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Was It a Failure of Idealism?
The Autonomous Industrial Colony “Kuzbas” and S.J. Rutgers ⁽¹⁾
by
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A pamphlet that begins with the following text: “Wanted. American Engineers and Workers for Soviet Russia in the Kuznets Coal and Iron Basin by the Autonomous Industrial Colony–‘Kuzbas’” [AIC-K] was published in New York in February 1922. It was an appeal to participate in the “plan for the first industrial colony in the world, where engineers will find freedom to work out experiments they cannot attempt under the profit-system, and where workers will find that self-government, that sense of social creativeness, that solidarity and equality they have never found anywhere in the history of the world until the present hour.” ⁽²⁾ This AIC-K was liquidated on 1 January 1927 and reorganized into “Kuzbassugol” (State Coal, Chemical, and Metallurgical Trust) later that year. Was this Project based on international labor solidarity a failure of idealism? If so, what were the problems? This article aims to address several key issues and ultimately answer these questions, but first, it will briefly outline the history of AIC-K, from its founding and development to its liquidation and reorganization. ⁽³⁾

(1) This article is an abridged version of the following series of articles: “The Autonomous Industrial Colony ‘Kuzbas’ and S.J. Rutgers (1)~(7)” [in Japanese with English summary], published in the Kyushu University Institutional Repository, 5.IV.2023~4.VIII.2025; cf. “Ibid. (8, Supplement): Contents, Summaries, and Selected Bibliography” in the same Repository, 8.IX.2025 (<https://doi.org/10.15017/7385225>).

(2) “Kuzbas.” *An Opportunity for Engineers and Workers. Prospectus* (New York, 1922), 1-2.

(3) Regarding footnotes, I have tried to minimize their use. This is because, while the original series included detailed descriptions with numerous historical source citations, it was impractical to include all of that in this abridged version. Moreover, I would like to list in advance the primary historical sources and scholarly works that were extensively used and discussed in this article:

Chapter 1 Founding, Development, Liquidation

After the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in March 1921, the acceptance of foreign capital, foreign labor, etc. came to be accelerated in Soviet Russia. At that time S.J. Rutgers (Dutch civil engineer), H.S. Calvert (IWW worker) and others aimed at founding the AIC-K to which the word “autonomous” was prefixed, as a unique practice of the international labor solidarity.

The contract for the Kuzbas Project was finally signed on 21 October 1921, between the Council of Labor and Defense (STO), which was presided over by V.I. Lenin and legally authorized as commission of the Council of People’s Commissars (SNK), and the “initiatory group of American workmen.” The SNK approved the contract on 25 October and a month later, on 22 November, Lenin (as chairman of the STO) and W.D. Haywood, J.H. Beyer, and Rutgers of the group, signed the final

“Организация Автономной колонии американских рабочих «Кузбасс» (1921–1923 гг.)” [The Organization of Autonomous American workers’ colony «Kuzbas» (1921-1923)], *Исторический архив*, 1961, No. 2, 69-98.

“Деятельность «Автономной индустриальной колонии Кузбасс» и её оценка в документах СТО СССР (1922–1926 гг.)” [The Activity of «Autonomous industrial colony Kuzbas» and its evaluation in the STO documents of the USSR (1922-1926)], *ibid.*, 1961, No. 3, 132-165.

Kuzbas. A Bulletin devoted to the Affairs of the Industrial Colony Kuzbas (New York), Vol. 1, No. 1~Vol. 2, No. 6, 20.V.1922~1.XII.1923.

Kurzgefaßte Angaben über die Autonome Industrielle Kolonie Kuzbas (nach Dokumenten und Briefe), in: Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ) [Russian state archive of socio-political history], ф. 626, оп. 1, д. 6, лл. 1-71 (hereafter cited as РГАСПИ, 626/1/6/1-71), Moscow.

Nederlanders bouwen in Siberië (1921-1927), in: Archief S.J. Rutgers, Map 15, Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis (IISG), Amsterdam.

Г.Я. Тарле, *Друзья страны Советов. Участие зарубежных трудящихся в восстановлении народного хозяйства СССР в 1920-1925 гг.* [Friends of the Soviet state. Participation of foreign workers in the restoration of the national economy of the USSR in 1920-1925] (Москва, 1968).

Л.Ю. Галкина, *Автономная индустриальная колония «Кузбасс»* [The Autonomous industrial colony «Kuzbas»] (Кемерово, n.d. [2011]).

W.Th. Smith, *The Kuzbas Colony Soviet Russia 1921-1926. An American Contribution to the Building of a Communist State* (Doctor of Arts in History diss., University of Miami, 1977).

J.P. Morray, *Project Kuzbas. American Workers in Siberia (1921-1926)* (New York, 1983).

agreement. Even before this, Rutgers had already departed for the Netherlands, and Calvert and T. Barker for the United States, to begin preparations for the colony's construction; Rutgers' signature on the contract was written by Haywood on his behalf.

The initiatory group began activities without waiting for the final agreement. They aimed to divide their activities into four locations (Kuzbas, Moscow, the Netherlands, and the US) and accomplish their respective tasks. Particularly I take note of the composition, with Rutgers in the Netherlands at the center and Calvert and Barker in the US and Haywood in Moscow as the two wings. And Rutgers took on the role of giving instructions and coordinating between the two wings. Rushing to carry out long-distance activities in a short period of time posed the following problems: (1) There was a shortage of suitable persons because they set about their task with a small number of people; (2) They could not bring about good understanding one another in spite of their efforts to exchange close correspondence.

The American Organization Committee (AOC) was organized in New York to handle labor recruitment and dispatch by Calvert, Barker, and others. The AOC could gain organizational cooperation and sponsorship from neither Communist Party (CP) on the spot nor the IWW and, what was worse, "factional strife" arose between the AOC and the CP (including the communist-leaning Society for Technical Aid to Soviet Russia [STASR]) or the IWW. The AOC had no choice but directly invite the members of the CP, those (Wobblies) of the IWW, and individual class-conscious engineers and workers to apply and be dispatched. The policy in this case was prescribed in advance by Rutgers: The AOC itself should have "the advantage [over the STASR]) of combining different elements (IWW, CP, and others) and offer a good chance of avoiding domination by political influence of one kind or another."⁽⁴⁾ This policy, in other words, "a non-partisan attitude" became the fundamental operating principle of the AOC. Nevertheless, the AOC's conflict with the CP and the IWW also affected its operations, particularly its committee composition, and led to disagreements among committee members (roughly divided into three groups: namely, CP's, IWW's, and liberal).⁽⁵⁾

The AIC-K encountered various problems at the start of operations in Kemerovo,

(4) Rutgers to Calvert, 11.XII.1921, in: ПГАСИИ, 626/1/13/18.

(5) Despite the handicap of starting from scratch and with limited preparation time, AOC's performance in the first year of dispatching workers was not inferior to that of the STASR, and it was able to contribute more than the STASR, especially in terms of dispatching expert engineers.

Western Siberia. From January 1922 onwards Beyer, Haywood, ⁽⁶⁾ and Rutgers were each sent there in turn as its director. But differences over management ideas and approaches arouse among them, so Beyer nearly broke away (and then suddenly passed away), Haywood left shortly after Rutgers' arrival and turned around to the opposite side, leaving Rutgers to continue undertaking as sole director.

In the meantime, Soviet governing bodies, particularly the State Planning Committee (Gosplan), quickly proposed downsizing the AIC-K Project and revising the terms of the original contract, forcing Rutgers and others members of the Organization Committee (the provisional Managing Board) to focus on negotiating these issues. M. Schuyler and Th. Reese (and later P.P. Cosgrove) of the AOC also left New York for Russia to assist in the negotiations. At this point over how to respond to the proposal, however, the opinions of members of both Committees were also divided and the internal conflict arose. During two joint meetings of the two Committees held in October 1922, a radical reorganization of the managing board was discussed, and a vote of 3 to 2 (Rutgers, V.C. Shatov [STO representative], and "liberal" Reese against Haywood and Schuyler) resulted in the following decision: the 14-member Organization Committee was disbanded, and a 3-member Managing Board (consisting of the three above-mentioned individuals) was formed. Moreover, the AIC-K provisionally relinquished its right to vote on Managing Board to the STO, till the management organization, including election preparations, was well formed (The AIC-K never regained its right to vote, and remained at the mercy of the Soviet Government's personnel power until the very end). The AOC was also to be disbanded and reorganized with Reese as its representative (he was soon deemed unsuitable and replaced by Barker). ⁽⁷⁾

The AIC-K signed the New Contract, whose main purpose was to "adapt" it to the NEP system, with the STO on 25 December 1922, and achieved the transition from the joint management with the Russians to the sole one on 1 February 1923. 1 March 1923 marked the official start date for the AIC-K, marking the start of full-scale operations.

Under the sole management the AIC-K enterprise immediately began to attain a remarkable development. To take one example, since October 1922 the total number of workers has been decreased from 2,307 to 2,041 (88.5%), mostly by reducing the

(6) Cf. Report of Haywood's Trip to Kemerovo, Siberia, in: ПГАСПИ, 515/1/4300/19-46.

(7) "Организация АИК-К...(1921-1923)," 91-93; Галкина, *АИК-К*, 62, 64-65; Morray, *Project Kuzbas*, 123.

office forces, watchmen, etc. Coincident with this the production has increased, the production of coal per person during March and April 1923 being three times that produced during October 1922. ⁽⁸⁾ The year 1923 brought the organizational consolidation of the AIC-K as a Soviet enterprise with *special features* (See Chapter 4).

In 1924 the AIC-K operated entirely outside the framework/control of the Soviet economical institutions. The coal in Kemerovo was taken over in principle by the Soviet Government, and its sales channels were limited, so the start of coke production from coal was eagerly awaited. The opening of a chemical plant on 2 March 1924 provided a major impetus for its enterprise development. At that celebratory gathering, “Long live the Little International in Siberia!” was shouted. Thus, an industrial core was emerging and was about to grow from this first combination of coal mining, coke making, and chemistry. This also represented “a new financial basis” for the AIC-K. ⁽⁹⁾

While the AIC-K was obliged to again postpone the transfer of Nadezhdinsk plants (in Northern Urals) in the above-mentioned New Contract, it was already planning to integrate the operations of Kol’chugino and Prokop’evsk, south of Kemerovo. Kemerovo was only the starting point with the Kuzbas Project. Taking advantage of an opportunity of coke production, the AIC-K aimed to work toward realizing the integration of coal mining and metallurgical industries throughout the Kuznetsk Coalfield. ⁽¹⁰⁾

In response to AIC-K’s demands for an expansion of its operations, the STO established a committee for investigating both the AIC-K’s enterprise and its opponent, Kuzbas Trust, within the People’s Commissariat of Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection through March into June 1924. After a two-month on-site investigation beginning at the end of June, in early September it approved to transfer the management of coal mines of Leninsk (formerly Kol’chugino) and Prokop’evsk and Gur’evsk plants from Kuzbas Trust to the AIC-K. As a result, the AIC-K integrated half of the Kuzbas Trust’s territory and, at the same time, was to assume 50% of the latter’s debts. But new considerable debts were discovered after the transfer was decided and Rutgers was unwilling to finally accept the decision. In the end, that

(8) S.J. Rutgers, “Report on Kuzbas,” *Kuzbas*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 29.VII.1923, 1-2.

(9) Koos [Visch] to Nel [Visch], 5.III.1924, in: *Nederlanders bouwen*, 120-121; Moryay, *Project Kuzbas*, 157.

(10) “Kuzbas Development,” *Kuzbas*, Vol. 1, No. 9, 20.I.1923, 5.

problem was settled by the STO's promise of even more financial support. By early 1925 the AIC-K acquired an area equivalent to the entire Netherlands, operating seven mines and three plants with 6,100 workers. ⁽¹¹⁾

The enterprise of the AIC-K continued to expand and develop further from 1925 to 1926. It is characteristic in it that the AIC-K quickly started taking action on making and realizing the next plan "Tel'bess" (iron ore producing area), located further south, though the AIC-K had only just set about integrating practically Leninsk and Prokp'evsk coal mines and Gur'evsk plants. In short, the AIC-K began to aim at the integration in the entire Kuznetsk Coalfield at its early stage and never gave it up until the very end. It is clear that for AIC-K the decision to liquidate itself at the STO conference on 22 December 1926 came as a complete surprise.

When Rutgers was mostly away from Russia for medical treatment from July to November 1926, he received repeatedly from foreign colonists complaints and dissatisfaction with K.N. Korobkin, who had arrived in Kemerovo in April 1926 as a replacement for Rutgers, and desire for Rutgers' return to work. In response to that, Rutgers repeatedly requested through telegrams and letters that the relevant authorities consider the dismissal of Korobkin. The STO conference on 19 November 1926 did not decide to dismiss Korobkin, but it did resolve to take necessary measures to retain and utilize foreign workers and engineers. At a meeting which was held by S.V. Kosior, secretary of the Central Committee of the CP on 2 December 1926, just after Rutgers' return to Moscow, he declared: "I [Rutgers] am ready to keep taking on the leadership of the AIC-K, provided that Korobkin be replaced by a Russian manager."⁽¹²⁾ In the end, the STO (and the CP too) were either unwilling or unable to find "a Russian manager" and decided to keep Korobkin as deputy. As a result, there was no room for STO's accepting the condition (underlined above) proposed by Rutgers. ⁽¹³⁾

(11) "Деятельность АИК-К...(1922-1926)," 146-157, 164; Галкина, *АИК-К*, 111, 132-133.

(12) Kurzgefaßte Angaben, in: РГАСПИ, 61-62; "Деятельность АИК-К...(1922-1926)," 163; *Nederlandesr bouwen*, 184.

(13) Regarding Rutgers' conditional consent, Galkina, Tarle, and Morray have offered some questionable interpretations. Galkina has explained as follows: "Rutgers' requirement was willing to be satisfied *only* on condition that he could undertake complete direction of, and responsibility for, integrating the AIC-K into the overall economic system. But Rutgers, tired of the constant struggle for what he had built with his own hands, demanded an experienced assistant. His condition was not accepted" (Галкина, *АИК-К*, 131 [my *italics*]). Tarle has similarly qualified the condition and described the declaration like a final settlement: "In November 1926 S.V. Kosior, secretary of the Central Committee of the Party, took over him [Rutgers]. S.J. Rutgers agreed to

But Rutgers never gave up: As Rutgers could not take the responsibility on himself without a competent deputy, he got to withdraw his conditional consent and to (temporarily) entrust his chairmanship to Korobkin on condition that Begemann (H.P. Haverkamp-Begemann; mechanical engineer) be named not only as one of the two deputies for Korobkin, but “also as representative of still remaining colonists.” And Rutgers again urged Korobkin to “issue necessary instructions to do everything necessary to retain the foreigners.”⁽¹⁴⁾ After the AIC-K was liquidated on 1 January 1927, Rutgers’ efforts to bring in such a deputy as representative of colonists were to be made for some time, with a glimmer of hope.

Previous researches have only touched on the reorganization of “Kuzbassugol” and the downfall of Korobkin after the liquidation of the AIC-K, but, to tell the truth, even after its liquidation Rutgers, with the aid of Begemann, attempted to retain foreign engineers leaving and promote the next plan “Tel’bess.” In the end, Rutgers’ efforts did not bear fruit. The possible reasons are as follows: (1) The successor manager, Kotin, did not oppose the plan “Tel’bess” from the outset, but he constantly interfered in technical issues and did not get along well with Begemann; (2) Top engineers had left Kemerovo, making it difficult to proceed with the plan; (3) It was difficult for Begemann to take over negotiations in Moscow in place of Rutgers.⁽¹⁵⁾

Chapter 2 A New Interpretation on Its Foundation

The main reason why the deliberations for the foundation were prolonged for

return to the Colony *only* on condition that his deputy of the outstanding Soviet specialist be appointed” (Тарле, *Друзья страны Советов*, 345 [my *italics*]). Morray has honestly described the proposed condition, but he seems to have overinterpreted it: “At the end of 1926 he [Rutgers] again returned to Moscow, where he offered to resume duties as Director in Kemerovo on condition that Korobkin be removed and a new Russian deputy named. His condition was not met, and Rutgers had to face the fact that his authority in Moscow was not sufficient to vanquish a Russian of Korobkin’s standing” (Morray, *Project Kuzbas*, 173). All three explanations are vague. Galkina and Tarle, in particular, have removed Rutgers’ demand for Korobkin’s dismissal and replacement from the condition. Rutgers demanded Korobkin’s dismissal because it was becoming difficult to keep foreign staff back and, more importantly, retain the “special features” exhibited by foreigners under Korobkin’s leadership. This issue was exactly the point for Rutgers.

(14) Kurzgefaßte Angaben, in: ПГАСПИ, 626/1/6/63.

(15) Kurzgefaßte Angaben, in: ПГАСПИ, 626/1/6/64-70.

nearly half a year was not the merits or demerits of the enormous financial support from the Soviet Government, as researchers have emphasized so far, but the disagreement over who should have jurisdiction over the Colony and who should better guarantee its “autonomy” that Rutgers stressed the importance of sticking to during the deliberations. One side was the STO and the other was the Supreme Council of National Economy (VSNKh), which promoted the provision of concessions to foreign capitalists and insisted the Colony should also be operated on a commercial basis. In the end, it was decided that the Colony would be founded under the jurisdiction of the STO. But the STO had entrusted preliminary consideration to the VSNKh, a specialized committee specifically involved in the foundation and management of the Colony, and for that very reason, attempts by the VSNKh to “intervene” in the Colony would be unavoidable even after its foundation. It has ultimately been foreseen that the disagreement between the two sides over its jurisdiction would continue.

Chapter 3 Problems with Periodization

The Division of the AIC-K into Periods

The Division into Periods by L.Iu. Galkina	The Division into Periods by A. Yamanouchi
① Organizational period (20.X.1921 ~ VIII.1922) “.....characterized by the predominance of the syndicalistic mood in the colony”	① From Proposal to Approval of the Foundation (12.VI.1921 ~ 12.XI.1921) ○ Establishment of the AOC and Its Operations (2.I.1922 ~ III.1923)
② Preparatory period (VIII.1922年 ~ III.1923) “.....characterized by the weakening of the influence of the Wobblies”	② Preparation for Operations till Restart with the New Contract (16.XI.1921 / I.1922 ~ II.1923) ○ From Reorganization of the New York Bureau to Its Dissolution (1.IV.1923 ~ 1.II.1927)
③ Managing period in the Kemerovo district (III.1923 ~ XII.1924) “.....distinguished by the strengthening of the position of communists and the most highest tempo of development”	③ From Regular Operations till Expansion of Enterprise Scale (1.III.1923 ~ XII.1924)
④ Active period of the expanded colony (I.I.1925 ~ XII.1926) “the strengthening of Russification; the removal of differences between AIC and ordinary Soviet enterprises”	④ From Further Development of the Enterprise to Its Liquidation (I.I.1925 ~ XII.1926) ⑤ Aftermath of Its Liquidation (I.I.1927 ~ II.1928)

The division of the AIC-K into periods is presented by Galkina. I list it in the left column of the table on the previous page, and my own division in the right column.

Galkina only adds short annotations for each period (characteristic excerpts are quoted in the table). Looking at these, Galkina's main interest is not in the development of the AIC-K's enterprise itself, but is rather partisan and focused too much on the conflict between the Wobblies and the Communists. It is difficult to grasp how the AIC-K actually developed its enterprise from Galkina's division of periods and the annotations. My division is based primarily on the subtitles of each Part in above series of articles, and follows the changes that occurred as AIC-K's enterprise developed.

Chapter 4 Problems with the Interpretation of the IWW Tendency

1 Mass Meeting vs. Technical "Efficiency"

There were problems with the "mass meeting," which was taken seriously by pro-IWW colonists as a system that guaranteed "freedom of criticism from below." Soon after Rutgers arrived at Kemerovo, he posed the problem with the mass meeting (for example, inefficiency that even the technical details had been discussed and resolved there) and tried to improve the deficiencies of mass meeting by introducing "a certain discipline." Although this attempt drew resistance from IWW supporters, what Rutgers was concerned with was the issue of technical "efficiency" in production, in other words, the inevitability of industrial management by specialized technicians. This was supported by the argument in the article "Workers' Control," which was published on 1 July 1922 in a local organ of the IWW, *Industrial Worker* and reprinted in *Kuzbas* on 20 September 1922, saying that "Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as 'Democratic Control of Industry,' at least not in the sense of 'Democratic Management'; "It might, it is possible to imagine, result in some sort of dictatorship of the technician, rather than a dictatorship of the proletariat, as far as production is concerned." Rutgers' critical response to the mass meeting and emphasis on technological "efficiency" in production provided a valid criticism of IWW-style Colony management.

2 Dreams and Reality of the Wobblies Group

In the Colony a group of the leading Wobblies (Haywood, Barker, S. Berg, J. Masukevich and others) who kept on adhering to the original ideals and principles on which the AIC-K had been founded (“Kuzbas idea,” to use the phrase from Barker’s recollection⁽¹⁶⁾) was being formed. The only time this group fought entirely with the Managing Board was over whether the AIC-K should adapt itself to the NEP system and make some institutional changes in the autumn of 1922. Indeed, their argument was not persuasive in heated discussions when faced with the real issue of how they could contribute to the economic reconstruction of Soviet Russia. As they were so attached to the “Kuzbas idea,” they could not propose anything other than maintaining the *status quo*. Nevertheless, they still left something like a hope for this international social “experiments they could not attempt under the profit-system.” They did not fight with the Managing Board on the level of being in conflict with the “Communists” that Galkina and others emphasized. Most members of the group never broke off relations with the AIC-K until its liquidation.

3 The Wobblies as the “Counterpart” of Communists

Why is it that not only American researchers Smith and Morray, but also Russian researchers such as Galkina tend to be too fixated on the binary oppositional interpretation of “Communists vs. Wobblies”? The most important conflict was between governmental organs (VSNKh, Gosplan, etc.) and the AIC-K. However, these were “opponents in argument” and disputes were inevitable under the difficult economic and financial situation at the time. In fact, there was another serious conflict, which was caused by hostile acts of Russian “spetsy” (specialists). They were always hostile to the process from the start of AIC-K’s operations to its expansion. N.P. Rastopchin, chairman of the STO [investigative] committee that investigated this conflict, wrote the following in his recollection, published years later: The “spetsy” of the competent authorities, who became members of the STO committee, openly opposed its [investigative] report and revealed a tendency to obscure Kuzbas Trust’s management and operation system, which did not actually

(16) T. Barker, “Lenin Inspired Us—A Veteran’s Reminiscences,” *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 52, No. 4, IV.1970, 159.

justify itself, and to underestimate and conceal the achievements of the AIC-K enterprise. ⁽¹⁷⁾ The “struggle with ‘spetsy’” was such a serious issue for Rutgers that “their slander or false allegations against the AIC-K were considered political crimes.” ⁽¹⁸⁾

Russian researchers have sometimes made do with vague descriptions of the former conflict/controversy, and have not directly addressed the latter conflict/struggle, so no description comparable to Rastopchin’s recollection can be found among them. It is likely that Russian researchers have not placed importance on these two conflicts, and in order to divert attention from them, they have placed more importance on the Wobblies as the “counterpart/villain” than the historical fact dictates, and emphasized “Communists vs. Wobblies.”

Chapter 5 “Autonomy” and the Retention of the “Special Features”

Originally, in the first “plan for Industrial Labor Colonial of foreign Workers” addressed to Lenin in June 1921 the following was stated clearly: “It will be absolutely essential that the labor colony gets a free hand to manage its own affairs and to stimulate what energy can be put to further the development.” ⁽¹⁹⁾ Rutgers also stated the following in the opening article of the inaugural issue of *Kuzbas*: “‘Autonomous’ colony means that the Soviet authorities have guaranteed a sufficiently free hand to manage their own interior affairs in order to make possible the highest degree of efficiency. No more.” ⁽²⁰⁾ In order to contribute to the economic reconstruction of Soviet Russia, which was the just cause of the AIC-K, it was essential to improve “efficiency” both technically and socially. To achieve this, the AIC-K also needed to be guaranteed “a free hand,” in other words, “autonomy.”

(17) “Деятельность АИК-К...(1922-1926),” 152-157.

(18) Kurzgefaßte Angaben, in: РГАСПИ, 626/1/6/26-27. Rutgers addressed his detailed memorandum, including a supplement on a battle with “spetsy,” to the Central Committee of the CP. On 9 July 1924 the Politbureau of the Central Committee referred it for discussion and passed some resolutions, one of which was related to a countermeasures against difficulties made by the “spetsy” and has not been taken up enough by researchers. Ibid.

(19) РГАСПИ, 5/3/246/2-6; 515/1/4306/59; “Организация АИК-К...(1921-1923),” 72.

(20) S.J. Rutgers, “Kuzbas. An Effort to strengthen Soviet Russia,” *Kuzbas*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 20.V.1922, 1.

Having started on such established principles, the AIC-K gradually developed despite encountering various difficulties due to it being an unprecedented project. In order to further develop to realize the just cause, the AIC-K needed to obtain any positive support from Soviet governing bodies. However, in reality, since it became difficult to obtain such support, the AIC-K had no choice but to make some institutional changes in line with the economic development under the NEP, and in fact, that would be the only option for the AIC-K. Rutgers' original dream of forming a new workers' republic (or, in the words of a certain colonist, "a new REPUBLIC OF LABOR")⁽²¹⁾ was gone and all that remained was how to aim at accelerating its economic development by increasing the technical "efficiency" in production as much as possible, on basis of "autonomy" within the AIC-K organization.

First of all, AIC-K's headquarters was to be located in Moscow as the center of trade. This also required a clear definition of what was meant by the term "autonomy." Many colonists, including the leading Wobblies, interpreted "autonomy" as "individual license and individual freedom of action in their conduct within the industry," rather than as autonomy of an organization within the framework of Russian institutions.⁽²²⁾ As a result of this interpretation, efforts were made to settle AIC-K's operational and technical issues through mass meetings. Their interpretations and arguments were not persuasive as mentioned above. At the time, Rutgers (with Reese) sent a letter to the STO, saying that "within the present Managing Board there are various differences of opinion which will put a brake on the preparatory work for actual production."⁽²³⁾ In other words, Rutgers was afraid that the internal conflict would affect the "efficiency" in production and ultimately hinder the just cause of contributing to the economic reconstruction of Soviet Russia.

Galkina viewed this AIC-K's trend, in other words, "Russification" as a natural and inevitable process and could see it as simply the start of full-scale operations, with the AIC-K being transformed into a normal Russian "commercial trust," in other words, being incorporated into Russia's overall economic system (which means that the AIC-K will be placed under the jurisdiction of the VSNKh rather than the STO).

(21) Cf. S.J. Rutgers, "Industrial Labor Colonies," *Moscow; Organ of the III Congress of the Communist International*, 1.VI.1921, 2, in: ПГАСПИ, 626/1/12/11-15; "A Letter from Siberia," *Kuzbas*, Vol. 1, No. 7, 20.XI.1923, 8.

(22) "Status of the Autonomous Industrial Colony 'Kuzbas'," *Kuzbas*, Vol. 1, No. 11, 1.IV.1923, 8.

(23) "Организация АИК-К...(1921-1923)," 96.

For Rutgers, the “Isolation” of the AIC-K was a dangerous experiment that could potentially undermine the general interests of Soviet Russia, and the trend toward strengthening the “Russification” was unavoidable, but the prerequisite was that the “autonomy,” which had been gradually weakened, be retained in the form of the “special features.” To be specific, these conditions were “all the progressive and rational things that the colonists had been adhering to,” “high efficiency of instructions with a minimal amount of administrative personnel [foreign staff],” “combining our statistics and management system with the introduction of the latest production methods,” and the right of appeal to the STO. In the end, these conditions were not accepted either, and these issues were resolved with the liquidation and reorganization of the AIC-K, which was the worst possible outcome. The importance of Rutgers’ insistence to the end on preserving the “special features” that were the last bastion of “autonomy” and on retaining the foreign staff who guaranteed it, has never been recognized by any AIC-K researchers until now.

I would like to ask why they did not recognize the importance of this. This is because they did not thoroughly examine the documents left behind by Rutgers, who was the person most directly involved. The only sources they used in their research from Rutgers were the 1935 memoirs “Encounters with Lenin” and articles, reports, etc. printed in *Kuzbas*. The Rutgers documents were donated by Rutgers’ daughter, Geertruida C. Trincher-Rutgers, to the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (now RGASPI) on 31 January 1983. While Tarle and others may not have been able to view them, current researchers such as Galkina can view them, and in fact I have used them as the main sources for this article. ⁽²⁴⁾

Chapter 6 Over the Evaluation of Rutgers

The on-the-spot report that the colonists, secretary Hellen C. Wilson and doctor Elsie R. Mitchell, contributed shortly after returning to the US after the liquidation of the AIC-K, was specific and detailed. However, it was based only on what they had seen and heard about, and they consistently criticized Rutgers as a “dictator,” stating, “It seemed a pity that the man on whom the dictatorship fell was a Hollander. His

(24) Of course, the Rutgers documents I have used still need to be verified again by using meeting minutes of the STO and other organizations and reports submitted by Rutgers on each occasion, and I would like to leave this to future researchers.

brief residence in the United States had resulted in a dislike and distrust of everything American—especially democracy.” Smith continued this evaluation of Rutgers as a “dictator.”⁽²⁵⁾

In response, N. Sparks, chemical engineer who was a colonist in the first half of the AIC-K, evaluated Rutgers as follows: “He was the only one of the management board that commanded, if not agreement, at least a necessary modicum of respect from all sides at the enterprise.”⁽²⁶⁾ It should be noted here that, although highly appreciated, there is a reservation “if not agreement.” This reservation is due to the “bureaucratic” or “centralized” management characteristics that have often been pointed out in evaluations of Rutgers, and is often treated critically. However, for Rutgers, “top-down” management and instruction were sometimes unavoidable, such as the introduction of “a certain discipline” to make up for shortcomings in mass meetings and the unavoidable response of “some sort of dictatorship of the technician” to improve the technical “efficiency” in production. In this regard, Paula Garb expands on Sparks’ evaluation by summarizing it as follows, which was probably valid at least in 1923-24 before he fell ill: “[Rutgers] put a stop to the endless meetings and bickering over petty daily problems. To the displeasure of many of the workers, who believed every single matter should be decided by the collective, Rutgers began making decisions himself and insisted that they be followed without question. Fortunately for the Colony, he made the right decisions. He became so well respected that by the time he asked to leave in 1925 no one wanted to see him go. He was strict but fair and, most importantly, an excellent manager.”⁽²⁷⁾

Rutgers, who was known for his “strict” discipline, made the introduction of “discipline” a condition for accepting leadership roles in the midst of a serious situation. His resolute feelings were expressed in a long typed letter addressed to Heywood and A. Pearson, Jr. on 27 August 1922, after the Colony general meeting introducing Pearson as chief engineer, who had just arrived with the fourth group: “...the Soviet Government would not turn over this property to a group of colonists,

(25) H.C. Wilson/E.R. Mitchell, “A Light-running Utopia. Kuzbas-American Colony in Siberia, ‘Liquidated’ because of Internal Friction,” *Asia* (New York), Vol. 28, No. 12, XII.1928, 962; Smith, *The Kuzbas Colony*, 193-194.

(26) N. Sparks, “Lenin and the Americans at Kuzbas,” R.S. Cohen/J.J. Stachel/M.W. Wartofsky (eds.), *For Dirk Struik. Scientific, Historical and Political Essays in Honor of Dirk J. Struik* (Dordrecht/Boston, 1974), 625.

(27) Paula Garb, *They Came to Stay. North Americans in the U.S.S.R.* (Moscow, 1987), 22.

no matter how well they were organized, unless they had a man whom they considered qualified to administer it. It seems I am the Goat [=Scapegoat]. If we take over these mines, I am going to take them over. If they get on fire, I will be called to trial in Tomsk [by local governing bodies]. I am the man that is responsible. It is rather a serious situation for a man to get into. I cannot undertake this unless discipline is accepted in this colony.”⁽²⁸⁾

Chapter 7 A New Evaluation from the Perspective of Post-liquidation Development

Regarding the evaluation from the perspective of economic development after the liquidation of the AIC-K, the evaluations of all researchers are almost unanimous. Here are two examples from shortly after its liquidation. Ruth Kennell says: “Taken as a colonization scheme or a social experiment, Kuzbas was a failure. But as an industrial undertaking it succeeded and its work lives on.”⁽²⁹⁾ Wilson and Mitchell make this evaluation: “The specific task of completing the chemical plant and modernizing the Kemerovo mines had been accomplished; both were producing and profitable. Our coke was being used in the steel-mills in the Urals... Some of our successes were not lasting, but the completed, producing plant remains as a substantial contribution to the industrial system of Russia.”⁽³⁰⁾ Its contributions increased further during World War II. “When the Germans overran Donbas, the Soviet Union lost over 60 per cent of her coal output. But in 1943 Kemerovo produced 25 million tons of coal. The chemical plant was the only coke plant still in the Soviet hands during the Nazi occupation. It supplied 2,000 enterprises with coke.”⁽³¹⁾

Kuzbas was fortunate to be located in a geographical location that made it difficult for German troops to invade. It is important to recall here the rebuttal that Rutgers made to one of the arguments against the Kuzbas Project, which argued that the Kuznetsk Coalfield should be given out as a capitalist concession: The region was close to the undeveloped interior of Russia, and “...chances for a bona fide concession

(28) ПГАСПИ, 515/1/4299/145-147.

(29) R.E. Kennell, “The End of Kuzbas,” *The Nation*, Vol. 128, No. 3318, 6.II.1929, 172.

(30) Wilson/Mitchell, “A Light-running Utopia,” 1038.

(31) R.E. Kennell, “Lenin Called Us: A Kuzbas Chronicle,” *New World Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Fall 1971, 97.

in the Kuznetsk Basin on basis of immediately putting up a large amount capital, are at present very small. Moreover it would be extremely important, if a region of so tremendous significance for the future development could be kept out of the hands of our class-enemies”; “Russia can utilize foreign experience and training in modern industries...without the interference of capitalist concessionaires.”⁽³²⁾

Rutgers’ original idea for the project arose from a search for other ways to utilize “foreign *capital*” while avoiding the intervention of “foreign *capitalists*.” He sought cooperation with foreign *labor* without the help of foreign *capitalists*, and required concessionaires to “the supply of labor and technical and organizing abilities” as well as “the supply of *capital* in the form of machines, initial expenses, food funds, etc.”⁽³³⁾ On the other hand, given the country’s severe financial situation and hardship at the time, Lenin was willing to offer concessions to foreign capitalists. Lenin, despite his views on concessions, supported Rutgers’ plan of “without the help of foreign capitalists” because he was keenly aware that this plan was part of the broader international labor solidarity movement. For Rutgers, granting concessions for the Kuzbas Project to capitalists would have been absolutely unacceptable, but I believe he avoided directly opposing it by cleverly using its geographical location as a pretext. In fact, the AIC-K’s Kuznetsk Coalfield became “a region of so tremendous significance for the future development.”

The fact that the AIC-K had already achieved the economic development necessary to make such a contribution during World War II was likely due to **the following consistent and proactive attitude toward expanding the scale of its operations**: (1) The AIC-K had been merging enterprises in the surrounding areas from an early stage, and had consistently aimed to integrate the management of the entire Kuznetsk Basin Coalfield until the Tel’bess plan. (2) The AIC-K was originally conceived as an industrial workers’ colony in both Kuzbas and the Northern Urals (Nadezhdinsk plants), but in the fall of 1922, when approval of the latter plan was in doubt, Rutgers enthusiastically advocated the so-called “Ural-Kuznetsk Combinat” plan at the Presidium conference of the Gosplan, which was not taken seriously by the Gosplan due to the economic and financial condition at the time (this was to be realized after the first Five-Year Plan).⁽³⁴⁾

(32) РГАСПИ, 5/3/246/4, 8; 515/1/4306/60, 63.

(33) Rutgers, “Industrial Labor Colonies” in: РГАСПИ, 626/1/12/11-12.

(34) Э.Б. Генкина, *Ленин—председатель Совнаркома и СТО. Из истории государственной деятельности В.И. Ленина в 1921-1922 годах* [Lenin—chairman of the Sovnarkom and STO.

If the AIC-K had not built the foundations for economic development in just five years (in extremely cold and other adverse conditions, although the country was finally emerging from the chaos of the Civil War), it is doubtful whether the Complex would have been able to support the country's economy to the extent that it was during World War II. In the sense that it made this possible, AIC-K's reputation as something that started as the "Little International in Siberia" and created a major industrial enterprise is unshakable.

Chapter 8 Was It a Failure of Idealism?

As we conclude this article, let us answer the question posed at its beginning: "Was this Project based on international labor solidarity a failure of idealism? If so, what were the problems?"

The AIC-K was started with the aim of **(a) contributing to the economic reconstruction of Soviet Russia** and **(b) realizing social experiments and creation based on international labor solidarity and the principle of "autonomy."** ⁽³⁵⁾ However, since the pursuit of **(a)** was the just cause, if **(a)** was in jeopardy, the pursuit of **(b)** had to take a back seat, and the AIC-K was faced with a dilemma in which both goals were difficult to achieve. Although there were fundamental problems, i.e., difficulties, the two main elements that motivated the colonists to participate in the Kuzbas Project were: "The first is the **enthusiasm** among workers and technicians in capitalist countries **for the social experiment** to overthrow capitalism and to build socialism. The second may be found in an overestimating of the all-powerfulness of modern technique, when liberated from the restraints in the capitalist world. Together they explain as well the difficulties and the disappointments, as the successes and the final results" (Rutgers' recollection in the 1950s). ⁽³⁶⁾ In short, it was especially the "enthusiasm for the social experiment" of **(b)** that enabled the proactive attitude toward expanding the scale of operations mentioned above to be maintained, and the contribution to **(a)** to be more solid.

From the history of State activities of V.I. Lenin in 1921-1922] (Москва, 1960), 162-163.

(35) In "Article for Am. pre[ss]" Rutgers made the following appeal, incorporating the meanings of (a) and (b): "Join the 'United economic front' [to strengthen Sov. Russia] in the name of International Solidarity, join the INTERNATIONAL LABOR-COLONY KUZBAS!" ПГАСПИ, 626/1/11/[unconfirmed lists after list 36].

(36) Autonomous Industrial Colony Kuzbas (A.I.K. Kuzbas), in: ПГАСПИ, 626/1/9/5.

On the other hand, the Soviet Government had some hope for the AIC-K and provided financial support for **(a)**, and as the NEP system was established, it came to believe that **(a)** could be achieved by the Government itself, that is, by “russifying” the AIC-K. Then another problem appeared. In the wake of Rutgers’ prolonged medical treatment and the issue of his deputy selection, the “Russification” progressed so rapidly that the pursuit of **(b)** was ultimately driven to failure.

The AIC-K was unable to achieve **(b)**, and in that sense it seems difficult to overturn the assessment that it was a “failure of idealism“. Although the AIC-K had internal problems such as a shortage of senior staff, internal conflicts due to differences in ideas and perceptions of the “autonomy” that was sought, and the death of Bronka Kornblitt (Rutgers’ interpreter and secretary) and Rutgers’ medical treatment, it continued to demonstrate high productivity, as Galkina summarized: “It is evident that the colony was much more efficient when operated by its own management than it was under the command of the Soviet director.”⁽³⁷⁾ In order for such AIC-K to achieve further economic development (for example, expanding the sales channels for coal, coke, and other chemical products), it had no choice but to enter the economic system of Russia as a whole, which was seen by the Soviet Government as a favorable condition for promoting the “Russification” of the AIC-K. Not a few colonists opposed the “Russification” and advocated the “Isolation” for the sake of **(b)**. But Rutgers recognized that refusing the “Russification” would make **(a)** more difficult and that the “Russification” was already unavoidable. However, he made the final condition that the foreign staff be retained, as they would maintain the “special features” essential to **(b)**. In the end, the fact that even this condition was overlooked by Soviet governing bodies suggests that there was **a fundamental problem on the Soviet Russian side**, in that they did not accept even the last condition, which had its roots in “autonomy.” Finally, it is recalled that not only among Russian “spetsy” but also among governmental organs, sentiments contrary to international labor solidarity were sometimes expressed, such as that they could manage on their own without help from foreigners.

As a conclusion it is argued that AIC-K’s “idealism” did not end with just failure, and that the cause of its failure was not solely its own fault, but also on the Soviet Russian side. How far Rutgers and his colleagues have come since Lenin said at the turbulent conference of the STO on 30 September 1921: “Dear Comrade Rutgers,

(37) Галкина, *АИК-К*, 199.

don't get too excited, I promise you not only some freedom, but complete freedom [within the organization]"! ⁽³⁸⁾

Key words: Autonomous Industrial Colony "Kuzbas," S.J. Rutgers, V.I. Lenin, STO, VSNKh, Gosplan, IWW, Autonomy

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(38) РГАСПИ, 626/1/6/6; cf. С. Рутгерс, "Встречи с Лениным" [Meetings with Lenin], *Историк-марксист*, 1935, No. 2-3 (42-43), 95.