

SECTION IV. STUDIES AND MATERIALS

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Former Worker Oppositionists' Personal and Personnel Files in the Russian State Archive of the Economy, 1918-1929*

Abstract: This article surveys information available in Russian State Archive of the Economy (RGAE) personal and personnel files for former Worker Oppositionists employed at high levels in military industry. The goal of research is to explore the connections that actually existed among former Worker Oppositionists after the movement was banned and how party and secret police leaders perceived these ties. The horizontal links between them in an increasingly centralized political and economic system and the ways in which they, as individuals, interacted with other "networks" in the Soviet Union during the 1920s-1930s may contribute to the overall project of studying networks in Soviet history. The conclusion is that the information found in these files is fragmentary, sparse, and challenging to contextualize without resort to richer source bases that are currently difficult to access.

Networks in Russian and Soviet politics and history have received increased scholarly attention, because of their impact on governance and modernization projects.¹ My interest in this topic arises from my biographical research on Bolshevik revolutionary Aleksandr Shliapnikov, who operated within political networks of radicalized Russian metalworkers, European trade unionists, and Bolshevik émigrés. He drew upon his networks in forming the Workers' Opposition, which in 1919-21 advocated trade union management of industry to counter what its members saw as a trend toward bureaucratization that denied workers the opportunity to command production.² After Russian Communist Party leaders defeated the Workers' Opposition, some of its former members continued to interact with one another

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¹ T. H. Rigby: *Communist Party Membership in the U.S.S.R., 1917-1967*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1979; Id.: *Lenin's Government. Sovnarkom 1917-1922*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1979; Id.: *Political Elites in the USSR. Central Leaders and Local Cadres from Lenin to Gorbachev*, Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1990; Alena V. Ledeneva: *Can Russia Modernize? Sistema, Power Networks and Informal Governance*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2013; J. Arch Getty: *Practicing Stalinism. Bolsheviks, Boyars and the Persistence of Tradition*, New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2013; and articles on post-World War II Soviet networks in a special issue of *Kritika* 14, (Spring 2013), 2.

² Larry E. Holmes: *For the Revolution Redeemed. The Workers' Opposition in the Bolshevik Party, 1919-1921*, Pittsburgh, PA, University of Pittsburgh CREES, 1990 (The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies. 802); Barbara C. Allen: *Alexander Shlyapnikov, 1885-1937. Life of an Old Bolshevik*, Leiden, Brill Academic Publishers, 2014 (Historical Materialism Book Series) [forthcoming].

socially and through work. Although its key figures were denied leadership posts in trade unions, they held important administrative posts in military industry, metals imports, the state economic bureaucracy, foreign affairs, and the court system. Due to a shortage of personnel, party leaders often had to rely upon former oppositionists in leadership posts. By the mid-1930s, however, most had been purged from the party and many perished during the terror in 1937-1938. Although the NKVD fabricated a case against the Workers' Opposition in 1935-38, none of its leading figures confessed. They were tried secretly and shot. Spurious NKVD charges aside, I am interested in exploring the connections that actually existed among them and how party and secret police leaders perceived these ties. The horizontal links between them in an increasingly centralized political and economic system and the ways in which they, as individuals, interacted with other "networks" in the Soviet Union during the 1920s-1930s may contribute to the overall project of studying networks in Soviet history.

Although the USSR's collapse eliminated many restrictions on archival access in former Soviet states, obstacles remain.³ During the 1990s, the relatives of former Worker Oppositionists Shliapnikov and Sergei Medvedev permitted me to read Shliapnikov's and Medvedev's files in the *Soviet Communist Party Control Commission* (KPK) collection in the *Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History* (RGASPI), but a 75-year-limit on access to personal information prevented me from accessing files on other former Worker Oppositionists.⁴ Although the limit has passed for those executed in 1937-38, these files are less accessible now than they were in the early 1990s. Held in a closed military zone near Kazan', where they were evacuated during World War II, the files can no longer be brought physically to Moscow, due to the expense. The files can be digitally copied and transferred to Moscow electronically but at exorbitant cost to individual researchers, who cannot be sure that they are paying for historically significant material that is not duplicated in other collections. In 2012 I consulted brief inventories of the collection and found files listed for many former Worker Oppositionists. Likewise, it is still challenging to access the *Central Archive of the Federal Security Service* (TsA FSB) files relating to arrested former oppositionists. With permission of Shliapnikov's and Medvedev's relatives in 1995, I consulted 14 volumes of the 56-volume case file on the Moscow group of the Workers' Opposition in the TsA FSB.⁵ Expiration of the 75-year limit on access to personal information of those executed in 1937-38 may make it possible to access the remaining files without relatives' permission, but this possibility remains untested in relation to the former Worker Oppositionists' files.

Seeking alternative sources of personal information, I examined in summer 2012 the contents of *Russian State Archive of the Economy* (RGAE) personal and personnel files of selected former Worker Oppositionists.⁶ I chose this route because I had earlier found information on personal ties in Aleksandr Shliapnikov's files from his tenure as *Metalloimport* chair in the late 1920s; some of these dealt with favors and recommendations for politically suspect individuals, while others referenced special interest networks in the Soviet economic

³ Ivo Banac: Silencing the Archival Voice. The Destruction of Archives and Other Obstacles to Archival Research in Post-communist Eastern Europe. In: *Arhivski vjesnik*, 42 (1999), pp. 217-222.

⁴ Personal party files of the KPK special archive. Medvedev, Sergei Pavlovich. Shliapnikov, Aleksandr Gavrilovich. RGASPI, fond 589, opis' 3, delo 9102 and 9103.

⁵ Case of the Moscow group of the Workers' Opposition, Tsentral'nyi arkhiv Federal'noi Sluzhby Bezopasnosti (TsA FSB), Moscow, R33718, delo 499061, 56 vols.

⁶ I use "personal" for "lichnyi" and "personnel" for "litsevye" and for "lichnyi sostav."

administration and foreign trade missions that may have been shaped by political differences.⁷

Given the significant presence of former Worker Oppositionists in the administration of military industry, most likely due to their metalworking expertise, I chose to examine their personal files first in this sector, concentrating my work in RGAE. The personal files I consulted seem to have been unavailable to historians who wrote in the early 1990s about the NEP-era economy. Although the files were accessible to historians working more recently, their published monographs and document collections on the economics, high policy, and institutional history of Soviet military industry dwell little on personal ties.⁸

The RGAE military industry personal files' contents and usefulness as sources vary, but all reflect individual administrators' priorities for document preservation. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to ascribe a high degree of significance to such sources for understanding former Worker Oppositionists' views on the evolving Soviet system and their places within it. After all, they did not regard the documents as sufficiently sensitive to carry with them when they left their positions. Moreover, many files are brief. While the contents of personal files vary, personnel files are generally lists of names of people and their positions, the departments in which they worked, and orders relating to hiring, transfers, pay, etc.

Gomzy, the *State Machinebuilding Trust*, employed a number of former Worker Oppositionists. In its collection, most personal files had fewer than 20 pages and many were under ten. Some important figures do not seem to have personal files preserved in the Gomzy fond (ex. A. E. Vasilev, a Worker Oppositionist who chaired Gomzy in 1921). The file of Aleksandr Tolokontsev (1889-1937) was longer than many at 75 pages.⁹ Tolokontsev had emerged from the Petrograd factory committees after 1917 to become chair of the *Central Board of Artillery Factories*, a member of the *All-Russian Council of the Economy* (VSNKh) and a leading figure in the Metalworkers' Union. He served as Gomzy chair from 1922-27. Despite his leading role in the Workers' Opposition, Tolokontsev enjoyed Stalin's support to become a party Central Committee (CC) candidate member in 1924. From 1925-34 he was a full party CC member and director of military industry.¹⁰ Tolokontsev's career, however, entered troubled waters in March 1929, when the secret police (OGPU) claimed to have discovered "a counterrevolutionary organization" with allegedly deep roots in military industry. Submitting his resignation, Tolokontsev nevertheless identified logical inconsistencies in the accusations and argued that the investigation constituted "wrecking." Tolokontsev's resignation was not accepted, but he lost some policy making authority. He

⁷ Metalloimport collection, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv ekonomiki (RGAE), Moscow, fond 8346, opis' 1, delo 6, listy 21-24; delo 26, listy 53-57; delo 38.

⁸ David Shearer: *Industry, State, and Society in Stalin's Russia, 1926-1934*, Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 1996; Andrei Sokolov: *Ot voenproma k VPK. Sovetskaia voennaia promyshlennost'. 1917 - iun' 1941 gg.*, Moskva, Novyi khronograf, 2012.

⁹ RGAE, 1637/2/851.

¹⁰ Questionnaires dated 20.9.1922, 22.1.1924, 17.1.1925, RGAE, 1637/2/851, 1-2, 5, 7, 9; Evan Mawdsley and Stephen White: *The Soviet Elite from Lenin to Gorbachev. The Central Committee and its Members, 1917-1991*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 39; A. A. Chernobaev: *Na prieme u Stalina. Tetradi (zhurnaly) zapisei lits, priniatykh I. V. Stalinyim (1924-1953 gg.)*, Moskva, Novyi khronograf, 2008, pp. 773-775; G. M. Adibekov e.a. (eds.): *Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b) i Komintern. 1919-1943 gg. Dokumenty*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2004, p. 889; Iu. V. Goriachev: *Tsentral'nyi Komitet KPSS, VKP(b), RKP(b), RSDRP(b), 1917-1991. Istoriko-biograficheskii spravochnik*, Moskva, Parad, 2005, pp. 13, 16, 18, 21, 395; K. M. Anderson et al. (eds.): *Stenogrammy zasedanii Politbiuro TsK RKP(b)-VKP(b). 1923-1928 gg. v trekh tomakh*, Moskva, ROSSPEN, 2007, vol. 1, p. 929.

only lost his top posts after the 1933 party purge; by the time of his arrest, he had been demoted to the position of a factory director in the Urals. He and many other military industry leaders perished during Stalin's Terror.¹¹

Tolokontsev's personal file in the Gomzy collection includes biographical questionnaires; excerpts from VSNKh protocols on his work assignments; documents on pay, housing, work trips abroad; and newspaper articles referencing his work assignments. When he left Gomzy to become VSNKh chief of military industry, he wrote a report on his work as Gomzy chair and kept a copy in his personal file.¹²

Of greater interest are Tolokontsev's personal folders from the period when he chaired the *Chief Military Industry Board*; these files date to 1927-29 and include material of a sensitive nature and correspondence alluding to personal acquaintances. A number of documents is related to Lenin factory no. 40 in Kazan. Kozlovskii, the factory director, reported on retooling the factory, referenced Tolokontsev's refusal to allow him to enroll in the Industrial Academy, and recommended as the leader of the chemistry industry's trust A. M. Zharko, who would satisfy the trust's staff and the central committee of the Chemists' Union. Kozlovskii mentioned Germans working or consulting at his factory and sought permission to pay overtime in dollars to a certain German engineer-consultant. Other materials in this file included:

- 1) copies of official correspondence between soviet and OGPU administrations regarding work delays at Lenin factory no. 40, shortages of seasonal workers and timber, and the need to change guards;
- 2) Tolokontsev's note to the Soviet trade representative in Germany, about assisting factory no. 40's director and chief chemist during their trip to Germany;
- 3) a December 1927 letter to Tolokontsev from Sovnarkom chair Aleksei Rykov regarding the poor performance of military industry, requesting that Tolokontsev study this problem and present ideas;
- 4) a copy of a letter from Tolokontsev to *Soviet Central Executive Committee* chair Avel' Enukidze in December 1927 requesting reconsideration of the case of the arrested engineer Bernatskii (of Roshal'skii powder factory) who was exiled to Solovki in July 1927; Tolokontsev offered his opinion that the case arose on the basis of personal conflicts and suggested that Bernatskii could be freed because he was a necessary specialist;
- 5) memos related to the work of Soiuzzoloto;
- 6) a May 1928 memo to OGPU chief Genrikh Iagoda from Tolokontsev concerning an engineer named Povarnin whom Tolokontsev wanted to employ;
- 7) a July 1928 request (copy) from Tolokontsev to VSNKh presidium member Postnikov for more flexible military industry deadlines due to the "weakening of the engineering-technical staff" (a subtle reference to the purges of engineers and technicians that year).

Of a more personal nature was a long letter from former Worker Oppositionist N. Kopylov (with supplementary letters and reports, all marked "top secret") about charges against him of incompetence in his work at the Soviet trade mission in France. Acknowledging that Tolokontsev was not directly involved, he nevertheless hoped on the basis of their personal acquaintanceship that Tolokontsev would help restore Kopylov's damaged reputation.¹³

¹¹ Sokolov, *Ot voenproma k VPK*, pp. 101-104, 373.

¹² RGAE, 1637/2/851.

¹³ RGAE, 2097/1/702, 1-102.

Tolokontsev preserved miscellaneous documents about worker unrest. The director of the Bolshevik factory in Leningrad wrote to him about unrest among workers over wage delays that led to a two-hour work stoppage. The Military Chemical Trust chair wrote in October 1928 about a 1½ day strike by construction workers at Shostenskii factory no. 9 to protest insufficient supplies and financing. Tolokontsev also preserved some top secret reports and corrections to draft decrees; among these was a May 1927 report from him to the *Council of Labor and Defense* (STO) on the first five-year-plan as it related to military industry. Finally, there was material related to Tolokontsev's offer to resign his post due to the OGPU's discovery of a "wrecker" organization in military industry. These documents included a copy of Tolokontsev's April 1929 report to the Politburo on his accomplishments and goals still unmet. This was accompanied by a copy of the VSNKh presidium's decision supporting Tolokontsev. In close proximity to these documents in the file was a list of arrested military specialists, some of whose names corresponded to those in a sealed envelope (which an archivist opened for me) containing oaths sworn in May 1923, promising to observe secrecy regarding new production of armaments. But there is no explanation provided as to why Tolokontsev preserved the list and the sealed envelope.¹⁴

Central Artilleries Board commissar Iakov Kubyshkin, a former Worker Oppositionist, compiled a thick file of more than 350 pages, including documents about the unjustified layoff of a qualified engineer, a strike at Tula Armaments factory in summer 1918, worker requests for back pay, excerpts from Metalworkers' Union protocols discussing the Tula strike, a manifesto from Left SRs and the Union of Maximalists calling on workers to stop the strike and copies of Kubyshkin's reports on worker discipline and how factory leadership was organized and operated.¹⁵ But these materials, like those in Tolokontsev's files, lack clear contextualization.

Aside from the problem of contextualization is that some files only provide scanty information. For Mikhail Mikhailov, a mid-level Worker Oppositionist, there was a 16-page file encompassing his work for July and August 1922. It included a biographical form and documents on his transfer into the reserves from having managed aviation factory no. 4, transfer of the factory's management to a new person, his request for vacation time, and correspondence on a new work assignment.¹⁶ In D. F. Budniak's 46-page personal folder are mainly documents relating to a four-month trip by Budniak and other military industry leaders and specialists to Europe and America in early 1930. The file includes a 1929 agreement between Gomzy and the German firm Krupp about technical aid.¹⁷ Arrested in 1937-8 as Red Army commander Mikhail Tukhachevskii's accomplice, Budniak perished in the Terror.¹⁸ S. I. Maslennikov's personal folder has ten pages, six of which relate to Boikov, a metalworker purged in 1929 from the Cartridge-Fuse (*patronno-trubochnyi*) trust party cell, accused of being influenced by counterrevolutionaries and of "insulting party members in the presence of nonparty staff." Boikov blamed a coworker who had been in Gavril Miasnikov's Workers' Group for casting suspicion on him in order to advance his own career. Boikov was

¹⁴ RGAE, 2097/1/842, 1-140.

¹⁵ RGAE, 2097/6/9.

¹⁶ RGAE, 2097/8/1526.

¹⁷ RGAE, 2097/1/1044.

¹⁸ Sokolov, *Ot voenproma k VPK*, p. 373.

vulnerable because when he was Glavvoenprom chief in 1918, his assistant had been V. S. Mikhailov, arrested in 1929 as a wrecker.¹⁹

In the late 1920s, former co-leader of the Workers' Opposition Sergei Medvedev worked in *Nonferrous Metals Administration* (Glavsvetmet); he lost his position in 1929 due to reorganization, was purged from the party in 1933 and arrested in 1935. The organization of Glavsvetmet files (fond 8034) appears quite complex, perhaps due to frequent restructuring, so a close examination of them requires more time than was available to me in summer 2012. The inventories included personal folders for foreign specialists hired in 1930-36, most of them with German names, but with only scanty information.

To clarify the professional and personal connections alluded to in the files, a researcher could benefit from examining party cell records in relevant individuals' places of employment, in addition to party control files of those who were investigated and NKVD files of the arrested. Another possible source could be RGAE files containing correspondence between institutions such as VSNKh and trade unions, but what I have seen so far of that appears businesslike and "correct" in tone, without references to personal relationships.

For biographical information, I have inspected the *Party History Commission* (Istpart) questionnaires in RGASPI completed by participants in the October 1917 Revolution and the membership files of the Society of Old Bolsheviks, but these sources were of limited usefulness. Not all participants in the revolution completed biographical questionnaires, Tolokontsev for one. There were few files for former Worker Oppositionists in the Society of Old Bolsheviks collection, but the recommendations they offered from other Old Bolsheviks provide some clues to personal relationships.²⁰ In conclusion, the information in the personal and personnel files I consulted in the Russian State Archive of the Economy was fragmentary, sparse, and challenging to contextualize without resort to richer source bases that are currently still difficult to access.

¹⁹ RGAE, 2097/1/1045; Sokolov, *Ot voenproma k VPK*, pp. 101-102. V. S. Mikhailov was a former tsarist army general and hereditary noble, who as an artillery specialist and military theorist had been appointed Council of Military Industry assistant chair (A. P. Bogdanov and G. P. Bogdanov: *Dolg pamiaty. Povest' ob ottse*, Moskva, Politizdat, 1990, p. 81).

²⁰ RGASPI, f. 70 and 124.