

## Disabled People in the USSR during Khrushchev's Modernization: Regional Aspect

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### Abstract

The situation of disabled people in the USSR is still a poorly understood problem. In the Soviet era, the subject of disabled people was actually under a secret ban, and the scientific works published abroad did not have the necessary research of the source base. Currently, despite the emergence of a number of works in Russia and abroad, this topic still has a significant number of research gaps. One of these gaps is connected with the determination of the influence of modernization carried out in the 1950s-1960s by the leader of the USSR N.S. Khrushchev, on the strength, composition and social status of the disabled people in the country. The regional aspect of this problem, including the special situation of disabled people in the Republic of Tatarstan as one of the important regions (strong points) of ongoing modernization, is very important.

The article was prepared on the basis of published sources, the existing corpus of Russian and foreign scientific publications, as well as a wide stratum of the archival materials from the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan involved for the first time.

The research methods included the statistical analysis of archival materials, a secondary analysis of published scientific researches.

The results obtained are correlated with the conclusions of a number of researchers and expand the existing regional studies of social policy during modernization in the 1950s-1960s.

**Keywords:** History, Disabled People, USSR, Tatarstan, Modernization, Khrushchev, Social Policy.

### Introduction

Modern attention to this topic is due to the fact that the situation of disabled people in the USSR has often remained beyond the scientific interests of Soviet historians. Moreover, this concerned not only the disabled war veterans, who were an undesirable subject for scientific research (as pointed out by Beata Fisiler) [1; 290], but also other groups of disabled people. The disabled people were both a graphic manifestation of the costs of Soviet construction and a burden on the Soviet system that built the society of "happy people of the future", where the image of a disabled person did not fit in any way [2].

At the same time, if it was preferable simply not to notice the disabled people in the days of Stalinism (a

known operation on deportation of the disabled war veterans from the large cities was a typical example of this relationship), then it was already difficult to do the same in the time of Khrushchev's thaw. The authorities were forced to pay attention to this problem, especially since the modernization carried out by N.S. Khrushchev in the late 1950s - the first half of the 1960s was accompanied by a sufficiently large number of industrial injuries, which led to an increase in the number of disabled people.

As a whole, there was the following division of disabled people in the USSR: disabled workers and disabled soldiers. The first category was divided into disabled people from labor injuries and occupational diseases (i.e., those who received disability as a result of their production activities) and disabled people from general diseases. The second category was divided into the disabled people of the Patriotic War, disabled people of Civil and Imperialist war, etc. The concepts of "disabled since childhood" did not exist in the USSR until 1979 [3]. All the category of disabled people were later divided into 3 groups: the status of disabled person of the 1st group was received by persons who had completely lost their ability to work and were unable to care for themselves, of the 2nd group - those who had lost the ability to work in any specialty, but capable to care for themselves, of the 3rd group - persons who retained the capacity to make easy labor.

The purpose of this article is to find out the number, composition, location and social status of disabled people in the Republic of Tatarstan during the Khrushchev's modernization. Tatarstan was an important point of this modernization, as the oil-bearing region, as the center of military industry, petrochemistry and energy, as an important source of labor resources [4].

At the same time, there are no works devoted to this problem in the regional literature, but we can only find separate data and only in general across the country in the general Russian works [5-7]. The existing foreign works are devoted, as a rule, only to certain aspects of the situation of disabled people, such as the history of everyday life [8], social policy [9], protection of the rights of disabled people [10] or special education for them [11].

### Methods

The statistical analysis of archival materials of the National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, in

particular, of such funds as R-2850 "State Planning Commission of the Tatar ASSR" [12] and R-1296 "Statistical Administration of the Tatar ASSR" [13], as well as published statistical data, were the research methods. We also carried out a secondary analysis of published scientific research of Russian and foreign authors in the work.

**Results**

We received the following results during the study. Firstly, it was possible to clarify the number of

disabled people in the republic. According to our calculations, the total number of all disabled people in the republic in this period was about 80-85 thousand people, which amounted to approximately 2.8 - 2.9% of the total population of the republic.

According to the Ministry of Social Welfare of the Tatarstan Republic, there were the following groups of disabled people being in the state pension provision in TASSR as of July 1, 1959 (Table 1).

**Table 1**

Group	Number of disabled people	Including labouring
<b><i>Disabled workers from labor injuries and occupational diseases</i></b>	<b>4,152</b>	<b>2,096</b>
1st group	215	8
2nd group	1,203	236
3rd group	2,734	1,852
<b><i>Disabled workers from general diseases</i></b>	<b>46,224</b>	<b>19,777</b>
1st group	3,898	528
2nd group	20,658	4,485
3rd group	21,668	14,764
<b><i>Disabled war veterans</i></b>	<b>33,522</b>	<b>22,763</b>
1st group	1,389	66
2nd group	7,945	2,692
3rd group	24,188	20,005

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 50

As for the materials of the State Planning Commission of the Tatar SSR, it only contains data on the number of unemployed disabled people only of the 1st and 2nd groups (that is, completely disabled) and only at working age. The share of such disabled people was 3.0-3.5% of the working-age population [12].

That is, all statistical data, in principle, were aimed, first of all, at determining additional sources of labor resources among these population groups.

As for the social composition of the disabled people, we have only fragmentary information. For example, it is known that 83% among those who applied for a primary examination as a disabled person in the first

half of 1959 were the workers and employees, while the share of collective farmers accounted for only 17% [13].

According to the age structure, 1,259 people were under the age of 29 years old, 2,141 people - under the age from 30 to 44 years old and 2,150 people - under the age of 45 years old and up to the retirement age out of 6,347 newly recognized disabled persons in the first half of 1959. Thus, the largest proportion of people who became disabled during this period accounted for the middle and older age groups, but the share of young people also amounted to about 20%.

Information on the territorial location of the disabled people in the Tatarstan Republic as of January 1, 1960 is presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

Category of disabled people	Number	Place of residence					
		Urban area			Rural area		
		Total	Employed	Unemployed	Total	Employed	Unemployed
<b><i>Disabled workers, total</i></b>	<b>52,816</b>	<b>35,061</b>	<b>14,515</b>	<b>20,546</b>	<b>17,755</b>	<b>8,817</b>	<b>8,938</b>

Including:

Disabled persons of the 1st and 2nd groups	26,618	18,568	3,288	15,280	8,050	2,236	5,814
Disabled persons of the 3rd group	26,198	16,493	11,227	5,266	9,705	6,581	3,124
<b>Disabled war veterans</b>	<b>33,735</b>	<b>9,901</b>	<b>5,955</b>	<b>3,946</b>	<b>23,834</b>	<b>18,197</b>	<b>5,637</b>
Including:							
Disabled persons of the 1st and 2nd groups	9,261	3,040	787	2,253	6,221	2,397	3,824
Disabled persons of the 3rd group	24,474	6,861	5,168	1,693	17,613	15,800	1,813

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 141.

Thus, we see that the vast majority of disabled people lived in the cities and worker settlements, while more than 70% lived in rural areas among disabled war veterans. It is characteristic that the share of workers living in urban areas was significantly lower than that of disabled people living in rural areas among the disabled workers and disabled war veterans of the 1st and 2nd groups. Apparently, this was due to the great opportunities for employment in agriculture. In addition, this process could be affected by liquidation of the enterprises of the All-Union Industrial Cooperation of the Disabled People in the late 1950s,

where at least 220,000 disabled people worked throughout the country [14, p. 22-26]. It was believed that these enterprises were economically inefficient [15, p. 45], and the Soviet leaders preferred not to think about their social role.

Data on the disability origin for the first half of 1959 showed that the main causes of disability were cardiovascular diseases and tuberculosis (about a third of all cases), then there were diseases of bones and joints, diseases of the nervous system, mental illnesses and diseases of the digestive system (about a third of all cases). At the same time, most often the most severe 1st group of disability was received due to mental illnesses and malignant tumors (Table 3).

**Table 3**

Type of disease	Disabled people, total	Including:	
		1st group	2nd group
Tuberculosis	752	26	451
Diseases of the respiratory system (except tuberculosis)	399	6	167
Diseases of bones and joints (except tuberculosis)	513	20	179
Consequences of work-related injuries	203	8	115
Diseases of the nervous system	563	43	169
Mental diseases	516	99	272
Diseases of the cardiovascular system, including hypertension	1,292	20	633
Diseases of the digestive system, including peptic ulcer disease	554	4	231
Consequences of occupational diseases and poisonings	23	-	12
Malignant tumors	264	111	148
Visual impairment or loss of vision	374	55	139
Other diseases	944	47	358
Total	6,397	439	2,974

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 33ob

The social and economic situation of disabled people can be judged from the data on the amount of their pension provision. Thus, according to the Ministry of

Social Care of the Tatar ASSR, the following amounts for different categories of disabled people were included in pensions for disabled people as of July 1, 1959 (Table 4).

**Table 4**

Group	Total amount of the designated monthly pensions, in roubles	Per 1 disabled person receiving a pension on average, in roubles
<b><i>Disabled workers from labor injuries and occupational diseases</i></b>	<b>1,351,481</b>	<b>325.5</b>
1st group	105,770	491.95
2nd group	468,791	389.68
3rd group	776,920	284.16
<b><i>Disabled workers from general diseases</i></b>	<b>12,011,681</b>	<b>259.85</b>
1st group	1,675,181	429.75
2nd group	5,919,488	286.54
3rd group	4,417,012	203.84
<b><i>Disabled war veterans</i></b>	<b>8,290,291</b>	<b>247.30</b>
1st group	609,201	438.58
2nd group	2,507,818	315.64
3rd group	5,173,272	213.87

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 50

These calculations are of a statistically correct nature, since they were confirmed by the results of a sample survey of disabled people, conducted at the same time [13].

Thus, disabled people received the least pensions for general diseases; pension provision for the disabled war veterans was somewhat better; and the disabled

workers had the largest pensions for the labor injuries and occupational diseases. These data make it possible to visually see the social differentiation of disabled people and the degree of care for them by the state.

There was a network of institutions for disabled people (homes and boarding schools), the number of which, in relation to the number of disabled people, was small in the republic. For example, the data for 1959 are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

Name of the boarding school	Number of institutions	Number of places in them	Number of patients
<i>Total number of disabled people's homes and boarding schools for adults</i>	12	1,350	1,336
Boarding school for tuberculosis patients:	-	-	-
Boarding school for psychochronics	2	170	176
Boarding school of the raised type	-	-	-
Boarding school of the general type	10	1,175	1,160
<i>Children's homes for mentally retarded children</i>	1	100	101

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 9.

In addition, there was a hospital for the disabled war veterans of the Great Patriotic War for 250 people with tuberculosis in the republic [13].

By 1962, the network of houses and boarding schools for disabled people was somewhat expanded in the republic: the number of institutions increased to 15, and the number of places in them increased to 1,497 [13]. At the same time, it is known that at least 210 people, including 87 disabled children, were on the waiting list to receive a place in the disabled person's home as of April 1, 1962 [13].

Analyzing the policy of regional authorities in relation to the disabled people, we came to the conclusion that it was, in fact, punitive. The authorities reluctantly granted the status of a disabled person and sought to reduce the number of disabled people through the MEC (medical expert commission) work and the procedure for the disabled people examination. For example, in the first half of 1959, only 6,397 people (65%) were recognized as disabled out of 9,762 people targeted for

the initial MEC examination; and only 95% of people were confirmed to be disabled out of 26,139 disabled people who were re-examined. Only 77.8% were recognized as disabled of those who passed the initial survey in the second half of 1959, as well as only 94% - among those who were re-examined [13].

So the data on the re-examination of disabled workers in the first half of 1959 show that the state purposefully sought to reduce these contingents or reduce the disability group. For example, the district and municipal MECs recognized as disabled people only 95% of applicants in the first half of 1959, in the second half - 94%. More detailed data on the results of primary and repeated examination of disabled persons by the district and municipal MECs in 1959 are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

Disability group prior to reexamination	Number of the re-examined disabled workers	Number of persons recognized as disabled	Including:		
			1st group	2nd group	3rd group
1st group	1,495	1,493	1,253	217	23
2nd group	17,338	17,130	918	13,488	2,724
3rd group	19,848	17,991	98	1,996	15,897
Total	38,681	36,614	2,269	15,701	18,644

National Archive of the Republic of Tatarstan, F. P-1296, In. 18, d. 735, l. 33, 112.

In addition to the district MECs, 2 central (republican) MECs operated in the republic, which examined the appeals and supervised the work of subordinate commissions. In 1959, the Republican MECs examined 2,956 cases and the share of people recognized as disabled was even lower in their decisions (only 58% of positive decisions). The work of these commissions had even more pronounced punitive character, because almost half of disabled people received reduction of a disability group out of 190 people who applied for reassessment of the disabled people of the 2nd group, as well as 90 persons were deprived of the disabled person status out of 1,261 disabled people of the third group [13].

**Discussion**

The results obtained are correlated with the conclusions of a number of researchers and expand the existing understanding of the situation of disabled people in the USSR and, in general, of the social policy during the modernization of the 1950s-1960s.

Our conclusions that the disabled people were considered by the Soviet authorities in this period, above all, as a possible additional source of labor resources, and not as a group of people in need of additional support and assistance, which has often led to a lack of attention from the state to their needs, are

correlated with the analogous conclusions of Sarah Phillips [3].

A conclusion about the differentiation of attitudes towards the disabled people, in accordance with their labor or military merits before the state and contribution to the common cause, is confirmed by the works of O. Snack [16] and some other researchers [3]. We also agree with Yu.A. Polyakov, V.B. Zhiromskaya and N.A. Aralovets, who have stressed that an increase in the number of disabled people has contributed to a decrease in the quantity and quality of labor resources, as well as has increased the burden on forms of social and medical services to the population [6]. At the same time, taking into account that in fact the norms of pension provision for disabled workers and disabled war veterans established by the Law of 1956 did not actually change until 1973 [7, p.178], it could be concluded that the standard of living of disabled people in the USSR has gradually decreased during the Khrushchev era, especially in the part of their state pension provision. Undoubtedly, modernization contributed to solving some other problems of the disabled people, for example, housing problems, or improving medical care, but the financial support for disabled people left much to be desired in this period.

## Summary

In general, we came to the conclusion that the Soviet state was interested in the disabled people in the period studied only in terms of the expenses necessary for their pension provision and treated disabled people as a possible source of additional labor resources rather than a social group that needs additional help and care. At the very least, all Soviet statistical information on people with disabilities was presented in this spirit during the period studied. As for such a category of disabled people as "disabled children", unfortunately, there was practically no statistical information on their number and composition during the period under study, and on the specifics of their social situation as well.

## Conclusions

In general, we received interesting results during our study on the regional specificity of the situation of disabled people in the USSR during the Khrushchev modernization period, which may be useful for broadening the notions of the social history and social policy of the Soviet state in this period.

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