

A.M. Markevich, "Was the Soviet Economy Planned? Planning in the Soviet Ministries in the 1930s"

Advocates of the Soviet economy usually cited planning as its main merit. They meant that all economic agents had plans that had been coordinated with each other. Planning managed to use resources rationally and reach the highest possible rate of growth. Eugene Zaleski investigated national planning at the level of government. He concluded that the priority of management over planning had been the dominant feature of the Soviet economy. As a result he defined the Soviet economy as "centrally managed" rather than "centrally planned". But until now we knew little about planning at the middle level of the Soviet system, in the Soviet ministries and main administrations. This problem is investigated in the paper. On the base of archival materials from the ministry of heavy industry and the ministry of light industry the following questions were studied: annual and quarterly planning mechanisms in the ministries; who prepared and signed ministerial plans; the frequency of changes in ministerial plans.

Despite the fact that practically all units of the ministries were involved in the planning process, ministries didn't have officially approved plans. The "final" variant of the draft plan, created by the ministry's planing department, played the role of a plan. These drafts were constantly in the process of correction. By the end of the year, quarter, and so on, the ministry's planning department had often created a new version of the draft plan on the basis of which to write the report. Research shows that Zalesky's definition of the Soviet economy is correct. The priority of management over planning is seen best of all at the ministry level. In the Soviet economy the aim of ministerial planning was not to create ministerial plans but to exchange information between the ministries and their subordinate economic agents.