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Communication practices of interaction of the Ural Nuclear Bomb specialists and government authorities

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Abstract

This article focuses on communication practices of interaction between specialists in the Russian Federal Nuclear Center – All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Technical Physics and authorities (Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry of the USSR, Ministry of Defense) in 1950s –1980s. The study describes mechanisms, strategy and vectors of interaction, certain cases and content of communication with authorities as well as possibilities and limits of mutual influence of authorities and physicists on functioning of a large research production institution of the Soviet nuclear industry, on the industry itself and on state processes.

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Keywords: Nuclear project; Russian Federal Nuclear Center; VNIITF; communication; interaction; authority

1. Introduction

On July 31, 1954 the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted the top secret resolution “On construction of R&D Institute (NII)-1011 of the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry” (Ryabev, 2009). This new Institute was intended to become an alternate to the first Soviet nuclear center, Design Bureau (KB)-11 (Ryabev, 2009) which is nowadays Russian Federal Nuclear Center – All-Russian Research Institute of Experimental Physics

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(RFNC–VNIIEF). Such dispersion of nuclear centers was creating of the competitive environment to increase efficiency and to ensure a coverage against the possibility of war. The Zababakhin All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Technical Physics (RFNC–VNIITF) was established at the final stage of the Soviet nuclear project. It was transition period from the project itself functioning in an emergency mode to the nuclear industry working in a regular mode. To ensure its security, the authorities founded the institute in the Urals Mountains, far from the country's borders. As a high security facility access was closely control through isolated secured area, special passes (to the town, the Institute, its separate divisions), secret terms and addresses, restrictions on the freedom of movement, pledge of secrecy, etc. It was typical for the objects of the soviet nuclear industry. In this space employees of the Ural nuclear center had to live and work. The first group of scientists and technical officers consisted for more than a half of the former employees of KB-11 (Ryabev, 2009). They were familiar with such conditions; while the newcomers had to get used to them. The new Institute did not copy KB-11 and escaped the role intended for it initially. Almost immediately after the beginning of functioning in the Ural region it tried to get rid of hereditary themes of KB-11, to prove its independence and sustainability and to take its own place both in the structure of the Ministry of Medium Machine-Building Industry of the USSR (MSM) and the environment of the Soviet physics. Thus, the All-Russian Scientific Research Institute of Technical Physics can be considered: a) as a part and successor of the nuclear project of the USSR which adopted its typical features, b) as a part of the Soviet community of physicists and c) as an example of the successful regional scientific organization (if we consider its territorial location).

2. Historiography, data and methods

Only a few publications is devoted to such interesting subject of research. All of them are memoirs by employees of VNIITF (present or former). There is not the special research about the history of this nuclear center. The subject of the relations between soviet physicists and authorities is more studied. Some aspects of this topic are presented par example by Jim Baggott (2010), Paul Josephson (1991, 1993, 1999), Alexei Kojevnikov (2005), Naomi Oreskes and John Krige (2014), Vladimir Vizgin (2014).

This article is the first study of interaction between regional physicists and the authorities. I want to give a look at possibilities and limits of mutual influence of regional nuclear physicists and authorities on science, on soviet nuclear industry, and on state processes. This meso-level helps to understand better the mechanisms of science development and functioning of government agencies in the USSR in general.

The research is based on published documents (Ryabev, 2009; Artyomov et al., 2008), and on memoirs of VNIITF's physicists, their descendants and colleagues (Nikitin and Kazachenkova, 2009; Litvinov, 2003; Ananiychuk, 2014; Feoktistov, 2003; Litvinov, 2006; Ryabev, 2014; Bogunenko, 2014; Shchyolkin, 2004; Shcherbina, 2003).

Non-formalized data suppose the application of multifaceted approaches such as the textual analysis (narrative and discourse analyzes). Recollections and memoirs gave the chance to familiarize with the ideas of physicists about VNIITF as a social organism through their self-perception, social self-identification and self-presentation.

3. Results

The Soviet physicists' community had special relations with the party and government apparatus due to the important role of the physicists in developing nuclear weapons (Vizgin, Kessenikh, and Tomilin, 2014). Nuclear physicists had direct access to the top managers (of the industry, of the country) and opportunities as minimum to declare and as maximum to defend their research programs, while trying to influence political processes as well. With that, these possibilities of influence began to decrease after creation of nuclear and hydrogen bombs.

Various cases of communication between the Ural nuclear center physicists and authorities show that authorities were more opened and accessible for them than to specialists of other areas of the industry. The authorities were addressed for help, with criticism, with various suggestions of any changes, improvements in the Institute, the industry, the country. Though many nuclear physicists during the described period were not members of the CPSU, the majority were loyal to the Communist Party and socialist ideas. However, the scientists disapproved of Party intervention into scientific and production activities of the Institute. For them the science had to remain free from

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