

Aleksandr V. Reznik

Department of History, European University at Saint Petersburg, Russia

The Left Opposition within the RCP(b), 1923-1924.

PhD Project*

The subject of my research is the Left Opposition within the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the period of 1923-1924 and its activities within the RSFSR. It is known that the Left Opposition (also known to historians as the "Trotskyite" opposition) and her most prominent leader Lev Trotsky unsuccessfully opposed the intra-party fraction of Iosif Stalin, Grigorii Zinov'ev and Lev Kamenev (the *troika*). As a fore-runner of the United Opposition of the years 1926-1927, it was the first large-scale opposition within the party. Its struggle was formative concerning the main conflict lines within Soviet politics throughout the 1920s and of the early 1930s.

A number of important monographs have been devoted to the study of this subject by historians such as E.H. Carr, Richard Daniels, Igal Halfin and Simon Pirani.¹ All of them focused on crucial aspects of the political struggle within the Bolshevik party, thus the main actors and events that have played a decisive part in the outcome of the struggle are well-known. Classical historiography dealt with the Left Opposition within the trajectories of traditional political history, giving priority to the study of the struggle for political leadership at the top of the party hierarchy (Central Committee, Politburo etc.), focusing on texts and activities within the USSR's capital.

However, since the Left Opposition is a complex phenomenon that cannot be reduced to the activity of Trotsky and his supporters at the top of the party's hierarchy, it still awaits research in its entirety. By no means reduced to Moscow or Petrograd, the Opposition had adherents in various regions of the vast country. As I aim to show, the Left Opposition was a complex phenomenon depending on regional circumstances and on the dynamics of opposition "from below" and "from above". There is still a lack of research on the forms of oppositionary groups, the level and form of support for the opposition, and the impact of the struggle in the province on the general course of the nationwide struggle. It would be of high interest to study the oppositions as a social phenomenon and a product of economic and cultural contradictions, thinking of the opposition as a kind of social movements with grassroots politics. Last but not least, a study of the Left Opposition rooted in the context of labor history could be useful to shed light on political activity of workers in the early Soviet period.

Furthermore, the political technologies and the types of opposition activity require further revision. Igal Halfin has offered an original vision of the anthropology of Bolshevik politics based on the analysis of political language and discursive practices. Even though the semantics of Bolshevik politics are very topical, it is also important to delve into concrete

* Supervisor: Prof. Boris I. Kolonitskii (St. Petersburg).

¹ Edward Hallett Carr: *The Interregnum 1923-1924*, Baltimore, Penguin Books, 1969; Robert V. Daniels: *The Conscience of the Revolution. Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 1969; Igal Halfin: *Intimate Enemies. Demonizing the Bolshevik Opposition. 1918-1928*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007; Simon Pirani: *The Russian Revolution in Retreat. 1920-24. Soviet Workers and the New Communist Elite*, London, Routledge, 2008.

political practices which constructed different political fields full of individual meanings to be an active militant of the oppositional minority. For me, it is relevant to study such issues as political communication, notably circulation and useage of "secret" documents, Soviet press, and rumors. The norms and deviations within practices of struggle and the conflicts between generations of party members (party youth gave strong support to the opposition) also seem to be a promising subject of investigation.

The aim is to reconstruct the Left opposition as a complex phenomenon, mostly through archival sources as well as the press. A number of important documents from the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History has been published in the collection "RCP(b): The Inner-Party Struggle of 1923".² The collection contributed a lot to our understanding of the main events and outcomes of the conflict within the higher ranks of the party, particularly through letters, declarations and short hand reports from the party leadership.³ The introduction and detailed annotation by Valentina P. Vilkova makes this collection also a genuine contribution to research,⁴ however the provincial level of opposition only scarcely covered. The project aims to extend our knowledge of the Left opposition in the provinces, making use of regional archival material.

Contact: reznik07@gmail.com

² Valentina P. Vilkova (ed.): RKP(b). Vnutripartiinaia bor'ba v dvadtsatye gody. Dokumenty i materialy 1923, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2004. An earlier version of the collection was released in the United States (The Struggle for Power. Russia in 1923, Amherst, Prometheus Books, 1996). Documents on 1924 are presented only through a compilation on the "cleansing" of soviet and university party cells ("Atmosfera, sozdavshaiasia za poslednee vremia v partii, chrezvychaino tiagostnaia". Chistka v RKP(b) 1924 goda. In: Istoricheskii arkhiv (2008), 2, pp. 130-176).

³ See also the correspondence in: Bol'shevistskoe rukovodstvo. Peregovory 1912-1927, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 1996.

⁴ V.P. Vilkova: Ot sostavitelia. In: RKP(b). Vnutripartiinaia bor'ba, pp. 5-26.