

Economic consciousness and behavior: state and trends (1990 – 2012)*



**Jean Terent'evich
TOSHCHENKO**

Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Philosophy, Professor, Chief Editor of the journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences "Sociological Studies", Dean and Head of the Department of Theory and History of Sociology at the Division for Sociology of Russian State University for the Humanities (zhantosch@mail.ru)

"People consider that the main difference of the bygone epoch from the present is that it was bad earlier, but we moved forward, but now we mark time and even take bribes for this"

S. Leskov, publicist ("Izvestia", December 24, 2003).

Key indicators of economic consciousness and behavior. In the Soviet Union the ideology predetermined the policy of social equality, social justice and social protection. Many provisions of this program were implemented. However, the 1970–1980s witnessed a paradoxical phenomenon: one issue was stated, another was implemented. Moreover, this conflict worsened, intensified and had a greater impact on people's consciousness and behavior.

Despite official propaganda, reassurance in advantages of the socialist way of life, Soviet people became more and more convinced that "it was impossible to live such a life" (S. Govorukhin).

The situation aggravated due to the opinion that in the West people lived richer, better, had opportunities to use so many goods and services, which were reachable only in the distant future, or not seen at all in our country.

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It was caused by the fact that innovation and pioneer spirit of the provisions declared in the USSR, as well as the fear of revolution forced the Western leaders to take into account the needs of the time and carry out many activities to provide a wide range of social services. Thus, consciousness of Soviet people combined these conflicting aspirations – formal, declarative and personal, individual, which ultimately manifested itself in the indifference to the fate of socialism in the early 1990s.

Therefore, the main indicator of economic consciousness, in our opinion, is such a phenomenon that proved itself as a result of the long-term competition between capitalist (Western) and socialist (Soviet) development models: ***the initiators of socialist programs did not realize many progressive ideas, but their opponents, in fact, did it, according to their social programs*** (see: Toshchenko, 2009).

However, the indicated weaknesses and failures of the Soviet system and the tendency

to welcome the achievements of the Western countries soon turned into the belief that the expectation of positive change had not occurred or, at least, demanded another turning point in the understanding of the ongoing changes.

According to the All-Soviet/All-Russian studies, estimating the economic situation of the population for nearly a quarter of the century (supervised by I.T. Toshchenko, W.E. Boykov), people have been skeptical about the changes (*tab. 1*).

The analysis of these data shows that the negative estimates have dramatically increased, although the data of the late 1980s – early 1990s revealed optimistic expectations, hopes for the radical improvement in their well-being. People did not assess proclaimed promises, but the results achieved. Economic consciousness of people clearly recorded/records the current situation and caught/catches the main features of the functioning of the economic mechanism

Table 1. What were the consequences of the transition to market relations?
(in % to the number of respondents)

Answers	1990	2012
Level of well-being has decreased	33	47.9
Inequity in remuneration has increased	12	45.5
Plundering of labor resources has increased	13	54.5
Inflation has increased	17	52.9
Number of economic crimes has increased	18	56.4
Only the rich has benefited	27	47.9

Note. The study was conducted May 24–31, 1990, 1525 people in 17 regions of the USSR were surveyed (Arkhangelsk, Ashgabat, Baku, Volgograd, Grodno, Zaporizhia, Irkutsk, Kishinev, Moscow, the Moscow Oblast, Orel, Riga, Rostov-on-Don, Semipalatinsk, Tbilisi, Chelyabinsk, Yakutsk).
The study was conducted October 5–10, 2012, 1201 people of 18 and over in 12 subjects of the Russian Federation were surveyed (Krasnoyarsk, Stavropol, Khabarovsk krais, the Volgograd, Voronezh, Irkutsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Sverdlovsk and Chelyabinsk oblasts, Moscow and Saint Petersburg) by the sample representing the employees of major economic activities, employed in enterprises of different ownership forms.

that puts people in a paradoxical position – the rejection of certain vices of a system does not compensate the changes, which were even more hazardous.

But the paradox remained a paradox: some just spoke, others took action. And as the story and the Marxist doctrine confirmed repeatedly, action succeeded.

At the same time, on the background of this global contradiction the current differences developed, emerged, aggravated, giving rise to new specific paradoxes inherent in both the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. As for the Soviet period, in the Soviet Union the property subject was extremely impersonalized: it was something amorphous and universal – the state and society. Despite constant talks that every Soviet person had the sense of the owner, as he/she was the owner and manager of the national wealth, the awareness of belonging to the solution of fundamental problems of life did not prove this statement. In the period of growing alienation from the socialist property, which, surprisingly, expended due to the increased efforts of official propaganda about the progress of developed socialism, the bitter joke was popular in the 1970–1980s: “There is the sense of the owner, but there is no owner”.

The Soviet economy failed to implement Lenin’s idea that socialism could only win due to advantages in productivity growth. And this performance in the period of “developed socialism” stagnated and even began to give ground in virtually all sectors of the economy. The lag in productivity became obvious at the last stage of development of the socialist economy. With all its distortions of

official statistics the productivity in industry decreased by one and a half–two times, in agriculture – by 3–5 times.

In modern Russia, this gap widened: labor productivity in industry comprised 20–25% of the world average, and in agriculture – about 15% (the data of the Ministry of Economic Development, 2014). The paradox of that time was quite vividly captured in the ironic phrase: “We do not sow, or plow, or build – we are proud of the social order”. And this “pride” without a solid financial base could lead only to frustration, bitterness, distrust and such contradictory attitudes of Soviet people as: “We have a better social system, but they have a better life”.

In the conditions of market economy there widely spread paradoxes. One of these paradoxes is an attitude towards market economy and its main leading actors – bankers, entrepreneurs, major owners, etc.

But, first of all, a little history. When the idea of the market began to penetrate into public consciousness, it was not necessary to persuade people – life did itself. First, during perestroika since the mid-1980s the expectations of the majority of people had been associated with the belief in a sudden breakthrough in the national economy development. But in the early 1990s the population was concerned about another fact: having assessed worthlessness of the economic policy implemented by the initiators of perestroika, people began to pay attention to other possible measures, in particular, those used by the countries with a high level of development and standard of living (Dushatskii, 1998; Il’ichev, 2005).

If we look back at the dynamics of changes of public opinion in relation to the market, the introduction of private ownership of land and some other market problems, just a few shared these ideas at first. By the end of 1989–early 1990 public consciousness experienced a significant shift. The All-Russian research under the author’s supervision in May 1990 showed that the market introduction (fully or partially) was positively assessed by 43% of the Communists and 28% of the population. By March 1991 there had been 57% of the market relations supporters. In 1991 and 1992 70–80% of the working population recognized the market acceptable for their life.

However, the growth of hardship in connection with Gaidar’s shock therapy resulted in the negative assessment of market reforms (up to 80% of people evaluate the economic situation in Russia negatively). People were disappointed and frustrated (*tab. 2*).

Thus, orientation on the market as a primary means to upgrade the economy and lifestyle has not become a key issue in public and private life. People compare failures of the Russian experience and the experience of countries that consistently and successfully

work in the market environment. The split in the understanding of market opportunities still exists, despite some increase in positive assessments of its forms and methods. That is why the stance of the Liberal Democrats (previously supporters of the “Democratic choice of Russia” and now of “Right Cause”) seems absurd and pretentious, as they try to present themselves as the only market reformers and the rest as their opponents.

The real situation is different: all political forces, from liberal to communist, from agrarian to patriot-national parties are market oriented. The discussion is about the price, people should pay for the transition to new economic and organizational forms of production.

But, unfortunately, this controversy continues to be dominated by old habits – “if you do not agree with me in everything without exception, then you are against me, my program, my ideas and views”. But people do not live according to laws (often far-fetched and absurd) of political struggle, not by preferences and morals of political parties and movements, not in accordance with socio-economic concepts and theories, but taking into account real life. And due to this they find themselves in an extremely

Table 2. Has the country gone in the right direction since August 1991?, %

Answers	2003	2005	2007	2011, October
In the right direction	30	25	28	42
In the wrong direction	47	50	37	39
Difficult to answer	23	25	35	19

Source: *Obshchestvennoe mnenie-2008* [Public Opinion-200]. Moscow: Levada center, 2008, p. 177. Available at: www.Levada.ru/press/2009072202.html

contradictory, paradoxical situation, when they can not make the right decision, feel confident in the environment, understand the contradictory situation, pushing them into mutually exclusive actions.

Public consciousness of people does not consider political and economic categories, no matter whether they are monetary, fiscal or social. In everyday life people ask themselves and others: “who is guilty and responsible for their plight, for the lack of social and legal protection and support?”

People often blame those who wield power: the President, the Government, the State Duma and bureaucracy as a whole. But this is some abstract criticism, for the situation changes frequently in the higher echelons of power and it is increasingly difficult to accuse a certain person; there is too uncertain situation with the so-called elite, the stagnation or leapfrog of high level temporary workers.

The situation is unusual, as approving the ideas of market economy; people begin to seek out those who have put them in this social stalemate, and try to find a way out, including taking measures to stop their humiliating status, the status of beggars and boarders. People have a desire to work, a clear head and hard-working hands: they should live a decent life.

But who prevents it?

Therefore, it is not surprising that dissatisfaction begins to focus on those individuals who actually represent the market, namely businessmen, bankers, entrepreneurs and all actors of the new economic theatre that are associated with

them and often called as “new Russians”. In fact, they pave the way for new economic relations and represent the triumph of new realities.

But since their rise as representatives of the market often involves the most shameless and criminal forms of profiteering and grabbing, international and domestic speculation, money laundering, these people are associated with criminals. It is often not far from the truth.

According to the experts, 25% of managers and entrepreneurs do decent business. According to the Levada center, in 2005 almost half of the citizens (44%) believed businessmen’s activity was harmful for Russia. This situation has changed little nowadays.

The sociological data analysis help to reveal the causes of the given assessment of the economic situation in the country and, therefore, to understand why the credibility of the subjects (actors) of economic activity is falling or being seriously questioned (*tab. 3*).

The data analysis shows that if in 1990 the distrust of state economic policy prevailed among the population (62%), i.e. people blamed the country leadership, in 2012 they started to blame the mechanism of the economy functioning – corruption, mutual protection, existence of mafia groups in governance and trade. It should be noted that the evaluation of such a vice, as corruption, does not differ much from the 1990 data, at first glance.

However, if we consider that the impunity of law violators was estimated as high by 35%

Table 3. Which of the following circumstances, in your opinion, hinders economic development in our country? (The sum of the responses does not equal to 100% because the survey methodology presupposes several options. The responses are listed in the descending order); in % to the number of respondents

Answers	2012	1990
Mutual protection and corruption	48.4	46
Impunity of law violators	36.8	-
Failures in economic policy	34.9	62
Mismanagement	30.4	-
Administrative arbitrariness of the authorities in the economy management	24.6	30
Lack of qualified managers	18.7	-
Lack of conditions for entrepreneurship	14.2	23
Monopoly of producers of goods and services	10.4	34
Leveling of employees' wages wage workers employed	7.8	44
Impact of gangs on the economy	7.4	-
Dependence of the economy on political and ideological dogmas	7.3	28
Transformation of production and services into the "hospice" for lazy people	4.8	34
Others	0.7	-
Difficult to answer	3.2	-
Note. The sign (-) means that this question was not asked in 1990.		

of respondents in the 2012 study; this is the same as mutual protection and corruption. So, the society believes that corruption in various forms of its manifestation almost doubled.

In modern Russia people are still concerned of administrative power abuse. Its estimates differ slightly in the last 25 years – 30% in 1990 and 24.6% in 2012.

Public consciousness can not apprehend the notion of new masters of life, which improves neither the Russian society, nor any of our notions of honor and dignity. People dislike flashy presentations, arrogance of wealth, excess and impudence of "new Russians", insolent behavior and a lack of any taste and ethical concepts.

Public consciousness (40–60% of the population) assesses market relations extremely negatively. In 1999, according to VTSIOM, 55% of the respondents estimated wealthy bankers and businessmen negatively. In 2006, according to the same research center, 84% of people responded positively to the criminal proceedings against the initiators of economic crimes (Komsomolskaya Pravda, June 9, 2006). The population considers these people as responsible for the collapse of the economy, poverty in the country, they can not be respected, supported, and some people advocate the use of repressive measures. Very often the surveys disclosed such opinions as: "they should be hanged, imprisoned, exiled to Siberia", etc.

In other words, the paradox is that public consciousness, supporting market transformations, is against subjects of these transformations, against those who really and actually represent the changes in the economic life of Russia. It is very true, as according to K. Stahlmann, no one believes that the Russian businessman is characterized by “fulfillment of the national principle, national objectives or national mission. Some people consider him/her as a combination of the worst sins: graft and disingenuity, greed, rudeness, “tough mafia style” (Stahlmann, 1999).

Further, the paradox of consciousness and behavior of people has emerged due to the official objective to “capitalize” consciousness – to make the private interest the principal, the leading. But life has shown that this objective has not brought the desired results.

On the one hand, the target to “work for the common good, for the good of society” is almost forgotten, faded in the public consciousness, although common, collectivist beginning, albeit in a distorted form, still exists. By the way, this factor is often ignored by the researchers who believe that the Western industrialized countries are the only example for Russia to follow.

On the other hand, the fund “Public opinion” gives a low estimate of such “capitalist” objectives, as acquisition of property (13%), and “investment in the enterprise” (5%).

Due to the problem of consciousness “capitalization” we should pay attention to the prevalence of such a paradoxical point

of view as comparison of the role and significance of private property with other forms of ownership. In public and private life of people, media, everyday life, and sometimes in scientific literature there is a simple, complementary approach to private property.

Sociological information, in particular the data of the Russian-Canadian studies, “Russia’s way to the market” (1992–1997) (supervised by J. De Bardeleben, J.T. Toshchenko, V.E. Boykov), indicated no significant differences in people’s attitudes to labor processes, production efficiency, growth in the productivity of work depending on the form of ownership (Toshchenko, Boykov, 1990).

And this becomes especially apparent in the assessment of the activities of joint stock companies where most workers continue to relate in the same vein, as in conditions of state ownership of the Soviet period. The evidence is protest movements in the number of enterprises, when the whole pathos of the struggle is directed against the state, but not against their leaders, responsible for enterprises with the specific form of ownership, isn’t it?

Analyzing this paradoxical situation, some researchers argue that under conditions of uncertainty, ambiguity, unpredictability of economic development the majority of shareholders are ready to delegate the powers to those who ensure stable and high salary and the solution of social problems in the enterprise. But it means that people want to waive the property right (Greenberg, 2012).

There is the indicative paradox, associated with the contradiction of social qualities of the consumer and employee in consciousness and behavior of people. Nowadays, they operate directly in the opposite direction, although it is well known that only when they are consistent with each other we can talk about the rational functioning of not only the economy, but of people’s economic behavior and way of life.

But in fact, the vector of efforts in these two roles mutually excludes each other. As a consumer, a person strives to meet his/her material and spiritual needs effectively and efficiently.

However, as an employee, a person faces a different situation. His/her work is not always paid for, or paid not adequately to the changing socio-economic environment. The production is often not popular. The results are often unnecessary and depreciated. The current economic situation is that more and more people – employees, peasants and specialists – are convinced that now neither mind nor talent nor skillful hands can guarantee success. Moreover, the prestige of labor, participation in the creation of material wealth and spiritual values are poorly paid and not supported by the state.

Today this view is shared by millions. For hard work and flawless and creative performance of duty do not determine people’s prosperity and confidence. The following data are indicate the decline in the labor significance indirectly (*tab. 4*).

So, we observe a certain, but still not decisive shift in the employee’s perception of his/her state. We can assume with a very high probability that the growth in positive estimates is achieved by those who had the opportunity to work on the basis of private initiatives or in private enterprises.

The “effective” means to maintain this contradiction-paradox is tax burden, which negates any manufacturing initiative. To sell and resell goods has become more profitable, than to produce them. It has become easier to buy cheaper and resell more expensive, using the “scissors” of prices between public and private sectors, between regions. And even it is better to speculate when selling foreign goods, including shuttles, delivering home everything that makes a profit – even defective and spoiled products. This massive shift to trade in all conceivable and criminal forms is not an evil intent, scourge or vicious intention; it is just more profitable than to manufacture goods.

Table 4. If you work more productively, will your wages increase? (in % to the number of respondents)

Answers	1990	2012
Yes, much	6	17,4
It will increase slightly	26	24,1
No/difficult to answer	68	58,5
Source: data of the Institute for Social Research.		

Thus, trade has become too exaggerated to the detriment of both production and distribution.

The special group of paradoxes, characterizing interaction between producers and consumers is formed by a widespread contradiction between the patriotic desire to support domestic producers through the purchase of Russian goods and products and the real behavior of these people when meeting specific needs – mostly personal and family. Its essence lies in the fact that domestic products give way to more quality and attractive goods, produced in the West. The declared desire contradicts real behavior. And this applies not just to one person or small groups – this is the real behavior of many Russian consumers, when the desire and intention does not coincide with actual activity.

However, in recent years there has been a shift in confidence to domestic products, which is especially evident in the situation regarding food products and light industry goods. In general, however, Russian goods lag behind foreign.

The significant paradox exists between the call to correspond to market democracy and everyday orientation on pathetic and primitive demands: how to survive.

Moreover, it is carried out in the conditions of the praised ability to make money in any way, the ability to swindle other people with the help of banks, funds and people who just like to make a fortune using all available, even unjust methods.

In August 1998 there was another robbery of people – the default that once again

undermined the credibility of the state and, at the same time, market relations.

The 2008 crisis was also shocking, seriously affecting the prosperity and confidence of people. It is, therefore, quite natural that after a long process of impoverishment people want to review the results of privatization, when those succeeded who managed to get a piece of the pie that belonged to the whole society. And when you take into account giant land speculation (and this is before the establishment of the institute of purchase and sale), theft of rare, unique natural resources and remains of state property, you think of lawlessness and chaos in the economic life in the country.

The paradox is that many people (50–60%) rely on the ability to suffer, adapt to the deteriorated situation, despite the fact that they are unhappy with their economic situation, assessing it as poor or very poor (70%). So, as in the case of paradoxes in the theory, there is a contradiction between imaginable and real world experience and they often contradict or oppose each other. Great dissatisfaction of the socio-economic situation, prevailing in the society, still coexists with positive or discreet personal assessment of the real situation.

Of course, we can talk about the process of primitivization of the needs, about the substitution of higher forms of needs satisfaction for lower, about the urge to survive in an extreme situation, but this does not negate the fact that people hope that these problems can be solved in a peaceful manner, but at a certain balance of political forces. Still people have an extremely unfavorable

Table 5. How do you assess the economic situation, in % to the number of respondents, N=1600

Answer	In the country	In the country	In the country	In the country	In the family	In the family	In the family	In the family
	1997	2000	2006	2012	1997	2000	2006	2012
Very good and good	0.7	2.2	9	13	3.8	5.5	9.0	18.0
Average	19.5	26	45	52	44.4	48.4	56	50
Bad and very bad	69.4	61.0	35	28	50.9	44.1	33.0	22.0
Difficult to answer	10.0	10.8	11.0	7.0	0.8	1.9	2.0	10.0

Sources: *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: ekonomicheskie i sotsial'nye peremeny* [Monitoring of Public Opinion: Economic and Social Changes], 2000, no. 4, p. 48; *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of the Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion.], 2006, no. 6, p. 66; *Obshchestvennoe mnenie-2008* [Public Opinion-2012]. Moscow: Levada center, 2013. Pp. 38, 47.

historical background, which strongly reminds of the enormous costs for everyone, if the resolution of the contradiction between the actual and desired is forcible (Gorshkov, 2011).

Especially it is necessary to dwell on the paradox, which prevails in the public consciousness due to the current economic situation – of a person and the whole country. If in the Soviet times it was common to say “we live modestly, but our country gets richer every day, but now people tend to assess the situation in the country worse than their own. This trend was observed in the surveys of the 90s (*tab. 5*).

There are more real and not exalted ideas about the market in the public consciousness nowadays. The increasing number of people is convinced that the market does not provide social protection, eliminate unemployment and poverty and prevent social stratification. As for the specialists involved in the economic reforms, many of them changed their attitude from the enthusiastic to critical and even negative assessment, because it became

apparent that the market by itself can not make rational structural changes in the long term, be socially efficient (provide social services, social needs) or prevent the process of monopolization of production and pricing. Public consciousness can not but respond to these processes. The result is “the cure”, i.e. release of failed expectations and hopes, and return to real life.

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The proclaimed advantage of market relations can not win way by itself. If they are not socially oriented, people (or a significant part of the population) face poverty, deprivation and despair. And this, in turn, is associated with potential social disasters.

So, the Russian society has a very little choice: either the way of original (bloody, nasty and very long) capital accumulation with the hope for a bright future after an unknown period of time or the way of market regulation, upgrade of forms and methods of the economic policy. And if choosing the first

war, you do not have to do anything (you let the history bring you to a prosperous life), then choosing the second you will make a great effort to become a decent man of the 21st century (see: Greenberg, 2012).

Thus, the economic paradoxes are based on huge shifts that have occurred in the society in general and in the life of every person. The Russian society experiences a radical change of the situation, based on the relations of property, ownership, use and disposal. We witness a change in the essential features of economic consciousness and behavior that during the Soviet period were not only regulatory requirements, but also became a tradition, stereotypes of thinking and activity of many millions of people.

The gap between the imaginary and real, between the official policy and socio-economic realities, between the orientations and results of the changes underlies the paradox that we observe in everyday life today.

It is worth noting that this paradoxical confusion was also caused by confused, self-contradictory concepts of the scientists representing various dogmatic, populist or second-hand ideas.

The economic management of the 1990s has revealed that, firstly, it is impossible to accelerate the transformation and ignore the lessons of international experience, even having best intentions. Secondly, scientific and political extremism, taking into account the absolutism of monetarist methods, does not consider the entire spectrum of modern beliefs, thus, it can not succeed.

Hence, the paradox of the current and future socio-economic situation, and, therefore, of economic consciousness and behavior of people, presupposes that the objective and subjective forces of the historical process act in different and sometimes opposite directions, that is why they ensure neither stability nor confidence in the speedy solution of urgent problems of the Russian society.

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