

CHRONICLE OF FORCED LABOUR 2017

Issue 1, February 2017



Public sector employees in Andijan planting lemons © ozodlik.org – mobil muxbir

The Uzbek authorities continue to attract employees from the education and health sectors to implement "public" works which do not usually provide additional payments (except for the cotton harvest). The type of work which teachers and doctors are traditionally obliged to carry out include street repairs, construction of public facilities, agricultural work, including the spring weeding of the cotton fields, the collection of fertilizer for farmers and the cultivation of silkworms. The peak period of forced mass mobilization of employees takes place in fall, during the cotton harvest. Failure to comply with participation in "public" works may lead to dismissal resulting in additional financial burden for state employees.

The situation of Uzbek farmers who are being deprived of their economic freedom remains deplorable. They are still denied the right to choose what to plant on their land and how to use their products.

In this Chronicle we offer a selection of articles on the mobilization of state institutions in agricultural activities in 2017.

Andijan: Teachers forced to grow lemons

19 December 2016

The head of the Andijan region is forcing schools and kindergartens to grow lemons. Representatives of the institutions who spoke to a correspondent of Radio Ozodlik complained that it was impossible to carry out official orders due to the lack of expertise and financial resources.



Public sector employees in Andijan planting lemons © ozodlik.org – mobil muxbir

According to a letter received by Radio Ozodlik, schools and kindergartens "were instructed to build one-meter-long and one-meter-wide small greenhouses. Officials of the regional administration came to the schools and kindergartens and gave orders to grow lemons. This is happening on a widespread scale in the Andijan region", wrote a resident of Andijan.

An employee of the Education Department in the Andijan region, told Radio Ozodlik that the idea of cultivating lemons had come from the regional administration.

Two directors of secondary schools in the Andijan region who spoke to Ozodlik said that they did not have any specialists or the material resources to produce lemons.

"We do not have enough money to grow lemons. The head of the region said that the banks would allocate loans. But loans have to be repaid. Well, even if we got money, where would we get the farmer? For the cultivation of lemons, you need an expert who knows this business. What are teachers supposed to do? Farm or teach lessons? My head is spinning", complained a school director who asked not to disclose his name.

Another school director in the city of Andijan said that his school teachers had started to plant lemon trees in pots.

"We don't have the possibility to build a greenhouse. The designated land for the school is located next to a football field and therefore there cannot be used for producing lemons.

Now we have been forced to grow lemons in flower pots", said the school director from the city of Andijan.

(Original source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/28184615.html>)

Fergana:

Educators involved in fertilization of grain fields with cow dung

20 January 2017

An Eltuz reporter in Ferghana city talked with teachers from the Tashlak, Buvayda and Kuva districts of the Ferghana region who said that they had to go to wheat fields once a week and help farmers fertilize the land.

The Office of Public Education in the Kuva district of the Ferghana region reported that the district administration had issued an order to attract school employees to fertilize grain fields.

"We were told that 10-15 people per day should come to help farmers to spread manure on the fields. I have to coordinate this work," said a public education worker who asked not to be named.

According to him, each school is supposed to allocate 2-3 employees to help farmers to fertilize a cornfield.

He said that farmers prepared bags filled with cow dung and put them on the field while other farmers brought carts with manure and dumped it near the beds.

"We put the manure in a bag or apron and then walk along the beds and spread it", said an employee of the Education Department from the Kuva district.

Eltuz talked to the management of the Public Education Department of the Fergana region, but they did not confirm this information. "We have teachers and educators of kindergartens who are mobilized only for the cotton harvest. And even then, they are not forced. They go of their own free will", said the official from the Regional Education Department.

An employee from the organization "Vatanparvar" in Fergana city said that public organizations had to help farmers look after the land, fertilize the ground and help with the irrigation of cornfields. "Well, if we collect all the cotton for the farmers, we might as well grow wheat and collect it too", said one of the "volunteers" from Kuva district ironically.

(Original source: <http://eltuz.com/?p=198514>)

Namangan: Gardeners are forced to make an agreement with the Municipality for cultivating silkworm larvae

25 January 2017

According to gardeners who responded to Radio Ozodlik, representatives of the local administration (Khokimiyat) went from house to house and warned people that those who did not sign the agreement would have to pay a bribe, known as "kokon money". A Khokimiyat (local government) worker reported that this was an order by the head of the regional administration.

According to one of the gardeners living in the mahalla "Tashlak" in the Naryn region, he was recently told to commit to growing moth caterpillars. "Representatives of the neighborhood committee and khokimiyat came to my home and said: 'This year you have to grow moth caterpillars. You have no right to refuse; if you refuse, you will have to pay money.' I asked: 'I only have two rooms in my house, where should I keep the caterpillars?' They answered: 'Then you will have to pay the money'", the farmer was told.



Silkworm Cocoons © UGF 2016

Another gardener, who requested anonymity, said that officials did not take into consideration the fact that people did not have the appropriate conditions for cultivating cocoons. "Following the order of the khokim, I created a garden of half an acre on arid land. In the beginning, no one told us about any obligation to grow cocoons. To grow cocoons, mulberry trees are needed. We have no mulberry trees! When we told the khokimiyat workers about this, they only shrugged and said: 'Then find some!'", said the gardener in the Namangan region.

Radio Ozodlik contacted a representative of the mahalla "Tashlak" via phone who said that this order came from the district khokim. "The khokim called our 'elder' (chairman of the mahalla) and said: 'Make the gardeners grow cocoons.' The elder did not dare to object. In our territory, there are about 15 such horticultural farms. We told them all about this

obligation. Some signed the agreement and some waited in indecision and resentment", said the representative of the neighborhood committee.

An official from the Naryn regional administration, who refused to give his name, confirmed by telephone that workers in the horticultural sector had to sign an agreement to cultivate silkworms. "This year, following a decision of the khokim, fishing communities, fruit and vegetable farms and farms growing poplar trees (for construction purposes) have also had to commit to the cultivation of silkworms. We are now compiling lists of farms and warning farmers about this obligation. But we will first carry out an inventory of existing mulberry trees and, based on these results, will allocate the cultivation of silkworm caterpillars. After signing the contracts, the silkworm management will provide mulberry leaves", the official said.

(Original source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/uzbek-fermer-shartnoma-paxta/28256759.html>)

Namangan: Farmers forced to sign blank contract forms

25 January 2017

Farmers in the Pap district of the Namangan region complained to Radio Ozodlik that they were forced to sign and put a stamp on a blank cotton procurement contract form. According to farmers, the police put pressure on them and even threatened to arrest anyone who refused to sign.

"On the contract form, there is no indication of any area in hectares of cotton to be cultivated, nor of any number of tonnes of cotton to be purchased. The paper is empty. Here is the blank form I was forced to sign. Farmers who refused to sign the agreement were searched for by the police and forced to sign and stamp the form. Otherwise, they were threatened with arrest", a farmer, who asked not to be named, wrote to Radio Ozodlik.

Another farmer told Ozodlik by telephone:

"In November last year, the khokim (of the Pap district) was urgently replaced by Uktam Ergashev who is the former first deputy of the Regional Administration. At the first meeting, he said that he had been appointed by the President and threatened to "crush" anyone who was against him. Instead of exposing the problems of farmers and searching for solutions, he warned us that the land of the farmers would be divided into 5 hectares and that he would carry out his threat. Now, he has demanded that we sign and stamp an empty form. He does not consider our capacity and the amount of cotton our land is able to produce. They can write as many tons as they want on the form and then return the contract. We are working under the same conditions as laborers from the last century. Nobody listens to us farmers. Nobody cares about the high prices of ICC services (Machine-Technology Park) and mineral fertilizers. They say, you have this amount of land and you must produce this much cotton or wheat, and that's it! We have not made any profit for several years. We barely make ends meet", the farmer said.

(Original source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/uzbek-fermer-shartnoma-paxta/28256759.html>)

Surkhandarya: Workers of Sanitary and Epidemiological Service forced to collect manure for fertilization of fields

1 February 2017

Workers in the Sanitary and Epidemiological Service (SES) in the Shurchi district of the Surkhandarya region were told to go around the villages and collect manure from households which keep animals. SES employees have to calculate the amount of manure available in rural residents' households, make lists and deliver this information to farmers.



© Elsevar 2016

One of the SES employees in the Shurchi district wrote to Radio Ozodlik: "Every day, we walk from one village to another, searching for cattle manure. Is it right that we are looking for manure instead of doing our real job?", he asked.

Radio Ozodlik talked with another SES worker from Shurchi, who complained that they were constantly being forced to do other work instead of their professional duties.

"We have become free mardikors (employees) for the khokimiyat (administration). Where there is a need for cheap labour, doctors or teachers are sent to do it. Now we have nobody left to do our main work. About forty employees from different district institutions have been divided into groups and sent to the villages".

A nurse explained the work they were required to do these days: "We come to the village, we go to every house and ask: 'How much manure do you have?' The owner of the house shows us a pile of dung. We estimate how much it is in kg or tonnes. Then we ask him whether he would sell the manure. If he says yes, we write that down in a notebook. This

way, we draw up a list of people who want to sell their manure. Then the farmers come and buy the manure to fertilize their land. "

According to the nurse, many people were not willing to sell their manure.

"We have problems with the electricity and gas supply. People in the villages make fuel from dry cow dung with which they use to heat the house and cook with. And many people say: 'We will not give it away or sell it.' Then we ask them to give only a little, a couple of bags, explaining that it is needed by our government. Some agree and others don't", said the SES employee.

The Deputy Chief Physician of SES in the Shurchi district, Musurmon Eshonkulov, confirmed in a conversation with Radio Ozodlik that his staff were sent to collect manure.

"The manure is a problem for the government. We help farmers stockpile fertilizer", said Musurmon Eshonkulov. When Radio Ozodlik asked why employees of the epidemiological center were involved in this work, the deputy chief medical officer replied: "Our people go from house to house to assess their hygiene conditions. They inform the inhabitants about the necessity of removing garbage and manure from the house."

An official of the khokimiyat Shurchi district, who did not give his name, confirmed by phone that SES employees were mobilized to collect manure on the orders of the regional governor and the Prime Minister.

"On the orders of the Prime Minister, SES staff are responsible for controlling the transfer of excess manure from the rural population to the farms, following the cleaning of barns and toilets. They check to see if disinfection has been carried out. They give lists to mahalla committees naming residents who are in possession of manure. In turn, the mahalla sends this information to the farmers who in turn collect and transport the manure to their fields", explained the official.

(Original source: <http://www.ozodlik.org/a/gung-ses-uzbek-shurchi/28272800.html>)

Employees of schools and hospitals in Andijan sweep the streets and whitewash kerbs

2 February 2017

In Andijan, school staff are sent to work on the landscaping of the city. Presently, one can witness well-dressed men and women on roadsides with brooms and buckets filled with lime. An Eltuz correspondent talked with several teachers and learned that the city administration had identified a certain area of the city which was to be put in order with the help of school staff. School workers clean roadsides and whiten facades of houses, helping to give the city a well-maintained appearance.

A teacher from a secondary school in the city of Andijan said that he had received such an order from the school director, and that students and staff of medical institutions in the city were also involved in this kind of work.



School employees working on the streets of Andijan © UGF 2016

In an interview with Eltuz, the teacher said that they had to buy lime to whiten the roadside kerbs at their own expense. He complained that because of the dampness and dirt it took a lot of lime and that the result of their work was almost invisible.

Another Russian language and literature teacher, who wished to remain anonymous, ironically remarked that he could now give lessons in labor.

"The worst thing is that we do this work in white shirts and a tie, and afterwards come back to school in the same clothes to teach lessons. There is no payment for this additional work. They say: "You will get your salary." But even if we were paid in addition to our salary, this does not mean that we can be pushed around", complained the teacher.

Eltuz spoke with an employee of the khokimiyat in the Andijan region who stated that this work was in connection with the visit of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Andijan.

"We expect a visit from the head of state. But there is no concrete information concerning the date of the visit. The employees of the City Beautification Management might not be able to prepare everything in time, and therefore, employees of public institutions and students are involved as well".



Teacher cleaning the streets © UGF 2016

Although the involvement of school and hospital employees in various "social" and agricultural work takes place throughout the whole year, officials say that such types of work were "Hashar", ie. that the employees were doing it on their own initiative and that none of this was forced on them.

However, it follows from conversations with such "voluntary" workers that this allegedly free additional work is a requirement for them to keep their main jobs.

(Original source: <http://eltuz.com/?p=198626>)
