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Purge of NKZem & TsUNKhU in 1937 and 1938

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A note on this presentation

- This presentation is based on work that I am completing for the volume ***'Years of Terror and Preparation for War, 1937-9'*** which is volume 7 of R.W.Davies ***History of Soviet Industrialization 1929-39***. I am responsible for the chapters on agriculture and demography and am trying to understand the impact of terror in these areas.

Major question

- To what extent was the purge of the senior figures in NKZem, TsUNKKhU explained by developments in these organizations at the time and to what extent were they part of the general nomenklatura purge?
- I argue that they were a particularly important section of the Nomenklatura purge that needs to be better understood.

A few words about how these government departments operated.

- From the Bolshevik point of view NKZem was an agency necessary to control agriculture and ensure that it provided the food surpluses that the state needed.
- Many of its leaders came from procurement or control agencies and had their prime responsibility to those agencies. We can call them enforcers.
- A few of the leaders became specialists, who genuinely tried to work to improve agriculture. We can call these the champions. But these specialist champions tended to be treated with political suspicion.

Some complications

- But we should not see this as a simple division between enforcers and champions.
- As well as enforcing fulfilment of procurement plans, those placed in charge of agriculture wanted to be seen as succeeding in their tasks and so did not want to cripple the peasantry. This led to some enforcers over time experiencing organizational capture which led to them siding with the champions.

Another complexity

- In the difficult political circumstances of the time, for champions to survive, they needed to moderate their defence of agriculture with a show of accepting the governments objectives.
- Finally there is a group that we can call 'collateral damage'.

Major external enforcement agencies

- Apart from the Party and security agencies we need to emphasise the role of NKRKI, TsKK, and then PKK and SKK, and the role of procurement agencies NKProd and then KomZag
- Note general history of former external enforcers being appointed to take charge of organization when previous administrations failed. Main examples are of course Kuibyshev and Ordzhonikidze moving from NKRKI to VSNKh and NKTP. Their deputy Yakovlev moved into NKZem, and he will later be replaced by former head of KomZag-Chernov

An important external enforcer

- An ambitious young man in Leningrad will make a spectacular career for himself by providing what appears to be a professional expert opinion that can be used to support politically convenient views even though they are devastatingly wrong.
- He is responsible for two important decisions:
 - A) In 1934 declaring demographic data indicative of famine to be falsified by wreckers in stat offices
 - B) In 1938 declaring that Osinski's attempt to assess harvest losses and deduct them from biological yield evaluations was wrecking and that amounts needed to be added

N. A. Voznesenskii, 1903-50

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Educated as Economist in the
Institute of Red professors 1928-
31

Dr of Econ Sc 1935

1934-9 member of Soviet
Control Commission

Nov 1937 dep ch Gosplan

19/1/1938 ch Gosplan

1939 TsK, 1941 Pbc, 1947 Pb

Sacked Mar 1949

Arrested 27/10/49,

Sent & Exec 30/10/1949



Classification of leaders

- Into
 - Enforcers
 - Champions
 - Enforcers who become captured by the institution and are gradually transformed into Champions

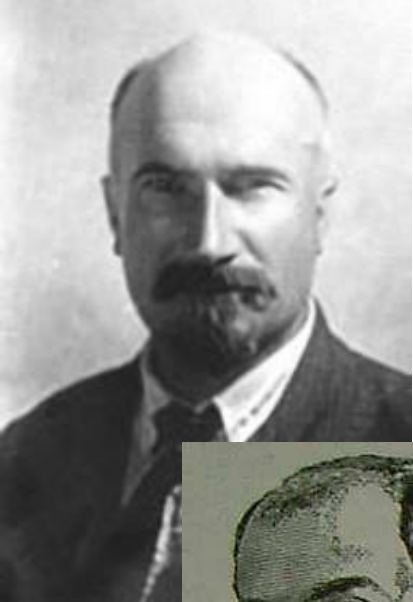
NKZem RSFSR, 1920-38



C. H. Sereda



Sereda d.1932
Osinskii* Champ shot
Yakovenko C-D shot
Smirnov, A.P*. E-Cshot
Kubyak ? shot
Muralov, A.I* Cham shot
Lisitsyn C-D shot



NKZemRSFSR 1929-34 & NKZems USSR 1929-41



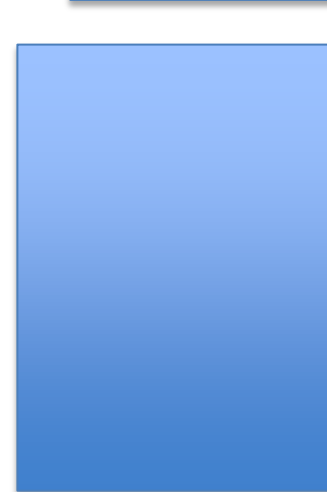
A.I.Muralov*	24/12/29-17/5/34	Arr. 20/7/37	Shot 3/9/38	Champion
Yakovlev	10/11/29-10/4/34	Arr. 12/10/37	Shot 29/3/38	Enforcer++
Chernov*	10.4/34-29/10/37	Arr. 7/11/37	Shot 15/3/38	E-C
Eikhe	29/10/37-29/4/38	Arr. 29/4/38	shot 4/2/40	Enforcer
Benediktov	15/11/1938-	Survived		Enforcer with Expertize

Heads of NKZemR & NKZemU

NKZem	When	Arrested	Shot or died
NKZemRSFSR			
V.V.Osinskii**	15/3/21-9/1/22	13/10/1937	1/9/1938
V. Yakovenko*	9/1/22-7/7/23	9/2/1937	29/7/1937
A.P.Smirnov*	7/7/23-20/2/28	10/3/1937	10/2/1938
N.I.Kubyak	16/2/28-24/12/29	13/6/1937	27/11/1937
A.I.Muralov	24/12/29-17/5/34	20/7/1937	3/9/1938
NKZemU			
Ya.A Yakovlev	10/11/29-10/4/34	12/10/1937	29/3/1938
M.A.Chernov*	10/4/34-29/10/37	7/11/1937	15/3/1938
R.I.Eikhe	29/10/37-29/4/38	29/4/1938	4/2/1940
Vacant	29/4/38-15/11/38		
Benediktov	15/11/38-	survived	Dies 1983

TsSU & TsUNKhU

Popov	Champ
Osinskii	Champ
Milyutin	Enf
Osinskii	Champ
Kraval	E-C
Vermenichev	C-D
Sautin	C-D
Starovskii	EnfwExpt



Directors of TsSU & TsUNKhU

Director	When	Arrested	Shot or died
P.I.Popov	Jul 1918-5/1/26	survived	dies 1950
V.V Osinskii*	4/2/26-3/3/28	13/10/1937	shot 1/9/1938
V.P. Milyutin	3/3/28-23/1/30	26/7/1937	shot 30/10/1937
TsUNKhU			
V.V Osinskii*	11/1/32-35	13/10/1937	shot 1/9/1938
Kraval	1935-31/5/37	31/5/1937	shot 29/9/1937
Vermenichev	31/5/37-5/12/37	5/12/1937	shot 8/2/1938
Sautin	1/38—10/40	survives	dies 24/8/1975
Starovskii	10/40-6/8/75	survives	dies 20/10/1975

Stalin's role in this

- He seems to have generally acted through his enforcers.
- But appears to have liked to hear independent figures who could tell him the truth, even when he really didn't want to hear it.
- He was in two minds about the champions, supporting them at some times and crushing them at others.
- Stalin's direct involvement and interests

Meeting of Agr Commissars with Stalin

	Yakovlev	Chernov	Eikhe	Benediktov	All when NKZ	All
1930	12		3		12	15
1931	24	1	2		24	27
1932	32	17	0		32	49
1933	36	49	1		36	86
1934	14	24	4		19	42
1935	23	13	3		13	39
1936	18	12	2		12	32
1937	36	9	4		13	49
1938			2		2	2
1939				2	2	2
1940				1	1	1 ₁₇

Meeting of Statistical & Planning Chiefs with Stalin

	Osin skii	Krzhizh anovskii	Kuiby shev	Mezh lauk	Smirn ov	Vosne senski
1930	3		5	2		
1931	0		15	7		
1932	0		??	14		
1933	3		35	17	1	
1934	3		50	10	2	
1935	1		6	14	5	
1936	1			22	6	
1937				14	9	1
1938						1
1939						9
1940						31

1) Connection of institutional leaders with major trials

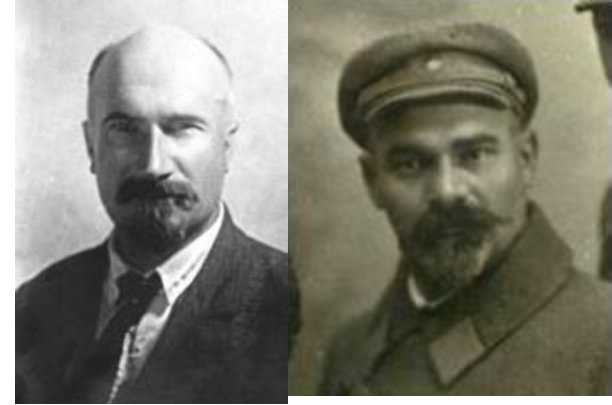
- ****** Billed as major oppositionist
 - A.G.Smirnov of Smirnov-Tolmachev-Eismont Opposition of 1932-4
- Real family link with major Oppositionist
 - Osinskii brother in law to V.M.Smirnov-Trot
 - A.I.Muralov brother to N.I. Muralov-Trot
- Three highly bogus links with Bukharin/Rykov Trial
 - ****** Co-Defendant Chernov-Rykov's link with Émigré Dam
 - Post humous ally Yakovenko sent by Bukharin to cause Kulak rebellion in Siberia
 - Osinskii Witness to attempt on Lenin's life

Family connections with real opposionists



- Osinskii
 - Had many active student friends particularly V,M, Smirnov whose sister he married, and Sapronov. Many become famous revolutionary leaders and were leading figures in the Democratic Centralist movement, but unlike Osinskii Smirnov became an active Trotskyist and was exiled in 1927.
 - Osinskii and his wife cared for Smirnov's son Rema
 - In 1930 and again in 1932 Mernov's sentence was extended
 - In 1935 a case was made against the CR DTs organization of Sopranov and Smirnov, and they were sentenced for 3 years
 - Smirnov appealed against this in 1936, but was executed on 26/5/1937
 - Osinskii's son was also arrested

Family connections with real oppositionalists



- A.I.Muralov
- Was the brother of the famous Trotskyist N.I.Muralov had been exiled to Omsk in Feb 1928, but had then been transferred to Novosibirsk in 1929, where he worked as an Inspector & dep plenipotentiary for Zernotrest in Wsiberia.
- In 1936 he became head of agr dept of division of workers supply in Kuzbasstroi where he was arrested on 17/4/1936. He was a defendant in the Show trial of 'Parallel-A/S Trot Centre 30/1/1937. Executed 1/2/1937
- A.I. Muralov had continued to try to intercede on his brothers behalf with Yagoda, Ezhov and with Stalin

In summary

- Two major enforcers who were not captured
 - Yakovlev and Voznesenskii (external)Both initially working for RKI or its successor would eventually be promoted to run the agencies associated with their enforcement activities
- Enforcers who were probably captured to some extent:
 - Kraval' and Chernov
- Champions
 - In TsSU Popov and Osinskii
 - In NKZem Muralov A.I.

2) Political problems within NKZem and TsUNKhU.

NKZem and TsUNKhU were both required to base their work and plans on false views of reality that were repeatedly causing problems.

There would be repeated attempts by specialists and champions to try to correct these views, or at least minimize the damage caused by them.

Stalin in the mid 1930s

Stalin was taking credit for rising living standards in the USSR, when his opponents had claimed that he would bring famine and disaster. He claimed that:

- The population was growing rapidly at 3 mln per year

- Grain production was reaching 7 to 8 milliard puds of grain per year. [114 to 130 million tons) about double pre-revolutionary levels.

Dealing with the problem

- Politicians, officials and organizations, including the statistical organizations who denied these claims were forced to officially change their minds.
- Many people and officials had been sacked and earlier arrested for challenging these claims, that had been embodied into plans and officially accepted as having been fulfilled.
- Were the purges in TsUNKhU & NKZem related to this problem? Was there a conflict between champions and enforcers?

Are the purges related to these problems?

- Purges initially seemed to move in the direction of the enforcers in both population numbers and in grain production. Because the 1937 census indicated that the population was 14 million less than expected, Yakovlev's commission declared the census was falsified and called for a recensus in 1939.
- And in response to attempts to reduce indicators of biological grain production that were over 20% higher than barn yield production Voznesenskii would argue for the levels to be increased further to include grain consumed by humans and livestock in the fields.

The early purges se were only temporary victories for the enforcers

- Yakovlev the main enforcer will be arrested on October 12th 1937 and with him will go many of his team.
- But this is not a victory for the Champions either because Osinski is himself finally arrested a day later on October 13, 1937, and Chernov will be arrested within the month on 7/11/1937.
- In March 1938 Bukharin and others are tried and shot. By the end of the year most people who could have gained politically from Stalin being shown to have been wrong had died.

The 1939 census in changed political circumstances

- In 1939 on the eve of the census Popov intervenes. He wrote directly to Stalin and Molotov warning them that the results of the new census will be equally low (14-18 million less than expected) and that this is a sign of Gosplan's expectations being wrong, rather than of wrecking in TsUNKhU.
- And contrary to all expectations Stalin accepts Popov's advice, and finally accepts a realistic evaluation of the size of Population

The 1939 census removed most distortions from population evaluations

- There is a widespread view that the 1939 census was still largely distorted by Stalin.
- This is incorrect.
- The major distortion was removed.
- There remained some juggling over the handling of the spets contingent. But this was minor in comparison with the distortions present earlier.

Distortion in agricultural reality remained

- Every year there would be a fight over not only what the level of grain production was but of what level of distortion would be applied. Some of this distortion had been removed earlier, but the final amount of this distortion (about 30%) was only removed by Khrushchev in 1953, when he found it politically useful to do so.

3) A brief review of chronology of purges of leaders of these agencies

- NKZem & TsUNKKhU had been severely purged earlier, but Osinskii & Kraval had interceded to save Kvitkin and others.
- 1937 TsUNKKhU purges initially centre around census and Yakovlev (PKK) request for NKVD review of staff
 - March Kurman & Kvitkin arrested
 - 31/5/1937 Kraval dir. Arrested
- Later
 - 13/10/1937 Osinskii fdir Arrested
 - 5/12/1937 Vermenichev dir Arrested
- They were largely completed by the end of 1937

The purges of NKZem leaders

- **Unfinished business**
 - Markevich, prev dep NKZem 1931-3 & founder of MTS, who had come into conflict with Yakovlev in 1933 had been imprisoned. On appeal he had been left in a state of uncertainty after Kirov's assassination when the positive reassessment of his case by a powerful Pb commission of Kaganovich, Kuibyshev, Akulov & Zhdanov was suddenly held up. Instead of being released Markevich will eventually be shot in January 1938

Unfinished business –Smirnov, A.P.

- Smirnov, A.P.(NKZemR, 1922-8) who had earlier been attacked as part of the Smirnov-Tolmachev-Eismont opposition in 1932 and been fairly lightly treated in 1933-4 was re-arrested and executed in March 1937.

New business-NKZem

- The first of the new arrests were fairly isolated before the June plenum
- **February 1937** Yakovenko NKZemR in 1921, a former Siberian peasant and Siberian partisan hero was arrested and charged with fomenting kulak rebellion in Siberia, especially amongst other ex partisons. At the time he held a relatively modest position of head of NKZem Research Institute for New crops (novo-lubii). Eiche probably involved.

The case of Muralov

- Muralov had been in trouble since the re-arrest of his brother and his attempted intercession in 1936.
- He was removed from dep NKZem in late 1936, but retained Directorship of VASKhNIL, until he was arrested in July 1937.
- He was already being targeted by NKVD as a leader of CR plots in NKZ from before the January plenum, but no action was taken until after the June in June plenum.
- Why was there no action before the June plenum?

Significance of June 1937 plenum for NKZem

- June Plenum
 - Ezhov's Report of progress from January plenum
 - A minor update report on constitutional changes
 - Three major but contradictory agricultural reports
 - 1) Yakovlev on Seed policy blaming saboteurs
 - 2) Chernov on Crop rotations arguing for serious change
 - 3) Chernov on improving MTS arguing for incentives & controls
 - The results- Yakovlev's thesis approved;
Chernov's deferred

What was happening with those conflicting agricultural theses?

- The old-guard enforcer was running with the current hysteria
- The current leadership of NKZem, who had been sent in as an enforcer was trying to introduce real change, which incidentally would have cast doubts on his predecessor
- For a while Stalin and the party leadership had appeared to entertain the idea of supporting a more scientific approach to agriculture, but then had sided with the enforcers

The enforcers seem to win

- The purge of Muralov and many of the NKZem leadership who were prepared to champion agricultural interests had been held up until the June plenum but now proceeded with full throttle:
- Kubyak fNKZR & Gaister dNKZU were arrested in June as the plenum was proceeding
- Muralov fdnkZU, fnkzR, Demchenko fNKZUk, Kalmanovich fdnkzU were arrested in July
- Tulaikov, Meister, other Agr specialists in August

But then a reversal in October 1937

- 12/10/1937 Yakovlev is himself arrested
- But this is not immediately to the advantage of those who championed the institutions.
- Osinskii is arrested a day later , and Chernov within the month

For NKZem a further upheaval in April 1938

- Eikhe's appointment as head of NKZemU on 29/10/1937 appeared to mark a great change in the political standing of NKZem with a candidate Politburo in charge, and it was probably he who had argued that he did not need to oversee him.
- But this was a very unstable arrangement, which seems to have quickly exploded.

On 29/4/1938 without any warning Eikhe is sacked while in office . The official reason was claimed to be nothing to do with Agriculture-Latvian Nationalism. But then again.

NKZem political leadership 1938+

- After a few months with the highest level of political leadership ever, in charge of NKZem, there were 7 months with no leadership.
- And then the appointment of an unknown very junior figure who combined professional training with great loyalty to Stalin.
- Benediktov.

Distortions of reality

- Benediktov had the flexibility to live with the distortions of agricultural reality that the enforcers had given him. He was politically too weak to do anything about them and they remained in operation to the immense disadvantage of Soviet agriculture until removed by Khrushchev in 1953.
- But as already mentioned the fate of population statistics was to be much better than this

Conclusions

- Purges of leadership of NKZem & TsUNKhu do appear to be related to some extent to the internal struggle over accepting correct or convenient views.
- All the participants in this struggle lost as the supreme political leadership changed its position and attempted to cover itself, at least until possible rivals had all been murdered.