

THE MARXIST-LENINIST RESEARCH BUREAU Report No 8

THE SYRTSOV/LOMINADZE AFFAIR

The Formation of the Faction (1930)

In 1930 a new opposition faction emerged in the Party, led by Sergey Syrtsov*, then Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars (i.e., Prime Minister) of the Russian Federation, Vissarion ('Beso') Lominadze*, then 1st. Secretary of the Regional Party Committee in Transcaucasia. Another member of the faction was Ian Sten*. Syrtsov

" . . . headed the opposition bloc".

(Heinrich E. Schwarz, Paul K. Urban & Andrew I. Lebed (Eds.): 'Who was Who in the USSR'; Metuchen (USA); 1972; p. 531).

The faction took organised form after the 16th Party Congress, which was held in June/July 1930.:

"Three small groups are known to have conspired after the 16th Congress to bring about changes in policy. The first group comprised a number of fairly young members. . . . S. I. Syrtsov, the leader of the group, was . . . Prime Minister of the RSFSR"
(Ian Grey: 'Stalin: Man of History'; London; 1979; p. 255).

"The bloc relied on the support of many secretaries and other local Comrades. A considerable portion of the younger members of the Central Committee and the Central Control Commission . . . showed open sympathy for the demands made by the bloc. . . . The former oppositionists were represented in the bloc by Sten, a former member of the Central Control Commission".
(Abdurakhman Avtorkhanov: 'Stalin and the Soviet Communist Party: A Study in the Technology of Power'; London; 1959;p. 19).

The Political Line of the Faction (1930)

The political line of the Syrtsov-Lominadze faction was one of right opposition to the policy of the Party:

"Syrtsov and Lominadze . . . found common ground in opposition to Stalin's policies".
(Robert H. Davies: 'The Syrtsov-Lominadze Affair', in: 'Soviet Studies', Volume 33, No. 1 (January 1981); p. 29).

It was essentially a rightist line, demanding that the Party adopt a 'more moderate' policy:

"Lominadze . . . began circulating memoranda and lobbying for a more moderate policy".
(Ronald G. Suny: 'The Making of the Georgian Nation'; London; 1989; p. 251).

"In the late summer or fall of 1930, Lominadze had the Transcaucasian Regional Committee issue a declaration excoriating 'the lordly feudal attitude towards the interests of the workers and peasants'".
(Ronald G. Suny: *ibid.*; p. 243).

Firstly, the faction denounced the Party's economic policy as 'adventurist', demanding a slowdown in industrialisation and a halt to

collectivisation. For example, in the autumn of 1930,

" . . . Syrtsov and Lominadze . . . circulated a memoir criticising the regime for economic adventurism".
(Robert Conquest: 'The Great Terror'; London; 1973 p. 51).

They declared that since

" . . . the pace of industrialisation was not supportable by existing physical resources, the number of capital projects must be reduced. . .
Syrtsov wanted a halt to collectivisation".
(Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 45).

It was at this time that Syrtsov

" . . . made a speech calling for reduced rates of industrial investment".
(Robert H. McNeal: 'Stalin: Man and Ruler'; Basingstoke; 1988; p. 145).

Secondly, the faction denounced 'excessive' centralised economic planning as 'undemocratic', and demanded that it be replaced, at least partially, by reliance on market forces. For example,

"In the late summer or fall of 1930, Lominadze had the Transcaucasian Regional Committee issue a declaration excoriating 'the lordly feudal attitude towards the needs and interests of the workers and peasants'".
(Ronald G. Suny: op. cit.; p. 251).

This resolution

" . . . closely accorded with the tenor of Syrtsov's speech"
(Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 41).

at the 16th Party Congress, and reflected

" . . . the common outlook of Syrtsov and Lominadze".
(Robert W. Davies: ibid.; p. 42).

In place of centralised direction of production, the Syrtsov-Lominadze faction demanded that

" . . . the excessive centralisation and lack of initiative of the system must be curbed. . . .
Market incentives must be partly resuscitated".
(Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 45. 46).

Thirdly, the faction denounced as untrue the Party's line that the USSR had entered the period of the construction of socialism.

In the Political Report to the 16th Congress in June 1930, Stalin said:

"We have achieved decisive successes in the struggle for the victory of socialist construction".
(Josef V. Stalin: Political Report of the Central Committee to the 16th Congress of the CPSU (b) (June 1930), in: 'Works', Volume 12; Moscow; 1955; p. 385).

However, later the same year Lominadze was insisting that

" . . . it is hardly possible to say that we have entered the period of socialism".
(Vissarion V. Lominadze: in: 'Problemy ekonomiki' (Problems of Economics), Nos. 11-12, 1930, p. 4-5. cited in: Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 35).

and Lominadze's resolution referred to in the last paragraph

" . . . took on Stalin directly when it challenged his declaration that the USSR had entered the period of socialist reconstruction",
(Ronald G. Suny: op. cit.; p. 251-52).

Fourthly, from 1932 the faction called for the removal of Stalin as Party leader:

"In 1932 . . . memoranda on the need to depose him (Stalin -- Ed.) from the post of General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party began to circulate in the highest quarters. Instrumental in the campaign to oust Stalin were the leading Georgian . . . Beso Lominadze . . . and Syrtsov, Premier of the Russian Federative SSR".
(David M. Lang: 'A Modern History of Georgia'; London; 1962; p. 252).

"Memoranda about the need to depose him (Stalin -- Ed.) circulated in his immediate entourage. They were signed by Syrtsov and Lominadze".
(Isaac Deutscher: 'Stalin: A Political Biography'; London; 1967; p. 333).

The aim of the Syrtsov-Lominadze group was to bring about unity between the left and right oppositions:

"His (Syrtsov's -- Ed.) idea was to bridge the gulf between the left and right oppositions with a group to be known by the incongruous title of 'Right-"Leftist"' bloc".
(Ian Grey: op. cit.; p. 255).

However, despite their similar policies, the most influential leaders of the right-wing opposition refused to associate themselves with the Syrtsov-Lominadze faction:

"Syrtsov , , , tried to organise resistance (to the Party's policy -- Ed.), while the Right leaders were counselling patience".
(Robert Conquest: op. cit. p. 206).

"The right-wing leaders did not associate themselves with Syrtsov and Lominadze; and Bukharin, in his declaration to the Central Committee dated 14 November, explicitly condemned the 'Syrtsov-Lominadze group'".
(Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 45).

Nevertheless,

" . . . Zinoviev and his colleagues . . . and the Trotskyites . . . formed a united bloc at the end of 1932. They had been joined also by the Lominadze group".
(Robert Conquest: op. cit.; p. 155).

The Demotions (1930)

"In 1930 Lominadze visited Syrtsov in Moscow, and for several hours they had a conversation about Party and state affairs. Stalin learned about the conversation".

(Roy A. Medvedev: 'Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism'; London; 1971; p. 142).

According to Trotsky's 'Bulletin of the Opposition',

" . . . when a search was carried out of Syrtsov's quarters, minutes of meetings were found which made it possible to uncover the bloc".

('Byulletin Oppozitsy' (Bulletin of the Opposition), Nos. 17-18 (November/December 1930); p. 39).

"Stalin moved against these opponents (the Syrtsov/Lominadze group -- Ed.) in October-December 1930".

(Robert H. McNeal: op. cit.; p. 145).

On 3 November 1930, Syrtsov was dismissed as Russian Premier, and

" . . . demoted to director of a factory producing gramophone records".

(Roy A. Medvedev: op. cit.; p. 142).

while

" . . . Lominadze was transferred from the Transcaucasian Regional Committee to work in the Commissariat of Trade, and then was sent to Magnitogorsk as secretary of the city's Party committee".

(Roy A. Medvedev: ibid.; p. 142).

On 1 December 1930 a joint resolution of the Political Bureau and Central Control Commission of the Party removed both Syrtsov and Lominadze from the Central Committee of the Party:

"In November-December 1930, the members of this group -- Syrtsov, Lominadze, Shatskin, . . . -- were publicly branded as 'rightists and followers of Rykov* and Tomsy*' and excluded from the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party".

(Babette L. Gross: 'The German Communists' United-Front and Popular-Front Ventures', in: Milorad M. Drachkovich & Branko Lazitch (Eds.): 'The Comintern: Historical Highlights: Essays, Recollections, Documents'; Stanford (USA); 1966; p. 390-91).

"Syrtsov and . . . Lominadze were stripped of their official posts and thrown off the Central Committee"

(Adam B. Ulam: 'Stalin: The Man and His Era'; London; 1989; p. 341-42).

The resolution charged Syrtsov with having

" . . . organised an underground anti-Party group",

('Pravda', 2 December 1930, in: Robert W. Davies: op. cit.; p. 43).

and Lominadze with having

" . . . headed for a considerable period a factional anti-Party

group".

('Pravda', 2 December 1930, in: Robert W. Davies: *ibid.*; p. 43).

According to a 'Letter from Moscow' in Trotsky's 'Bulletin of the Opposition',

" . . . Syrtsov, when accused of forming a bloc, bluntly told the Central Committee that Stalin was 'a thick-headed man who is leading the country to ruin'"

('Byulletin Oppozitsy' (Bulletin of the Opposition), No. 19, March 1931; p. 18).

Lominadze's Self-Criticism (1934)

At the 17th Party Congress in January/February 1934, Lominadze was one of many former Opposition leaders who made insincere self-critical statements:

"The line they took was one of complete Stalinist orthodoxy, replete with compliments to the General Secretary and abuse of his enemies".

(Robert Conquest: *op. cit.*; p. 63-64).

in which he

" . . . admitted that he had been wrong to dispute Stalin's claim that the USSR had entered the period of socialism. The bloc . . . had 'overestimated difficulties'",

(Vissarion Lominadze: Speech at 17th Congress of CPSU, in: Robert W. Davies: *ibid.*; p. 44).

and admitted engaging in factional activity directed against the Party leadership:

"We concealed our views from the Party, struggled by stealth and entered the path of deception of the Party. . . .

Like every opposition, the Right-'Leftist' bloc came out against the leadership of our Party, against the leader of the Party, Comrade Stalin".

(Vissarion Lominadze: Speech at 17th Congress of CPSU, in: Robert W. Davies: *ibid.*; p. 44).

The Arrest of Syrtsov (1935)

In 1935, Syrtsov was arrested, charged with and found guilty of treason, and sentenced to a long term of imprisonment.

The Suicide of Lominadze (1935)

By this time, the authorities had come to realise that Lominadze's self-criticism had not been sincere, and he was summoned to the district capital, Cheliabinsk. Realising that his treasonable activity had been discovered, he committed suicide:

"Beso Lominadze, who had been allowed to redeem himself and had been appointed secretary of the important Magnitogorsk Party committee, suddenly fell from grace. When he was abruptly summoned to Chelyabinsk by the authorities, he shot himself".

(Ronald G. Suny: *op. cit.*; p. 271).

Medvedev confirms this:

"Lominadze was summoned to Cheliabinsk. He shot himself in an automobile on the way".
(Roy A. Medvedev: op. cit.; p. 167).

The Kamenev/Zinoviev Trial (1936)

At his trial, along with Lev Kamenev* and Grigory Zinoviev*, in August 1936, the terrorist Vagarshak Ter-Vaganyan* testified:

"In the autumn of 1931, my very close connection and friendship with Lominadze began. I met Lominadze frequently, and on these occasions we talked about a bloc. . . .

At that period, the Trotskyites began negotiations for union with the Zinovievites and the 'Leftists' (i.e., the Syrtsov/Lominadze group -- Ed.). . . . The terroristic stand was perfectly clear".
('Report of Court Proceedings: The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre;' Moscow; 1936; p. 110).

And the defendant Sergey Mrachovsky* named Lominadze as one of the members

" . . . of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite terrorist centre".
('Report of Court Proceedings: The Case of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Centre;' Moscow; 1936; p. 440).

Published by:

THE MARXIST-LENINIST RESEARCH BUREAU,

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Essex,

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Moscow; 1936.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

- KAMENEV, Lev B., Soviet revisionist politician (1883-1936); Chairman, Moscow Soviet (1919-25); RSFSR Premier (1919); member, Political Bureau (1919-25); RSFSR Deputy Premier (1923); Ambassador to Italy (1926-27); joined 'United Opposition' (1926); expelled from Party (1927), readmitted (1928), re-expelled (1932), readmitted (1933), re-expelled (1934); tried for and found guilty of moral complicity in murder of Sergey Kirov and imprisoned (1934); tried for and found guilty of treason and executed (1936).
- LOMINADZE, Vissarion ('Besov') V., Soviet revisionist politician (1891-1935); secretary, CP of Georgia (1922-24); secretary, Communist Youth International (1925-26); 1st Secretary, Transcaucasian Regional Party Committee (1930); head, Scientific Research Section, USSR People's Commissariat of Supplies (1931-32); secretary, Magnitogorsk City Party
- MRACHOVSKY, Sergey V., Soviet revisionist politician (1888-1930); expelled from Party for factionalism (1927); reinstated in Party and again expelled (1936); arrested, tried, found guilty of treason and executed (1936).
- RYKOV, Aleksey I., Soviet revisionist politician (1881-1938); RSFSR People's Commissar of Internal Affairs (1917); Chairman, Supreme Council of the National Economy (1918-21); RSFSR Deputy Premier (1918-21); member, Political Bureau, CPSU (1922-1930); USSR Premier (1924-30); USSR People's Commissar of Posts and Telegraphs (1931-36); expelled from Party (1937); arrested, tried for and found guilty of treason and executed (1938).
- SHATSKIN, Lazar A., Soviet revisionist politician (1902-37); 1st Secretary, All-Russian Young Communist League (1918-22); removed from Central Control Commission, CPSU for siding with the Leftist-Rightist bloc (1931); expelled from Party (1935); arrested, tried, found guilty of treason and imprisoned (1936); died in imprisonment (1937).
- STEN, Ian, Soviet revisionist politician (1899-1937); Director, Marx-Engels Institute (1929-32); expelled from Party (1932); arrested (1936); tried for and found guilty of treason and executed (1937).
- SYRTSOV, Sergey I., Soviet revisionist politician (1893-1937); editor, 'Kommunisticheskaya revoliutsiya' (Communist Revolution); Secretary, Siberian Regional Party Committee (1926-29); Premier, RSFSR (1929-30); removed from Central Committee for factionalism (1930); director, Ngin Chemical Plant (1931-36); arrested, tried, found guilty of treason and imprisoned (1936); died in prison (1937).
- TER-VAGANYAN Vagarshak A., Soviet revisionist politician (1893-1936); arrested, tried, found guilty of terrorism and executed (1936).
- TOMSKY, Mikhail P., Soviet revisionist trade union leader and politician (1880-1936); member, Political Bureau, RCP/CPSU (1922-29); Chairman, All-Russian Central Council of Trade Unions (1921-28); Director, Joint State Publishing House (1928-36); committed suicide to avoid trial for treason (1936).
- ZINOVIEV, Grigory E., Soviet revisionist politician (1883-1936); Chairman, Petrograd Soviet (1917); member, Political Bureau, RCP/CPSU (1921-26); Chairman, Comintern (1919-26); removed from all posts (1926); expelled from Party; arrested, tried for and found guilty of moral complicity in murder of Sergey Kirov and imprisoned (1935); tried for and found guilty of treason, and executed (1936).