

Soviet Hostility to the Alash Intelligentsia

The leaders of the national liberation movement also understood clearly it was impossible for these objectives to be reached in Russia without creating a democratic system and giving freedom of choice to people who had previously been dependent on the metropolis. On this platform they were prepared to cooperate with the new regime. Expressing the general view held by the Alash party's founders, A. Baitursunov in a letter to Lenin wrote: "The proletariat of the Russian nation, which has for centuries been stealing from and oppressing the Kazakhs, must prove and demonstrate through deeds that they are the liberators of oppressed peoples and not their new subjugating masters who wish to sponge off them in place of the Tsar's bureaucrats." [1] At the same time he urged the Soviet leadership to tackle the escalating problems in Kazakh society in conjunction with the nation's political elite who had gained experience in the pre-revolutionary struggle. He wrote, ". . . among the Kirgiz [i.e., Kazakhs] there is a certain part of the intelligentsia that the people trust wholeheartedly and who, while not being immune to mistakes or losing their way, would never deliberately sell out their people no matter the reward or benefit. The most direct route, if the Russian proletariat wishes to gain the trust of the Kirgiz, is through these members of the intelligentsia." [2]

Were the calls of Baitursunov and others heard by the central leadership? Ensuing events and the process of Sovietization in the republic show that the Soviet government was confident it knew better than anyone the local problems and the ways and methods of solving such problems, and had no intention of handing over the initiative to anyone else in this regard. This was manifested in the following. Firstly, leadership posts in Communist Party organizations in the Kazakh oblast (up to the year 1925), and later the krai, were given to officials who were assigned from Moscow [3] and had no knowledge of local life or customs, and hence judged them "according to Moscow stereotypes." [4] As a result they had no "specific work plan" other than the basic instructions set out in the "Declaration of Rights of the Peoples of Russia" and the Russian Communist Party program. [5] Most of these officials, who had earlier been involved in revolutionary activities and the civil war, behaved themselves under the new conditions as some sort of higher caste of "celebrated heroes and liberators" and were carriers of that disease, Russian "Bonapartism" — i.e., viewing local problems from on high and with excessive simplification.

Secondly, while solidifying their grip on power in Kazakhstan, the Bolsheviks methodically and consistently propagated the view that the prerevolutionary Kazakh intelligentsia were some sort of reactionary, counter-revolutionary force that had acted in opposition to the cardinal interests of the Kazakh population on the whole. As an example, in the resolutions of the First All-Kirgiz (Kazakh) Party Conference it was noted unequivocally, "the Kirgiz intelligentsia have no connection (by origin or status) to the Kirgiz masses and are least of all connected with the interests of the poorest of the Kirgiz people." [6]

While did exist other views among the Communist Party ranks as to the place and role of those of the intelligentsia who were not party members, it was on the former that social policy of Kazakh Krai Committee (Kazkraikom) of the Russian Communist Party was to be based in subsequent years. Admittedly it could not have been any other way, given the political predominance of a party that explicitly claimed the solution to national problems lay in resolving class conflict. Stalin himself was the inspiration for this approach. Having raised the issue of Tatar "nationalism" (embodied by M. Sultangaliev) at the Fourth Meeting of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) with the responsible officials of national republics and oblasts in 1923, [7] he imposed the task of "turning Turkestan into a model republic" before railing against "Kazakh nationalism." In his letter to the members of the Kazkraikom Bureau of May 29, 1925, regarding the newspaper Aq-Jol (formerly an organ of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Turkestan and the Central Executive Committee

of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic), he took an emphatically negative view of the newspaper's line, adjudging that the critical comments on its pages "had no place in the country of the Soviets."

The Kazkraikom's stance towards "non-party intelligentsia" was also set out in the letter. He wrote: "I am against non-party intelligentsia educating Kirgiz youth in politics and ideology. We did not seize power to let the political and ideological education of our youth be handed over to the bourgeois, non-party intelligentsia." [8]

Stalin's letter essentially signified the hardening of policy towards the Alash Orda intelligentsia, restricting their activities in the fields of science, the arts and especially in the press. And what is particularly interesting is that the offensive that was to be launched against the main leaders of the Alash party (which had already long since ceased to exist as such) was prepared simultaneously by the various ranks of the Communist Party and OGPU. [9]

The Kazakhstan OGPU took to its task with enthusiasm, providing quarterly status reports "On the Activities of the Alash Orda and Kazakh National Factions." In one such report the activities of former leaders and activists of Alash and national factions in the final quarter of 1922 were described as being characteristic of a movement whose purpose was national liberation. Taken together with others, this document serves as confirmation that the Soviet leadership understood and recognized internally the existence of a real national liberation movement in Kazakh society. However, obscuring it in class-related slogans, they purposely wrote it off as anti-Soviet activity by the national bourgeoisie.

From about the year 1925 the process of forcing the Alash Orda intelligentsia out of printed media began. For example, on two occasions (March 2 and October 23) that year the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (hereinafter the "Central Committee") reviewed the status of the press in Kazakhstan. Decisions adopted by the Central Committee's secretariat on March 2, 1925, cite "inadequate control of printed periodicals on the part of the Kirgiz [Kazakh] Krai Committee and local party bodies" and "the influence of nationalistic members of the intelligentsia who are not party members on the leading political line in certain periodical publications." [10]

At a meeting on October 23, 1925, the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee heard a report by Secretary of the Kazakh Krai Committee F. I. Goloshchekin entitled "On the Kazakh Press," in which he focused on the "stranglehold" the Alash Orda intelligentsia had on the republic's Kazakh-language press. The Organizational Bureau, expressing its "understanding" of the situation and the need to increase party control over the Kazakh press, instructed the Kazkraikom "to organize a Press Department under the Kazkraikom and staff it with as many trained workers as necessary."

"Having noted the inadequate editorial work in general political publications of Tsentroizdat [the Central Publishing House for Peoples of the Soviet Union] in the Kazakh language," the Organizational Bureau proposed that the Tsentroizdat board "a) release all its Kazakh-language publications only after meticulous political editing; b) relieve comrade Bukeikhanov of his duties as editor." [11]

It was prescribed by the Central Committee's Press Department that the "general principle is to preserve a single, mass-circulation peasants' newspaper for each guberniia [province]" and close all uezd (district) newspapers (with the exception of Jïmisker Till). The range of departmental publications was also to be reduced. The final list of periodicals to be available in the Kazakh Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR) was to be submitted for approval to the Press

Department of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party. The Press Department of the Kazkraikom of the Russian Communist Party was instructed in the space of two months to study the state of literature in the Kazakh language and submit a "special report to the Press Department of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks)." [12]

By decision of the Kazkraikom Bureau dated June 10, 1925, the instructions given by Stalin and the Central Committee were accepted to be enacted and a circular was distributed among the provincial committees with recommendations on how to manage the national press and on procedures for using the national non-party intelligentsia in it. Local party organizations were instructed to step up the operations of their propaganda departments in support of control over local press.

All of this meant the chartering of a new course designed to force leaders and activists of the Alash movement out of public and political life. The realization of this course was accompanied, firstly, by purposefully and explicitly undermining the Alash Orda intelligentsia in the eyes of the Kazakh people by characterizing them as bourgeois, bais and reactionary, and, secondly, by encouraging acceptance into the upper echelons of the party and administration those Kazakh nationals who were willing to tow the line set by Moscow. Thus was the foundation laid for a new phase in the political life of the people and their intelligentsia. Intellectuals, who until that time had expressed general national and democratic interests, now had to hand over that function to party officials and Soviet nomenklatura, whose role was to fulfill Moscow's directives.

In order to at first isolate, and then eliminate altogether the thin layer of prerevolutionary national intelligentsia, the Soviet leadership chose a sophisticated method through which to punish it. In the decisions of the party congresses and conferences the important role of the small number of national intelligentsia was openly acknowledged, while in practice the policy was to squeeze the most active members out of public life. In their directives the Bolshevik leadership always noted that it saw better than anyone the internal problems in Kazakh life and therefore was in a position to solve them without the involvement of any "bourgeois intellectuals."

As early as the first years of the 1920s the central leadership began a course aimed at preventing any manifestations of "local separatism," taking resolute steps to allow the Communist Party to take root and survive under local conditions and working to bring about uniform living conditions and social structures. At this time certain languages and cultures were already given preference over others. The necessary foundations for successful implementation of these policies were laid by the migration policy of the Stolypin government, and this was continued during the Soviet period. In 1925 the indigenous nation accounted for approximately 58 percent of the republic's total population, compared to 81.7 percent in 1897. [13]

Around the same time the Communist Party's national policy moved away from the principle of self-determination in the structuring of the state, and the idea of social equality became noticeably dominant over the idea of freedom. In party documents statements of the following ilk became widespread: ". . . national problems can be solved only in the course of building socialism, the building of socialism is possible on the basis of close economic and political ties with the entire Union, the latter being a possibility only together with solution of the main problems in building socialism throughout the USSR."

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References:

1. T. A. Baitursunov, "Pis'mo tov. Leninu V. I. 17 maia 1920 g.," Arkhiv Prezidenta Respubliki Kazakhstan (AP RK), f. 811, op. 20, d. 568, ll. 46-46 ob.
2. Ibid.
3. Before Goloshchekin was sent to Kazakhstan as the First Secretary of the krai party organization the post was held by: S. S. Pestkovskii (1920), I. A. Akulov (1920-1921), M. Murzagaliev (1921), M. M. Kostelovskaia (1921), G. A. Korostelev (1921-1924) and V. I. Naneishvili (1924-1925). Of these, the only Kazakh was M. Murzagaliev, who led the oblast party organization for less than six months in 1921.
4. T. Sedel'nikov, "Tsarskaia okraina: vzgliad iznutri (Pis'mo V. I. Ul'ianovu-Leninu)," Mysl 7 (1993), p. 80.
5. Baitursunov, "Pis'mo tov. Leninu," l. 46.
6. Kazakhstanskaia oblastnaia (kraevaia) partiinaia organizatsiia v rezoliutsiakh i resheniakh konferentsii i plenumov obkoma i kraikoma, vol. 1, 1921-1927 (Alma-Ata, 1981), p. 33.
7. I. V. Stalin, Sochineniia, vol. 5 (Moscow, 1952), pp. 291-341
8. AP RK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 479-A, II. 1-2
9. The acronym OGPU stands for Ob"edinennoe Gosudarstvennoe Politicheskoe Upravlenie (Unified State Political Administration), later renamed the Committee for National Security, or KGB, of the USSR
10. AP RK, f. 141, op. 1, d. 377, l. 1
11. Ibid., ll. 33-38
12. Ibid., l. 38
13. N. V. Alekseenko and A. N. Alekseenko, Naselenie Kazakhstana za 100 let (1898-1997 gg.) (Ust-Kamenogorsk, 1999), pp. 61-63; Ana Till 1 (1991).
14. Partiinoe stroitel'stvo v Kazakhstane. Sbornik rechei i statei (1925-1930 gg.) (Moscow and Alma-Ata, 1930), p. 150.