

THE MARXIST-LENINIST RESEARCH BUREAU Report No. 11

THE ALEKSANDR SMIRNOV CASE (1928-38)

The Formation of the Smirnov Group (1928-29)

In February 1928, Aleksandr Smirnov*, who had been People's Commissar of Agriculture in the Russian Republic, was promoted to the position of Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU:

"In February (1928 — Ed.), the Rightist Commissar of Agriculture of the Russian Republic, Aleksandr Smirnov, was . . . appointed to the Party Secretariat".

(Stephen F. Cohen: 'Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography: 1888-1938'; London; 1974; p. 279).

and shortly afterwards Smirnov took the initiative in forming an opposition group. At his public trial in March 1938, the defendant Izaak Zelensky*, a former agent of the tsarist secret service, admitted:

"I joined the Right organisation at the end of 1928 or at the beginning of 1929, . . . I was recruited by A. P. Smirnov".

(Izaak A. Zelensky: Testimony at 1938 Treason Trial, in: Report of Court Proceedings in the Case of the Anti-Soviet 'Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites' (hereafter listed as 'Report (1938)'); Moscow; 1938; p. 325).

The A. P. Smirnov group

" . . . was Bukharinist in economic outlook".

(Stephen F. Cohen: op. cit.; p. 348).

but separate from the Bukharinist leadership:

"The top Rightists . . . refused to have anything do do with Smirnov's plans".

(Robert Conquest: 'The Great Terror: Stalin's Purge of the Thirties'; London; 1968; p. 31).

Their programme included the dissolution of most collective farms, the independence of the trade unions from Party leadership and the removal of Stalin from the post of General Secretary of the CPSU:

"Their (the A. P. Smirnov group's — Ed.) programme seems to have covered . . . the dissolution of most of the kolkhozes, . . . the independence of the trade unions. Above all, they had discussed the removal of Stalin".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 30).

The defendant Izaak Zelensky admitted at the 1938 treason trial that the programme of the A. P. Smirnov group also included wrecking and terrorism:

"At the end of 1931 or the beginning of 1932, Smirnov . . . told me of the new tactics which had been outlined by the centre of the Rights, and which consisted in the following: the use of double-dealing, a conspirative form of organisation, the adoption of tactics of wrecking, diversion, destruction, training insurrectionary cadres, the adoption of terrorism".

(Izaak A. Zelensky: Testimony at 1938 Treason Trial, in: Report (1938);

op. cit.; p. 327).

From the outset, the A. P. Smirnov group was underground and illegal:

"Smirnov's group . . . decided to go underground and formed an independent group known as 'Bolshevik Workers'. . . .

His first efforts were devoted to the creation of illegal cells in the more important working-class centres and the drawing together of all oppositional elements within the Party".

(Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov: 'Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party: A Study in the Technology of Power'; Munich; 1959; p. 193).

"A. P. Smirnov's group . . . had to a large extent gone underground, with a view to organising for a struggle".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 30).

Among prominent members of the A. P. Smirnov group were Nikolay Uglanov* (discussed in the paper on the Ryutin Affair) and Lev Karakhan* — later exposed as a German agent, as was admitted by defendants in the 1938 treason trial:

"RYKOV: Karakhan reported that the German fascists were, of course, very well disposed towards the prospect of the Right coming into power and would welcome it very much".

(Report (1938): op. cit.; p. 179).

"VYSHINSKY: Accused Bukharin, were you aware that Karakhan was a participant in the conspiratorial group of Rights and Trotskyites?

BUKHARIN: I was.

VYSHINSKY: Were you aware that Karakhan was a German spy?

BUKHARIN: No, I was not aware of that.

VYSHINSKY (TO RYKOV): Were you aware, accused Rykov, that Karakhan was a German spy?

RYKOV: No, I was not.

VYSHINSKY: Were you not aware that Karakhan was engaged in negotiations with certain German circles? . . .

RYKOV: Yes, yes.

VYSHINSKY: Treasonable negotiations?

RYKOV: Treasonable. . . .

VYSHINSKY (TO BUKHARIN): Were you aware that Karakhan was engaged in negotiations with the German fascists?

BUKHARIN: I was. . . .

VYSHINSKY: Did you endorse these negotiations?

BUKHARIN: . . . I did not disavow them; consequently I endorsed them.

. . .

VYSHINSKY: And so, accused Bukharin, you bear responsibility for these negotiations with the Germans?

BUKHARIN: Undoubtedly".

(Report (1938): op. cit.; p, 401-02, 407, 408).

The importance of the A. P. Smirnov affair lay, firstly, in the fact that it embraced senior officials who had never before been associated with any opposition:

"The views of A. P. Smirnov and his followers mark an important crux. For we find veteran senior officials who had never been associated with

any opposition".
(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31).

and, secondly, in the fact that it

" . . . was supported by important trade union officials".
(Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov: op. cit.; p. 192.

The CC/CCC Resolution on the A. P. Smirnov Affair (1933)

In January 1933, the A.P. Smirnov group was condemned at a joint plenary meeting of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission of the Party. Bukharin dissociated himself from the group:

"At the plenum, Bukharin . . . made a speech typical of the extravagant and insincere tone which was now conventional in ex-oppositionist statements, demanding 'the severe punishment of A. P. Smirnov's grouping'".
(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31).

A resolution of the Plenum charged the group with forming an underground opposition group:

"Smirnov and others in fact carried on anti-Party activity and opposed the Party policy. They established a factional underground group".
(Resolution of Joint Plenary Session of Central Committee and Central Control Commission, CPSU (January 1933), in: Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov: op. cit.; p. 194).

"At the January 1933 plenum , . . . the last of the new cycle of plots was exposed. . . . A. P. Smirnov . . . was charged . . . with forming an anti-Party group".
(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31)

"The group of . . . A. P. Smirnov . . . was discussed at the meeting of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission in January 1933. A resolution was adopted condemning the creation of an underground factional group, allegedly dedicated to the disruption of industrialisation and collectivisation and the restoration of capitalism".
(Roy A. Medvedev: 'Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism'; New York; 1971; p.155).

"In January 1933, still another underground opposition cell was unearthed, this one organised by the former Commissar of Agriculture, A. P. Smirnov, . . . They were accused of organising 'bourgeois degenerates' to attempt, like the Ryutin group, 'the restoration of capitalism and in particular of the kulaks'".
(Robert V. Daniels: 'The Conscience of the Revolution'; Cambridge (USA); 1960; p. 380).

Nevertheless, the members of the group

" . . . were treated leniently".
(Ian Grey: 'Stalin: Man of History'; London; 1979; p. 256).

The Plenum removed Smirnov from the Central Committee:

"The joint plenary session of the Central Committee and Central Control Commission therefore resolves . . .

to expel Smirnov from the Party Central Committee with a warning that if he fails to gain the confidence of the Party in his work, he will be expelled from the Party".

(Resolution of Joint Plenary Session of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission (January 1933). in: Aburakhman Avtorkanov: op. cit.; p. 195).

"Smirnov was removed from the Central Committee, with a warning that expulsion from the Party would follow if his future work did not merit trust".

(Roy A. Medvedev: 'Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism'; New York; 1971; p.155).

"A. P. Smirnov and others. . . . were merely reprimanded by the Central Committee, not expelled from the Party. Smirnov, the only one who had been on the Central Committee, was removed from it and threatened with expulsion from the Party if he did not mend his ways".

(Robert H. McNeal: 'Stalin: Man and Ruler'; Basingstoke; 1988; p. 146).

"A. P. Smirnov (was expelled -- Ed.) from the Central Committee".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31).

The Expulsion and Trial of A. P. Smirnov (1934-35)

In December 1934, Smirnov was expelled from the Party:

"Smirnov was expelled from the Party in December 1934 . . . for double-dealing and continuing his struggle against the Party".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31).

Early in 1935 Smirnov was arrested, tried for and found guilty of anti-Soviet activity and sentenced to imprisonment. He died in imprisonment in 1938.

The Trials of Uglanov and Karakhan (1936-37)

In 1936,

". . . Uglanov and others were given jail sentences".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 31).

while Karakhan was tried in 1937 for treason, found guilty and executed:

"On 16 December (1937 -- Ed.) . . . Karakhan . . . and others had been tried before the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court as spies, bourgeois nationalists and terrorists, had confessed and had been executed".

(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 272),

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

KARAKHAN, Lev M., Soviet revisionist lawyer and diplomat (1889-1937); RSFSR People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs (1918-20, 1922); USSR Ambassador to China (1923-26); USSR Deputy People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs (1930-34); USSR Ambassador to Italy (1934-37); arrested, tried for and found guilty of espionage and treason, sentenced to death and executed (1937).

SMIRNOV, Aleksandr P., Soviet revisionist politician (1877-1938); RSFSR People's Commissar of Agriculture, and simultaneously Secretary-General, Peasants' International (1923-28); RSFSR, Deputy Premier (1928-30); Secretary, Central Committee, CPSU (1928-30); expelled from Party (1934); arrested, tried for and found guilty of anti-Soviet activity and sentenced to imprisonment (1935); died in imprisonment (1938).

UGLANOV, Nikolay A., Soviet revisionist politician (1886-1940); secretary, Petrograd Party Committee (1921-22); secretary, Nizhny Novgorod Party Committee (1922-24); secretary, Moscow Party Committee (1924-28); USSR People's Commissar of Labour (1928-30); expelled from Party (1932); reinstated in Party (1934); re-expelled from Party, arrested, tried for and found guilty of anti-Soviet activity, and sentenced to imprisonment (1936); died in imprisonment (1938).

ZELENSKY, Izaak A., Soviet revisionist politician (1890-1938); Secretary, Moscow Party Committee (1920-21, 1924-31); Secretary, Central Asian Party Bureau (1924-31); Chairman, Central Union of Consumer Co-operatives (1931-37); arrested (1937); tried for and found guilty of treason, sentenced to death and executed (1938).

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