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THE COTTON INDUSTRY IN UZBEKISTAN DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract

This article analyses, on the basis of historical sources, the activities of the cotton industry of Uzbekistan during the Second World War, its strategic significance for the rear-area economy, and its contribution to the military defense system. The article examines how the sector was developed under the severe conditions of wartime — amid shortages of labor and machinery, problems with irrigation systems, and changes in agriculture. It argues that the infrastructural and economic foundation created by the cotton industry during the war years served as an important basis for the restoration of the republic's national economy in the post-war period.

Keywords: Second World War, Uzbekistan agriculture, cotton industry, home front, national economy, strategic raw materials, economic recovery.

ХЛОПЧАТОБУМАЖНАЯ ПРОМЫШЛЕННОСТЬ УЗБЕКИСТАНА ВО ВРЕМЯ ВТОРОЙ МИРОВОЙ ВОЙНЫ

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Аннотация

В статье на основе исторических источников проанализирована деятельность хлопковой промышленности Узбекистана в годы Второй мировой войны, её стратегическое значение для тыловой экономики, а также вклад в систему военной обороны. Рассматривается, каким образом отрасль развивалась в тяжёлых условиях военного времени — при нехватке рабочей силы и техники, проблемах ирригационных систем и изменениях в сельском хозяйстве. Обосновывается, что созданные в годы войны инфраструктурный и экономический фундамент хлопководства послужили важной основой для восстановления народного хозяйства республики в послевоенный период.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, сельское хозяйство Узбекистана, хлопковая промышленность, тыл, народное хозяйство, стратегическое сырьё, экономическое восстановление.

During the Second World War, Uzbekistan became one of the most important strategic rear bases. In this period, special attention was devoted to developing the cotton industry, which was considered the leading branch of the republic's economy. Cotton was an indispensable raw material not only for textiles but also for the military industry — for the production of gunpowder, ammunition, medical cotton wool, and other strategic goods.

For this reason, Uzbek cotton growing faced unprecedented difficulties during the Second World War: the mobilization of labor and machinery to the front, shortages of fuel and fertilizers, and the compulsion to reduce a portion of cotton-sown areas in order to grow grain and potatoes in pursuit of food self-sufficiency



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all placed the sector in a severe situation. Nevertheless, special attention continued to be paid to producing raw cotton.

Our country's industry was directed one-sidedly towards cotton growing as a result of the policy pursued by the Soviet government. For this reason, special attention was devoted to cotton production in our homeland, and this process was implemented on a broad scale especially during the Second World War. For example, in 1941 the population of the republic harvested an average yield of 17.1 centners per hectare and delivered 1,646,000 tons of raw cotton to the state, fulfilling the established annual plan by 106 percent. In addition, Tashkent Province delivered 12,500 tons, Samarkand Province 10,700 tons, Khorezm Province 6,500 tons, and Bukhara Province 21,500 tons above plan [1]. This attests to the increase in cotton yields in the republic in 1941. Compared with 1940, cotton productivity in the Karakalpak Autonomous Republic rose by 3.53 centers, in Khorezm Province by 3.1 centners, and in such districts as Jizzakh, Kosonsoy, Narpay, Shovot, and Qarshi by 1.5–2 centers [2]. In 1942, however, delivering raw cotton became extremely difficult for cotton growers in the republic. As a result of the war, serious changes took place in the agricultural system of Uzbekistan, and special attention was devoted to increasing grain crops alongside cotton. Whereas 5.5 million centners of grain were produced in the republic in 1941, the task was set to raise this to 15 million centners in 1942, while also increasing the main crop — cotton — by 14.5 percent. In pursuit of these goals, despite the difficult wartime situation, the sown area in the republic was expanded by 346,600 hectares, and the cultivation of grain and other crops — including sugar beet — was organized [3]. This testifies that during the war years, grain and other agricultural crops were grown alongside cotton.

Furthermore, the IX Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Uzbekistan, held on 4 January 1944, the X Plenum held on 26



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April 1944, and the First Congress of Cotton Growers of the Republic held in January 1944 set the most important tasks: to restore cotton growing, to raise cotton yield to 14 centners per hectare on collective farms and 18 centners on state farms, and to bring mechanized cultivation to 6.2 million hectares [1, p. 98]. Accordingly, special attention was devoted to the republic's agriculture and in particular to delivering raw cotton.

In the years following the Second World War, attention in our country was focused on developing all sectors, and five-year plans were drawn up. The reconversion of industry to peacetime conditions was carried out with great difficulty — requiring incalculable material and physical expenditure from the population. The industry of Uzbekistan, and the development of other branches of the national economy, was tied mainly to the interests of cotton growing. Efforts to raise the country's economy became an integral part of the "struggle for cotton" [4].

From the very first years after the Second World War, the main criterion for reconstructing the republic's agriculture was the consistent expansion of cotton-sown areas and the increase of their share within the total cropped area. Of particular significance were the following: the resolution of the Central Committee of the VKP(b) and the Union government of 14 June 1945 "On measures for the restoration and further development of cotton growing in Uzbekistan" [5]; the resolution of the CC VKP(b) and the USSR Council of People's Commissars of 2 February 1946 "On measures for the restoration and further development of cotton growing in Uzbekistan in 1946–1953"; the resolution of the CC VKP(b) Plenum of 16 February 1947 "On measures for the further advancement of agriculture in the post-war period"; and the resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek SSR of 30 August 1946 "On the five-year plan for the restoration and development of the national economy of Uzbekistan for



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1946–1950", as well as other special resolutions — all of which set the task of increasing cotton production, the leading branch of the republic's national economy. The Second World War had disrupted the balance of the country's economy, and in conditions where a strong material-technical base, experienced skilled personnel, and other resources were lacking, the Soviet system adopted the above resolutions in pursuit of its own interests. Through these resolutions, the aim was to achieve the restoration of the republic's national economy — and in particular its agricultural sector.

In conclusion, during the Second World War the cotton industry of Uzbekistan was developed not merely as a source for fulfilling dry plans and economic targets, but as the principal factor for keeping the entire national economy stable under difficult military-political conditions and for continuously supplying the strategic goods required for the needs of the front. The stringent demands of the wartime period transformed the sector from a simple raw-material base into a large complex closely linked with the chemical, textile, and defense industries. During this period, the "white gold" produced through the arduous labor of the Uzbek people played a decisive role in military aviation, the production of gunpowder, medicine, and the supply of clothing to soldiers.

The enormous economic foundation, infrastructure, and production experience created during these difficult processes — under conditions of systemic crisis and labor shortages — also served as a firm basis for the rapid restoration and development of the republic's economy in the post-war years of peace.

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