

Smuggling Consumer Goods in Soviet Russia in the Period of the New Economic Policy

A. I. Rupasov, E. D. Tverdyukova

For citation: Rupasov A. I., Tverdyukova E. D. Smuggling Consumer Goods in Soviet Russia in the Period of the New Economic Policy. *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg University. History*, 2022, vol. 67, issue 2, pp. 403–413. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2022.206>

The purpose of the paper is to analyze the reasons for the persistence of consumer smuggling in Soviet Russia / USSR during the period of the New Economic Policy. The study draws upon national and regional archives and archives run by specific government departments as well as upon statistical and media sources. The authors conclude that the main reason for the smuggling trade was the shortage of consumer goods, which was caused by a decrease in imports and a reorientation of manufacturing towards the industrial products, rejection of the ideology of “everyday asceticism”, and the emergence of a new Soviet bourgeoisie. They believe that the factors for maintaining the scale of consumer smuggling were: disagreements between the border guard and the customs service, the leniency of punishments for smuggling, and the underdevelopment of border duty-free trade. The authors show that a lack of consumer imports led to a demand for smuggled items, which transformed within a short period of time (the first post-Revolutionary decade) unorganized smuggling carried out by individuals into a large-scale smuggling operation set up by organizations in which each member performed a specific function. The study demonstrates that government policies of protecting the state monopoly of foreign trade and a steady demand for smuggled goods contributed to the preservation of the smuggling industry. The presence of illegally imported consumer goods on the market contributed to the stabilization of the social situation in Soviet Russia during the years of the New Economic Policy. It became an alternative channel for satisfying the material needs of the urban population. Western products were not only sold from under the counter to representatives of the wealthy strata of the population but also entered the state and cooperative commercial network and craft workshops, which reduced shortages of goods on the domestic market. Smuggling in the 1920s could be classified as a “victimless crime” because it benefited not only its perpetrators but also those who used their services.

Keywords: smuggling, consumption, fight against smuggling, smuggled goods market, Soviet Russia.

Alexander I. Rupasov — Dr. Sci. (History), Leading Researcher, St Petersburg Institute of History, Russian Academy of Sciences, 17, ul. Petrozavodskaya, St Petersburg, 197110, Russian Federation; rupasov_ai@mail.ru

Александр Иванович Рупасов — д-р ист. наук, вед. науч. сотр., Санкт-Петербургский институт истории РАН, Российская Федерация, 197110, Санкт-Петербург, ул. Петрозаводская, 17; rupasov_ai@mail.ru

Elena D. Tverdyukova — Dr. Sci. (History), Professor, St Petersburg State University, 7–9, Universitetskaya nab., St Petersburg, 199034, Russian Federation; e.tverdyukova@spbu.ru

Елена Дмитриевна Твёрдюкова — д-р ист. наук, проф., Санкт-Петербургский государственный университет, Российская Федерация, 199034, Санкт-Петербург, Университетская наб., 7–9; e.tverdyukova@spbu.ru

© St Petersburg State University, 2022

Контрабанда потребительских товаров в Советской России в годы новой экономической политики

А. И. Рупасов, Е. Д. Твердюкова

Для цитирования: *Rupasov A. I., Tverdyukova E. D. Smuggling Consumer Goods in Soviet Russia in the Period of the New Economic Policy // Вестник Санкт-Петербургского университета. История. 2022. Т. 67. Вып. 2. С. 403–413. <https://doi.org/10.21638/11701/spbu02.2022.206>*

Целью статьи, подготовленной на материалах федеральных, региональных и ведомственных архивов, статистических источников и периодических изданий, является анализ причин сохранения потребительской контрабанды в Советской России / СССР в годы новой экономической политики. Авторы пришли к выводу, что главной причиной контрабандного промысла явился дефицит товаров широкого потребления, который был вызван сокращением объемов импорта и переориентацией производства на продукцию промышленного назначения, на фоне отказа от идеологии «бытового аскетизма» и появления новой советской буржуазии. Они полагают, что факторами сохранения масштабов потребительской контрабанды служили ведомственные разногласия пограничной охраны и таможенной службы, мягкость наказаний за контрабандный промысел, неразвитость приграничной беспрошленной торговли. Авторы показывают, что малые объемы потребительского импорта, сохранение широкого спроса на предметы контрабандного ввоза и организационные недостатки в работе ведомств, призванных охранять монополию советской торговли, способствовали переходу в течение короткого периода времени (первого послереволюционного десятилетия) от контрабанды массовой, бытовой — к профессиональной, которая характеризовалась формированием организаций контрабандистов с разделением функций входивших в них членов. По их мнению, поступление на внутренний рынок потребительских товаров, ввезенных нелегально, способствовало стабилизации социальной обстановки в Советской России в годы новой экономической политики за счет формирования альтернативных каналов удовлетворения материальных потребностей городского населения. Они показывают, что контрабандная продукция западного производства не только продавалась из-под полы представителям обеспеченных слоев населения, но и поступала в государственную и кооперативную торговую сеть и ремесленные мастерские, чем снижался дефицит на внутреннем рынке. Это дало основание полагать, что деятельность контрабандистов 1920-х гг. можно отнести к так называемым «преступлениям без жертв», от совершения которых получали выгоду не только правонарушители, но и те, кто пользовался их услугами.

Ключевые слова: контрабанда, потребление, борьба с контрабандой, рынок контрабандных товаров, Советская Россия.

The socio-economic problems of the border policy of Soviet Russia in the 1920s have repeatedly attracted the attention of researchers in Russia and abroad¹. One of the most

¹ See, for example: *Neh V. F. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie aspekty sovetskoi pogranichnoi politiki (1917–1941) // Bezopasnost' Evrazii. 2004. No. 3 (17). P. 535–552; Dullin S. La frontière épaisse. Aux origines des politiques soviétiques (1920–1940). Paris, 2014; Rupasov A. I. Neftianaia trgovlia SSSR s gosudarstvami Baltii i Finliandii v 1920–1930-e gg. // Noveishaia istoriia Rossii. 2019. Vol. 9, issue 4. P. 942–954; Shemetova T. A. O vliianii geograficheskikh uslovii na kharakter i aktivnost' kontrabandnoi trgovli v prigranichnykh raionakh Sin'tsiana i SSSR v pervoi polovine 20-kh gg. XX veka // Sovremennye problemy nauki i obrazovaniia. 2015. No. 1 (1). P. 1629; Makovsky A. V. Sovetskii opyt organizatsii pogranichnogo i tamozhennogo kontroliia na Dal'nem Vostoke (1922–1941): dis. ... kand. ist. nauk. Vladivostok, 2018, etc.*

studied issues in this area includes the activities of state bodies designed to protect the monopoly of the young Soviet State of foreign trade and to combat smuggling².

However, such aspects as the evolution of the smuggling industry, its influence on the stabilization of the social situation in the critical periods of Russian history remain on the periphery of research interest. This paper is devoted to the study of these issues.

Residents of the former border areas of Russia, as well as the people who found themselves in this status as a result of radical changes in border demarcation, e. g., in the case of the Russian border with Estonia, Latvia, and Poland, were left to fend for themselves during the First World War and the Civil War and were forced to search for means of survival. Smuggling was one of such means. An unprecedented expansion of the scope of illegal entrepreneurship was facilitated by the extreme weakness of the state during the period of the Civil War. This affected the work of many government institutions including customs and a border guard. Onkman, the head of the observation post near the village of Mertvetsy reported at the beginning of January 1921 to the head of the Iamburg Customs Oversight Authority: “I inform you that the border guard of the area entrusted to me has recently been in such a state that even during the day you will not see a single sentry who would meet anyone who wants to cross border... There are cases when people walk and ride along the river, along the banks of which the border runs, but the sentry, although he notices it, does not try to ask for a pass or documents”³.

The proclamation of a New Economic Policy (NEP) and the rejection of the principles of War Communism (such as the curtailment of commodity-money relations, the closure of markets, the persecution of private entrepreneurs) did not mean a revision of the foundations of the state monopoly of foreign trade, which was the result of “the creation of our proletarian revolution”⁴. In the fall of 1922, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Trade L. B. Krasin declared that it was “impossible to immediately jump from the situation of a catastrophe to the pre-war splendor”, all the needs would still not be satisfied. He stressed that it was impossible to allow free import and export of goods with extremely weak border protection because the entire peasantry would become couriers⁵. The situation was little different a few years later. The absence of cordons at the border was the reason that the representatives of the border guard had to live in peasant families, of which “at least 100 %” were engaged in smuggling⁶. Employees of the People’s Commissariat of

² See, for example: *Dudar’ L. A. Administrativnye formy bor’by s kontrabandoi na Dal’nem Vostoke Rossii v 20-e gg. XX veka // Vestnik Dal’nevostochnoi gosudarstvennoi akademii ekonomiki i upravleniia. 2001. No. 2. P. 114–119; Shlyakhter A. A. Smuggler states: Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and contraband trade across the Soviet frontier, 1919–1924. Chicago, 2020; Popenko A. V. Opyt bor’by s kontrabandoi na Dal’nem Vostoke Rossii (1884 — konets 20-kh gg. XX v.). Khabarovsk, 2009; Beliaeva N. A., Liapustin S. N. Organizatsiia bor’by s kontrabandoi v usloviiakh Grazhdanskoi voiny i interventsii na Dal’nem Vostoke. Vladivostok, 2014; Dal’nevostochnaia kontrabanda kak istoricheskoe iavlenie (bor’ba s kontrabandoi na Dal’nem Vostoke vo vtoroi polovine XIX — pervoi treti XX v.). Moscow, 2019. — Since, as can be seen from the above list, several fundamental works on combating smuggling in the Far East have been published in recent years, this study focuses on the western border of Soviet Russia.*

³ *Doklad v Iamburgskii tamozhennyi nadzor. Ianvar’ 1921 g. // Leningradskii gosudarstvennyi oblastnoi arkhiv v g. Vyborg. F. 3441. Op. 2. D. 6. L. 8.*

⁴ *Hojlsler J. Leonid Krasin i “monopoliiia vneshnei torgovli” // Ekonomicheskaiia istoriia: ezhegodnik. Vol. 2013. Moscow, 2014. P. 471.*

⁵ *Vystuplenie L. B. Krasina na zasedanii Severo-Zapadnogo oblastnogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchaniia, 17.10.1922 // Tsentral’nyi gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Sankt-Peterburga (TsGA SPb). F. 198. Op. 6. D. 12. L. 354, 365–366.*

⁶ *Uralov S. 14 tysiach kontrabandistov // Vneshniaia torgovlia. 1923. No. 3. P. 29.*

the Workers' and Peasants' Inspection (NK RKI) noted in 1925 in their report: "The protection of the maritime border, apart from the areas where customs offices are located, is almost absent; up to 6 versts (sic!)"⁷.

The expansion of smuggling was facilitated by the encouragement of cross-border trade from neighboring states. In particular, by the decision of the Latvian government in 1921, the so-called "transit lines" were opened. The cooperative, The Society for Frontier Trade with Russia, bought alcohol, saccharin, clothing, footwear and distributed them among its branches located in the border villages. To facilitate the access of Russian buyers to these "cooperatives", the Latvian border guard was located in their rear. Thus, a neutral zone was formed specifically for the smuggling trade, and the purchase of goods was carried out exclusively with gold and silver⁸. Responding to the discontent shown by the Soviet side, the head of the Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Z. Meierovics replied: "...my government believes that the abnormal state of trade on the Russian-Latvian border can hardly be improved by simply liquidating these trade points"⁹. On July 17, 1924, the Latvian government decided to close the transit from January 1, 1925, but despite this the shops were open for the whole year. So, for example, according to the customs officials, thanks to the transit shop opened at the Zilupe station, the shops in Sebezsh were "full" of goods that were absent in government-run commerce (sweaters, stockings, woolen scarves, women's shoes, etc.)¹⁰. At the same time, the value of the seized contraband at the border with Latvia was estimated in 1925–1928 at a relatively small amount in the range of 60 000–65 000 rubles¹¹. It is pertinent to note here that the practice of rewarding reports of smuggling led to the emergence of "honest" smugglers who imported goods in order to report them to the authorities¹². Employees of the state bodies authorized to combat illegal import; smugglers; and the local population, who had the opportunity to legally acquire goods in short supply, — were the beneficiaries of such operations.

Large-scale smuggling continued due to departmental disagreements between institutions designed to protect the state monopoly of foreign trade. By the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of September 1, 1922 and the decision of the Labor and Defense Council (STO) of October 25, 1922, local customs authorities were given the right to carry out counter-smuggling operations independently both in the 21-kilometer border strip and inside the country in the trade centers and regions of the USSR. Joint leadership was entrusted to the Central Commission for Combating Smuggling. According to Article 5 of the 1923 "Regulations on the Protection of the Borders of the USSR", the border guard (as a structural subdivision of the United State Political Administration — OGPU) was charged with creating an anti-smuggling shield, but at the same time customs still had this responsibility under their mandate. The Main Customs

⁷ Doklady upolnomochennykh NK RKI o rezul'tatakh obsledovaniia deyatel'nosti tamozhennykh okrugov Narkomata vneshei trgovli po bor'be s kontrabandoi, 1925 g. // Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE). F. 413. Op. 14. D. 336. L. 7.

⁸ Fenin L. Bor'ba s kontrabandoi // Vneshniaia trgovlia. 1923. No. 10. P. 17.

⁹ Nota Z. Meierovicsa K. K. Yurenevu, 22.1.1923 // Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii. F. 150. Op. 6. P. 15. D. 9.

¹⁰ Trofimova G. T. Ocherki istorii Sebezshskoi tamozhni, 1918–1927 gg. (po dokumentam Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva v g. Velikie Luki). Velikie Luki, 2012. P. 108.

¹¹ Vneshniaia trgovlia Soiuza Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh respublik za period 1917–1927/28 gg.: stat. obzor. / red. A. P. Vinokur, S. N. Bakulin. Leningrad; Moscow, 1931. P. 790. — For comparison: the amount of arrested contraband along the Polish border amounted to 700 000–900 000 rubles.

¹² Kolesnikov L. Litso klassovogo vruga. Moscow; Leningrad, 1928. P. 39.

Directorate lost to the OGPU in the rivalry between the two government bodies for the right to play a leading role in the fight against smuggling in the wide border zone. The secret order of the OGPU of September 24, 1923 No. 396/551/94 was attached to the Regulations on the Protection of the Borders of the USSR. Article 8 of the document reads: "To combat smuggling and border violations the following border strips are established: a 500-meter border strip, 7, 5, 16, and 22-km border strips, and a 12-mile maritime border strip at sea"¹³. The OGPU border guard had the right to inspect individuals suspected of smuggling within the 22-km strip; conduct searches in residential and non-residential premises; seize contraband goods without involving customs officers, who were forced to be content with seizing contraband at customs posts or when monitoring mail sent abroad. In 1922, the largest number of arrests (56 %) were made by customs authorities, 21 % by the border guard, 19 % by the GPU, and 4 % by the police¹⁴. By 1925, the statistics had changed in favor of the OGPU with 40 % of the total number of seizures, while the customs were responsible for 33 %, and the border guard for 27 % of them¹⁵. According to A. V. Popenko, in the mid-1920s, the leadership of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Trade and the OGPU fought not against smuggling but for the right to play the main role in the fight against it¹⁶.

Despite the severity of the punishments for smuggling decreed by the authorities, the actual legal consequences were quite mild for those caught doing it. This was explained by the social origin of the perpetrators. This encouraged people to get involved in this illegal trade. The decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of December 8, 1921 included the following punishment for individuals violating the state monopoly of foreign trade: imprisonment with strict isolation for a period of at least 3 years for general cases and the highest measure of social protection (capital punishment) for offenses under aggravating circumstances. The Criminal Code as amended on June 1, 1922 provided for two types of smuggling: simple smuggling was punishable with a period of forced labor for up to 3 months or a fine of up to 300 rubles in gold, and qualified smuggling (as a trade, armed smuggling or the smuggling of certain items) was punishable with imprisonment with strict isolation for at least 3 years or the highest measure of social protection. Despite the rigidity of the law, those arrested for qualified smuggling in the 1920s were sentenced to prison terms from several months to a year but were released early. Amnesties carried out (on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the October Revolution in 1922 and its tenth anniversary in 1927), as well as periodic so-called "cleansing" of places of detention, allowed convicts to be released long before the expiration of their sentences and to resume illegal activities. In 1924–1926 Ksenia Pochivalina, who had put together a group of peasants to carry contraband, was sentenced by the Pskov provincial court three times to imprisonment for terms from 5 months to a year, which did not prevent her from doing what she so loved. The most striking thing was what the court especially noted in the verdict: "The rights of the convicted may not be infringed", which was of great importance for a person of that era. The reason, obviously, lay in the social class-based principle of

¹³ See: *Sekretnyi prikaz OGPU № 396/551/94, 24.9.1923 // TsGA SPb. F. 1000. Op. 80. D. 198. L. 1–2 ob.*

¹⁴ *Uralov S. 14 tysiach kontrabandistov // Vneshniaia torgovlia. 1923. No. 3. P. 29.*

¹⁵ Calculated according to: *Doklady upolnomochennykh NK RKI o rezul'tatakh obsledovaniia deiatel'nosti tamozhennykh okrugov Narkomata vneshnei torgovli po bor'be s kontrabandoi, 1925 g. // RGAE. F. 413. Op. 14. D. 336. L. 221.*

¹⁶ *Popenko A. V. Osnovnye prichiny protivorechii antikontarbandnoi gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossii v 1920-kh gg. // Vlast'. 2012. No. 2. P. 142.*

imposing punishments: individuals of unearned incomes posed a threat to the economic security of the state. To identify peasants of the Pskov region, albeit massively engaged in illegal activities, to be such persons was politically inexpedient¹⁷.

The “punishment with the ruble”, which was applied to “ordinary smugglers” as an administrative order, did not achieve its goal either. According to I. N. Rovinskii, the Head of the Foreign Trade Section of the NK RKI of the USSR, “it was clear even to a child that the routine levying of fines (in multiples of the duty or of the value of the contraband) could not provide a noticeable infringement on a professional who, moreover, could avoid payment, when the fine was imposed on a casual courier, a poor frontier peasant who is a blind instrument of organised smugglers”¹⁸.

However, “qualified” smugglers often managed to avoid legal liability. Thus, on March 3, 1926, the OGPU’s anti-smuggling department detained eleven peasants of the Kingisepp district with smuggled herring (8,142 kg in total) at the Prival Inn 16 kilometers from Leningrad. Despite the scale of the fishing, the documents on the detention of contraband were sent to customs for the confiscation of fish and the imposition of a fine, while the criminal case was dropped. But even in the event of a decision to impose a fine, the penalties were often written off due to the insolvency of the payers. In the 1927–1928 fiscal year, Leningrad Port Customs imposed fines totaling 1 377 772 rubles and 17 kopecks, but only 80 038 rubles and 94 kopecks were collected¹⁹.

The widespread impoverishment of the population of Russia during the Revolutionary and the Civil War periods caused people from almost all segments of the population (peasants, fishermen, workers, timber raftsmen, sailors, servicemen, members of the intelligentsia) to be involved in smuggling activities. As the situation in the country stabilized, illegal fishing operation had become the milieu of professional smugglers. In April 1925, an anti-smuggling investigation committee in the Leningrad Military District stated: “Thanks to the measures taken... consumer smuggling throughout the district has all but stopped and has now crystallized into professional trading”²⁰. The inspectors of the Tax Code of the Russian Federation came to similar conclusions based on the results of a large-scale survey of the country’s customs institutions in 1925²¹.

The development of professional smuggling implied the distribution of the roles of its practitioners: often there was a need not only for a guide across the border, several couriers (it would have been difficult for one person to carry 10 000 shoe buckles, 15 000 awls, 230 feet of patent leather etc., purchased, for example, by the smuggler Pashenkov²² in

¹⁷ So, for example, as a result of a month on the fight against smuggling held in the area of the Sebezhs customs in the summer of 1924, mobile courts were held, which examined 88 cases against 133 people: 59 of them were convicted conditionally, 17 were sentenced to forced labor, 5 were evicted from the border zone, and the rest were fined. See: *Trofimova S. G. Ocherki istorii Sebezhskoii tamozhni, 1918–1927 gg.* P. 95.

¹⁸ *Zakliuchenie I. N. Rovinskogo po zamechaniiam Narkomata vneshnei torgovli protiv doklada o rezul'tatakh obsledovaniia kontrabandy, 1925 g.* // Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii (GARF). F. 374. Op. 28. D. 983. L. 3.

¹⁹ *Otchet o deiatel'nosti Leningradskoi portovoi tamozhni za 1927/28 g.* // TsGA SPb. F. 1908. Op. 1. D. 127. L. 43.

²⁰ *Obshchie vyvody po obsledovaniiu voisk pogranokhrany OGPU v Leningradskom voennom okruge, 1925 g.* // *Ibid.* Op. 3. D. 28. L. 75.

²¹ *Doklady upolnomochennykh NK RKI o rezul'tatakh obsledovaniia deyatel'nosti tamozhennykh okrugov Narkomata vneshnei torgovli po bor'be s kontrabandoi, 1925 g.* // RGAE. F. 413. Op. 14. D. 336. L. 5.

²² According to investigators, in 1924–1925, in two Leningrad markets alone, Pashenkov managed to sell about 2000 feet of leather (lacquered and chevette), 150 000 boot buckles, 200 000 boot awls,

Latvia in 1925 during one of his many trips), creditors (the rate could reach half the value of the goods; when a smuggling group was arrested in Leningrad in 1926 the creditor Alexander Pavlov, who lent money at 80 %, was detained), buyers, storekeepers, etc.

According to the data of the Leningrad Port Customs for 1927/1928, out of 1073 persons detained for smuggling, 521 people were blue-collar and white-collar workers (half of them worked on the steamers of the Soviet merchant fleet), 110 housewives, 86 artisans, 66 unemployed, 51 merchants, 22 representatives of free professions and students, 5 sailors and Red Army personnel, 9 peasants, and 168 people of unknown professions²³. Compared to previous years, the percentage of business people among the detainees decreased, which is obviously due to the tendency for the curtailment of private commerce in the country.

The specificity of the port cities was the active participation of steamship crews in smuggling. In a calendar year, sailors were entitled to bringing into the country without a license and duty-free a coat, a suit or a mac, two hats, three outer shirts or blouses, 10 pairs of socks or stockings and some other items of clothing and small haberdashery. It was assumed that they were intended exclusively for personal use, so all things bought abroad had to be recorded in personalized reinforcement notebooks. Sailors were also allowed to bring to the country food and industrial goods under a duty of 150 rubles on each voyage (twice a year). The Workers' and Peasants' Inspectorate, which in 1925 examined the Odessa port customs, found out that in just six months prior to the check, sailors imported duty-free (according to the reinforcement lists) garments worth about 480 000 rubles (at the average market prices in Odessa). Mainly, these were items that were considered "luxury" goods in NEP Russia: chevette and lacquered leather, perfume, Koti powder. In addition, almost every sailor, receiving a salary of 40–80 rubles per month, brought into the country goods under a duty in the amount of 200 rubles and more²⁴. From the data of the GPU and the observations of customs officials, it followed that they were lent in money by Odessa merchants. Sailors created whole networks for the sale of contraband goods not only in Odessa, but also in other port cities.

The main reason for the preservation of large-scale smuggling operations during the NEP years was consumer demand for household goods, which was unsatisfied due to their insufficient production in the country and the extremely limited scope of their legal import. In 1924, the Assistant to the Head of the Main Customs Directorate, Iurii Kleiman, stated: "The compression of imports and the centralization of export trade during the period of the country's general economic upsurge should inevitably cause a spontaneous, massive pressure of smuggling"²⁵. The measures by which he proposed to eliminate this phenomenon were impracticable. They included relaxation in the licensing system for imports, the production of consumer products, the dramatic improvement and cheapening of products that were the subject of mass smuggling, the organization of cooperatives in the border strip and supplying them with the most popular goods.

120 000 caps, 60 masses of boot buttons, 50 mother-of-pearl grosses, 3 kilograms of cocaine, and other goods. As for alcohol, they repeatedly brought it from Estonia in large quantities — 10–20 poods each.

²³ Otchet o deiatel'nosti Leningradskoi portovoi tamozhni za 1927/28 g. // TsGA SPb. F.1908. Op. 1. D. 127. L. 12.

²⁴ Doklad po obsledovaniuu Glavnogo tamozhennogo upravleniia, Moskovskoi tamozhni i vazhneishikh tamozhen SSSR, 1926 g. // GARF. F. 374. Op. 12. D. 1003. L. 81.

²⁵ Kleiman Iu. O zadachakh i metodakh bor'by s kontrabandoi v usloviakh gosudarstvennoi monopolii vneshnei torgovli, 1924 g. // RGAE. F. 413. Op. 14. D. 257. L. 49–50 ob.

The import planners did not focus on saturating the trading network, but rather on purchasing semi-finished products and raw materials for the processing industry. So, for example, when the delegates of the North-Western Economic Conference worked on an export-import plan in 1924, out of all commodity products they only included cotton, silk, medicines, and paraffin as goods to be imported²⁶. The insignificance of funding requested from central government departments for the purchasing products abroad necessary for the production of consumer goods is illustrated by the requests in 1923 to purchase a mere 2500 axes, 900 files, etc. in Finland²⁷.

It is not surprising that customs inspectors often found items of clearly illegal origin in shops. For example, during one of the raids in Leningrad in 1927, contraband goods worth 93 987 rubles were found in the Metallichesкое Snabzhenie (Metal Supplies) store. As it turned out in the course of the investigation, the shop owners were systematically engaged in the purchase of metal products illegally brought into the USSR. They had a whole network of suppliers, one of which, according to the investigation materials, delivered goods for 10 000 rubles²⁸.

With many goods in short supply on the market, not only private traders benefited from illegal import. As noted in a report addressed to the General Customs Directorate in 1925, state and cooperative bodies “inherited from the former haberdasher merchants a special love for foreign goods”. Since no haberdashery licenses are issued “while it would be desirable to obtain foreign-made products, customs auctions, where goods imported by smuggling are sold, provide a reprieve”²⁹.

In 1924 and 1925, and in 1927 and 1928, respectively, the following confiscated smuggled goods were sold to the population: lingerie and dresses — 9070 kg for 58 758 rubles and 24 404 kg for 315 220 rubles; watches and spare parts for them — 434 kg for 10 025 rubles and 814 kg for 125 679 rubles; and knitted woolen products — 3499 kg for 73 994 rubles and 4873 kg for 155 924 rubles. The figures went down between 1924 and 1925 and 1927 and 1928 for goods of a cheaper assortment: sewing needles (1734 kg for 45 158 rubles and 162 kg for 3601 rubles), and cosmetics (5522 kg for 92 705 rubles and 2450 kg for 88 688 rubles)³⁰.

In 1929, when discussing the problem of reorganizing customs work, one of the speakers directly stated that in 1923 and 1924, “the entire state commerce traded in contraband goods”³¹. This continued to be an important supply channel throughout the 1920s. Whereas in the 1925–1926 fiscal year, on average 150–300 people attended the auctions held by Leningrad Customs, in 1926 and 1927 the figure went up to 400–600 people (or rather, as noted in Customs reports, “until the auction hall was so full that people were turned away”). Once the auction was even held in a former stock exchange and attracted more

²⁶ Протокол № 87 заседания plenuma Severo-Zapadnogo ekonomicheskogo soveshchaniia, 8.2.1924 // TsGA SPb. F. 198. Op. 1. D. 10 b. L. 11.

²⁷ Протоколы заседания Экспортного бюро Управления регулированиа Severo-Zapadnogo oblastnogo upravleniia Narodnogo komissariata vneshnei torgovli // Ibid. F. 8. Op. 1. D. 303d. L. 24.

²⁸ Отчет о деiatel'nosti Leningradskoi portovoi tamozhni za 1926/27 g. // Ibid. F. 1908. Op. 1. D. 126. L. 36 ob.

²⁹ Доклады studentov-praktikantov v Glavnoe tamozhennoe upravlenie o sostoianii proizvodstva i sbyta v SSSR izdelii galantereinoi promyshlennosti v sviazi s kontrabandoi izdelii, 1925 g. // RGAE. F. 413. Op. 10. D. 902. L. 68, 72.

³⁰ Vneshniaia torgovlia Soiuzu Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh respublik... P. 796–797.

³¹ Протокол soveshchaniia po reorganizatsii tamozhennogo dela, 11–17.11.1929 // TsGA SPb. F. 1908. Op. 1. D. 132. L. 59.

than 3000 people. However, they did not repeat this experience. In 1926 and 1927, 41,5% of the goods sold at customs auctions in Leningrad were acquired by cooperatives and 58.5% — by private individuals for a total of 258 346 rubles and 94 kopecks. In 1927 and 1928, the total value of sold goods was estimated at 294 193 rubles and 96 kopecks³². At the end of the NEP era, it was decided to abandon public trading in favor of a system with the initial participation in the auction only of state trade and cooperative enterprises. As a result, for the 1928–1929 fiscal year, purchases at customs auctions by state trade and cooperation bodies increased compared to the previous year from 41,5% to 85,3%³³.

The global commodity deficit in Soviet Russia / USSR, fueled by the weakness/ underdevelopment of transportation network, the reduction in the volume of imports of consumer goods, the lack of adequate ways to organize border duty-free trade were objective prerequisites for the preservation of a mass market for smuggled goods. When speaking at a meeting on combating violations of the state monopoly of foreign trade, the Head of the Ukrainian Branch of the Main Customs Directorate V.I. Vuitik pointed out that 25–30% of smuggling was consumed by the border population due to defects in the state supply system³⁴.

The emergence of a new Soviet bourgeoisie, highly paid specialists, stimulated consumer demand. In large cities, entire neighborhoods became smuggling centers. In Leningrad, for example, these were quarters adjacent to Sadovaia Street and Muchnoi Lane, Senaia Square, Mytninskaia Street. Here one could find not only stockings, silk and woolen fabrics, leather and knitted products, perfumes, but also sewing machines “for openwork stitching” with spare parts for them, watch accessories, bicycles, and even artificial teeth, for which there was a demand from private dental practitioners.

According to the Head of the Anti-Smuggling Department of the Main Customs Directorate P. N. Kумыкин, in the 1924–1925 fiscal year, the internal production of smuggled goods satisfied no more than 25% of the country’s demand. At the same time, according to the People’s Commissariat of Internal Trade, a significant part of smuggled goods belonged to “luxury items for consumption by the wealthiest strata of the population, their production volumes in the Union are very small, and the quality was significantly inferior to that of foreign products”³⁵. Indeed, the pre-Revolutionary scale of imports was a thing of the past. At the beginning of the NEP period, the share of foreign goods entering, for example, the “free market” of the North-Western Region, was only 13%. While in 1913, 163 805 kg of cosmetic products (mainly perfume and powder) were imported to Russia, in 1923–1924 these imports were down to 681 kg, and in 1924–1925 to a mere 314 kg³⁶.

The reason behind measures to limit consumer imports was the Soviet “ideology of everyday asceticism”. This doctrine was the foundation of the daily life of Soviet citizens in the 1920s. This was the response to the pre-revolutionary ideology of consumption based on the cult of things. The acquisition of many goods, including those in the smuggled nomenclature, was considered one of the signs of bourgeois decadence. Thus, A. G. Kagan, who headed the household department of Leningrad’s Gleron Central House

³² Otchet o deiatel’nosti Leningradskoi portovoi tamozhni za 1927/28 g. // Ibid. D. 127. L. 45.

³³ Otchet o deiatel’nosti Leningradskoi portovoi tamozhni za 1928/29 g. // Ibid. L. 13.

³⁴ Protokol soveshchaniia po reorganizatsii tamozhennogo dela, 11–17.11.1929 // Ibid. 1. D. 132. L. 55.

³⁵ Dokladnaia zapiska Narkomtorga o meropriiatiiah po bor’be s kontrabandoi, 30.1.1929 // GARF. F. 5446. Op. 10a. D. 233. L. 52.

³⁶ Kумыкин P. N. Kontrabanda v 1924–1925 godu // Vneshniaia trgovlia. 1926. No. 13. P. 3.

of Communist Education of Youth, believed that “make up is the first step down: after it, or more often accompanying it are “flirting”, parties, early sex life, confusion in personal life and a smooth but steady departure... from all social life”³⁷. However, the desire to dress “better” and buy patent leather shoes had become characteristic of not just “NEPed” youth. This was noted by the poet Vladimir Maiakovskii: “Oh, how many of the female kind are shopping, scouring, looking for fashion, asking for fashion, the latest, Parisian [fashion]”³⁸. State-owned companies were well aware of the situation. Mostorg (Moscow Trading Partnership on shares), for example, hired special agents who traveled to customs and bought up “everything needed for the shops” at auctions. Among the main suppliers of haberdashery, combs, in particular, were Poland and Germany whose supply bases were Minsk, Sebezh, and Leningrad Customs. Subsequently, in Moscow, the Main Department Store (GUM), for example, sold “legalized contraband” with a 200–300 % margin, using the charm of the words “foreign goods”³⁹.

Smuggled goods worth 5 730 000 rubles were seized in the USSR in the 1927–1928 fiscal year. Of these, woolen fabrics accounted for 484 000 rubles, cotton fabrics for 72 000, knitted products for 201 000, leather products for 226 000, lingerie and dresses for 130 000, and leather shoes for 38 000. According to customs data, this amount was 10 % of the annual smuggling, the total amount of which was estimated at 60 million rubles⁴⁰. But by the end of the NEP era, such types of smuggling as the resale of goods permitted for import on preferential terms and not intended for sale had acquired greater importance.

Thus, both policy shortcomings in protecting the state monopoly of foreign trade and the demand for smuggled goods contributed to the preservation of the smuggling industry. Enterprising citizens, forced in the post-revolutionary era to engage in illegal commerce to provide for themselves and their families, began to fill in the “gaps” in the state supply system during the NEP years, easily finding the possibility of illegal sales. In a short period, which was not even two decades long, from the end of the Civil War to the collapse of the New Economic Policy, unorganized smuggling carried out by individuals had grown into a large-scale smuggling operation set up by organizations in which each member performed a specific function. It can be argued that the smuggled goods that entered the markets of Soviet cities during the NEP years served as a source for the preservation, if not for the rise, of small-scale handicraft production and filled the shelves of city shops. This contributed to a decrease in the level of social tension through the formation of alternative channels for satisfying the material needs of city residents and the household needs of private entrepreneurs. In this sense, smuggling in the 1920s could be classified as a “victimless crime” because it benefited not only its perpetrators but also those who used their services.

³⁷ Kagan A. G. Kak molodezh' raskhoduet i kak nado raskhodovat' poluchku. Leningrad, 1928. P. 38, 39.

³⁸ Maiakovskii V. V. Poiski noskov // Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii, poem i pès v odnom tome. Moscow, 2011. P. 706.

³⁹ Doklady studentov-praktikantov v Glavnoe tamozhennoe upravlenie o sostoianii proizvodstva i sbyta v SSSR izdelii galanterei noi promyshlennosti v sviazi s kontrabandoi izdelii, 1925 g. // RGAE. F. 413. Op. 10. D. 902. L. 75.

⁴⁰ Spravka po voprosu o meropriiatiiah po bor'be s kontrabandoi, mart 1928 — i iul' 1929 g. // GARF. F. 5446. Op. 10a. D. 233. L. 8, 15.

References

- Beliaeva N. A., Liapustin S. N. *Organizatsiia bor'by s kontrabandoi v usloviakh Grazhdanskoi voiny i interventsii na Dal'nem Vostoke*. Vladivostok, Vladivostok branch of the Russian Customs Academy Press, 2014, 103 p. (In Russian)
- Dudar' L. A. Administrativnye formy bor'by s kontrabandoi na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii v 20-e gg. XX veka. *Vestnik Dal'nevostochnoi gosudarstvennoi akademii ekonomiki i upravleniia*, 2001, no. 2, pp. 114–119. (In Russian)
- Dullin S. *La frontière épaisse. Aux origines des politiques soviétiques (1920–1940)*. Paris, EHESS, 2014. 355 p.
- Heusler J. Leonid Krasin i “monopoliiia vneshnei torgovli”. *Ekonomicheskaiia istoriia: ezhegodnik*. Moscow, Institute of Russian History, Russian Academy of Sciences Press, 2014, pp. 471–482. (In Russian)
- Makovsky A. V. *Sovetskii opyt organizatsii pogranichnogo i tamozhennogo kontroliia na Dal'nem Vostoke (1922–1941 gg.): dis. ... kand. ist. nauk*. Vladivostok, 2018, 212 p. (In Russian).
- Neh V. F. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskie aspekty sovetskoii pogranichnoi politiki (1917–1941). *Bezopasnost' Evrazii*, 2004, no. 3 (17), pp. 535–552. (In Russian)
- Popenko A. V. *Opyt bor'by s kontrabandoi na Dal'nem Vostoke Rossii (1884 — konets 20-kh gg. XX v.)*. Khabarovsk, Khabarovskii pogranichnyi institut Press, 2009, 149 p. (In Russian)
- Popenko A. V. Osnovnye prichiny protivorechii antikontarbandnoi gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossii v 1920-kh gg. *Vlast'*, 2012, no. 2, pp. 141–144. (In Russian)
- Rupasov A. I. Neftianaia torgovlia SSSR s gosudarstvami Baltii i Finliandii v 1920–1930-e gg. *Noveishaia istoriia Rossii*, 2019, vol. 9, issue 4, pp. 942–954. (In Russian)
- Shemetova T. A. O vliianii geograficheskikh uslovii na kharakter i aktivnost' kontrabandnoi torgovli v prigranichnykh raionakh Sin'tsiana i SSSR v pervoi polovine 20-kh gg. XX veka. *Sovremennye problemy nauki i obrazovaniia*, 2015, no. 1 (1), p. 1629. (In Russian)
- Shlyakhter A. A. *Smuggler states: Poland, Latvia, Estonia, and contraband trade across the Soviet frontier, 1919–1924*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2020, 462 p.
- Trofimova G. T. *Ocherki istorii Sebezhskoii tamozhni, 1918–1927 gg. (po dokumentam Gosudarstvennogo arkhiva v g. Velikie Luki)*. Velikie Luki, [S. n.], 2012, 147 p. (In Russian)

Статья поступила в редакцию 4 ноября 2021 г.

Рекомендована к печати 14 марта 2022 г.

Received: November 4, 2021

Accepted: March 14, 2022