in Commons. The Alaska Solution. – Oakland, California – Institute for Contemporary Studies; – Anchorage, Alaska – Alaska Pacific University/ Institute of the North. – 290 p.

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This book was translated into Russian and had a different subtitle in this regard, “The Alaska Model – opportunities for Russia?”³. The titles of both chapters and paragraphs look more than unexpected to orthodox followers of the neoliberal economic trend – “Alaska is fighting for its land”, “Victory in the struggle for local control”, ..., “Concern for the public domain”, ... “Problems of wealth”, “Energy and freedom”.

It should be noted that this view (which is not based on a narrowly market-based approach, or, on the contrary, a narrowly dirigiste approach) arose in the Governor on the basis that was formed under the influence of not only freedom-loving and enterprising immigrants, but also those few intellectuals whose fate turned out to be inextricably linked with the state of Alaska. One of them (it seemed incredible at the time) spent his childhood in the USSR, later often visited Russia and, moreover, was a frequent guest of our institute in Novosibirsk. This man is Vic Fisher, who was not only a highly educated man, held the position of Director of the Institute of Socio-Economic Research in Anchorage, but is also one of the founders of the state of Alaska (i.e., a member of the team of authors writing the text of the Constitution of Alaska)⁴. Vic Fischer has a special friendly relationship (as he repeatedly notes on the pages of his book) with academician Alexander Granberg (and director of the IEPP SB of the USSR Academy of Sciences and Editor-in-Chief of our magazine in the second half of the 80s).

The author of these lines was lucky enough to listen to a lecture by Vic Fischer at his native institute in 1992. It should also be noted that the experience of Alaska has had a tremendous impact on us, researchers of the problems of spatial development of the Arctic and, in general, the East of Russia⁵.

A distinctive feature of the “Alaska school” (approach) is a systematic view of socio-economic processes and the indispensable “embedding” (presence) of economic institutions representing the economic interests of different groups

³ Hickie J. Walter Problems of Public Property. The Alaska model – opportunities for Russia? Moscow: Progress Publishing House, 2004–356 p.

⁴ Victor Fisher (with Charles Wolforth) To Russia with Love. An Alaskan Journey. – Fairbanks, Alaska – University of Alaska Press. – 2012. – 406 p.

⁵ Kryukov V.A., Sevastyanova A.E., Shmat V.V. Utopian idea or Real hope? Assessment of opportunities for the creation and operation of special financial funds of raw material territories in Russia and the analysis of foreign experience. Novosibirsk: Association of Siberian Banks. – 1996. – 92 p.

Kryukov V., Sevastyanova A., Shmat V. Oil and gas territories: how to dispose of wealth? Current problems and the formation of conditions for long-term sustainable socio-economic development / ed. by V.V. Kuleshov; JSC “Legal Economics”, IEOPP SB RAS. – Novosibirsk, 1995. – 368 p.

Krasnopolsky B.H. Alaska: a difficult path to well-being/ ed. by acad. RAS P.A. Minakir; Institute of Economic Research of the Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Khabarovsk: IEI Far Eastern Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences, 2014. – 224 p.

of the state's population – from indigenous people to recent immigrants. At the same time, many of the subjects discussed in the thematic selection of this issue of the journal are about how and how to form the basis for sustainable progressive socio-economic development of the territory in Alaska were solved (and are still being solved) not so much within the framework of preferential regimes, but rather through the procedures of interaction of all stakeholders in the implementation of various projects. At the same time, it is based on a contract – mutual obligations of both staff and companies in the implementation of specific projects. This makes, for example, it is simply unnecessary to clarify the issues of responsibility of large businesses to the population of small settlements or the indigenous inhabitants of the Arctic. At the same time, what is extremely important is the ability and abilities of the public to conduct a dialogue and defend their interests, which is ensured not only by certain formal tools (such as tax distribution), but also by organizational and educational measures. In particular, the so-called “corporations of indigenous peoples”, which have performed and are performing a significant amount of providing non-specialized services to resource companies (in the field of hotel and communal services).

The state of Alaska is one of the few regions in the world that has its own financial fund focused on ensuring the sustainability of the Territory's economy. Attempts to follow a similar path in Russia in the 90s, alas, failed – not only and not so much because of the lack of financial resources at the regional level to create such “piggy banks”, but because of the lack of the necessary degree of maturity of our civil society at that time.

The experience of Alaska clearly shows (the personalities of Walter Hickel and Vic Fischer are responsible for this) that, nevertheless, the most important thing is the most important thing in shaping the prerequisites for sustainable ecological, economic and social development of a person with his knowledge, worldview and conditions for realizing the creative potential that our great Russian has always been rich in The people.

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