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### THE CRISIS OF CORPORATE IDENTITY OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY RUSSIA (1917 – EARLY 1920S)<sup>1 2</sup>

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#### ABSTRACT

The breakdown of the empire statehood and the establishment of soviet statehood in Russia were accompanied by the revision of the social roles of many members of the society and communities, including the university teaching community. The article is devoted to the crisis of the corporate identity of the university lecturers in Russia in the first years after the revolution (1917 – early 1920's.). According to the authors the crisis was caused by various factors. Firstly, if at the past, pre-revolutionary, social structure of the Russian Empire professors belonged to the elite, at the new "coordinate system" professors were forced to give way on "social Olympus" to the representatives of other "class- hegemon". Secondly, the majority of the university corporation had deep ideological differences with the Soviet authorities, as they mostly shared liberal, more rarely, monarchical ideological tenets and were far from the socialist ideals. Thirdly, the overall political and socio-economic situation in the country during the civil war did not create the necessary conditions for the teaching and research activities. The authors conclude that the crisis of the corporate identity of the university teaching community was expressed in a social split into "old" and "new" professorship, the conflict between "old" and "new" professors, leaving the occupation by many lecturers who had developed in the pre-revolutionary system, emigration of two types: involuntary and voluntary. As a result of these processes the academic teaching community of Soviet Russia (since 1922 – USSR) has undergone tremendous changes in comparison with the pre-revolutionary period.

Keywords: university lecturers, corporate identity, the Russian revolution of 1917

# INTRODUCTION

The collapse of Russian empire and the establishment of Soviet statehood in Russia was accompanied by reconsideration of social roles of many members of society and furthermore whole communities. Clergymen, former tsarist bureaucrats and officers found themselves in completely new socio-political environment on the margins of social and class hierarchy. Quests for survival and subsistence were resolved by

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representative of each of these groups in different ways. Academic community also underwent corporate identity crisis. The main research question to be addressed in this article is – what factors caused the identity crisis, what forms did it take and why did it exhaust itself?

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

For completing this research authors used archival documents from Central state archive of Saint-Petersburg (CSA S-Pb), Center for documentation on contemporary history of the Tomsk oblast (CDCH TO), State archive of the Saratov oblast (SA SO), State archive of the Tomsk oblast (SA TO) as well as periodical of 1920s (the newspaper *Krasnoye Znamya*).

The study was conducted using both anthropological and historical approaches to the analysis of society.

#### HISTORIOGRAPHY

Higher education in Russia under circumstances of revolutionary transformation was at various times the subject of historical studies. Among them are studies by E.V. Lebedeva "Research – power – society: the relationship between scientific intelligentsia and Soviet power during civil confrontation in late 1910s – beginning 1920s (On the example of the Volga region universities" (published in The bulletin of the academy of management: theory, strategies and innovations. 2012. № 5), S.A. Krasil'nikov "Power and intelligentsia in the Siberian province 1919–1973" (Novosibirsk, 1996–2004), A.V. Litvinov "Academic teaching staff of Tomsk state university in 1920s–1930s" (Tomsk, 2005) etc. The abovementioned works contain valuable factual material which can be used in anthropological studies which deal primarily with current state of affairs in higher education.

## RESEARCH

In 1917 University lecturers represented a relatively small but coherent professional community. In consequence to the revolutionary upheaval it underwent a deep crisis due to the fact that political circumstances did not allow for society to stay the same.

*Factors that caused the crisis.* Change social role. Pre-revolutionary community of professors a firm position in bureaucratic hierarchy of Russian Empire. "The Table of civil ranks" regulated the hierarchy of academic teaching staff. For example, the position of a university rector corresponded to the fourth class of the "Table"; professor in ordinary  $-5^{\text{th}}$  class; professor *extraordinarius*  $-6^{\text{th}}$  class. Professors could be awarded a medal. As a result of the October Revolution professors were among others categorized as "former" and under new circumstances the community of professors had to give up their place at top layers of society to the representatives of other "hegemonic classes".

Ideological contradiction to the Soviet power. The overwhelming majority of Russia's university lecturers remained skeptical about Bolsheviks coming to power. This fact concerns both center and regions. For example "The Note on the condition and activity of Tomsk state university" which was sent to the Chief Administration of the

professional education in RSFSR on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1922 said that "Attitudes of Tomsk professors after the reinstallment of the Soviet power in Tomsk were depressing and lost". In the report of the People's Commissariat for education commissioner in Siberia "On the condition of higher education in Siberia" of 18 July 1922 it was categorically clamed that "Tomsk university professors took a hostile position towards new authorities" [1].

In 1929 Tomsk state university party organization categorized professors' and teaching staff's political attitudes. Out of 135 staff members (including medical residents and postgraduate students) the "reactionary" part was composed of 15 people (12 %), "hostile" – 46 (34 %), "loyal" – 47 (34 %), "like-minded" (communists) – 27 (20 %) [2].

General political and socio-economic environment. The political situation of the country in the years of Civil War was not apt for facilitation of teaching and research activity. Horrible material and living conditions of academic teaching staff is covered in existing historical research in great detail. Material and living conditions of academic teaching staff in Siberia is also illustrative. In the beginning of 1920s salaries amounted to approximately 25 % of subsistence minimum. Due to low hourly pat and shortage in teaching staff, multi-jobholding became widespread. Soviet universities found themselves in harsh conditions, and one time their overall existence hung in the balance. B.L. Bogaevsky, the rector of Tomsk state university concluded that "it should be acknowledged that living conditions of professors extremely harsh even compared to those of public servants" [3].

Apart from housing and supply problems, the situation with life conditions was exacerbated by the fact that many of them had to undergo numerous migrations. For example, in 1918 Kazan and Perm university professors had to evacuate to Tomsk, escaping from the Red Army attack.

After the end of the Civil War and installment of the Soviet the migration of university lecturers from regions to the center in search of better conditions for life and work was a common phenomenon. Former head of the Siberian department of people's education D.K. Chudinov wrote: "Already back then (the first half of 1920s) escapements had occurred. We interpreted this fact as a discrepancy between the overall number of universities and that of professors in the country. Consequently we found out that doors were opened easily: center of the country was attractive for professors because of academic ration, booked housing, various sorts of multi-jobholding opportunities, academic trips etc... Margins of the country in their supply policy was more straightforward and equaled professors to all others. This phenomenon made us worried to the extent that we made it a subject of special discussion at Siberian Revolutionary Committee" [4].

As can be seen from above, in 1917–1920s the conditions of transformation of the socio-political system and reforms of higher education determined deep crisis of the university academic and teaching staff corporate identity. The instability in staff recruitment negatively influenced the research-educational process.

*Manifestations of crisis.* In our view, the crisis of academic and teaching communal identity was manifested in:

- the split of community into "old" and "new" professors;

- conflicts between "old" and "new" professors;

- resignation of mane university lecturers who gained their professional maturity back in pre-revolutionary times;

- two kinds emigration from the country: forced and voluntary.

Now we will focus on the above-mentioned manifestations of crisis in more detail.

The split of community into "old" and "new" professors. The basic element of educational reforms in the first decade after the October Revolution was the radical change in social makeup of universities, which was brought into effect among other things also by realization of the party and class principle of the staff recruitment. One of the authors of reforms, M.N. Pokrovsky considered that it was necessary to "modify the professors' community breaking it caste structure and divisions into privileged groups" [5].

For the fulfillment of this objective, among other things, the dismantling of the old system of academic certification including academic titles, degrees and system of academic and teaching staff recruitment greatly contributed. From 1918 on the teaching staff of universities was to be recruited through all-Russian competitions. However first competitions of this kind resulted in old cadres to win them: as a rule, academic and teaching positions, heads of departments offices were taken by those who used to belong to the academic community back in Russian Empire. Some of them held anti-Soviet attitudes. This fact can be evidenced, for example, by the materials from Saratov university [6].

Authorities' pursuit of the aim of "proletarization" of academic and teaching community is also evidenced by the close down of an array of traditional university faculties, and on the other hand by creation of worker's faculties, pedagogical faculties, faculties of social sciences, establishing such unusual for classic universities faculties as faculties of agricultural and forestry studies.

Also, the new system of teaching staff training was to become yet another instrument for renewal of academic and teaching staff. In this respect, a significant role was played by the phenomenon of "promotion" (so-called *vydvizhenchestvo*). Initially the term "*vydvizhenchestvo*", which appeared in Soviet vocabulary during the years of Civil War, was used to define workers and peasants which were promoted for managerial work in labor unions, economic and cooperative administration. Afterwards, in 1926 the State scientific committee that was the main public agency responsible for research and methodology in general within the People's Commissariat for education of RSFSR, the institute of promoted students (*vydvizhenets*) was introduced. In the «Regulations on promoted students» (20 April 1930) determine goals of promoted students in the

following way: "The institute of promoted students is meant to give opportunities to the most valuable students in terms of academic and public activity, especially to those coming from backgrounds of workers, peasants, *bednyak* (poorest peasants), *kolkhoz* members" [7].

However, by no means all promoted students (*vydvizhentsy*) justified hopes of their promoters. For instance, professor P.A. Lomovitsky, the head of the department of the  $1^{st}$  Therapeutic clinic at Tomsk medical university in his report on department performance for 1932 mentioned one of promoted students of the department and emphasized the following: "This promoted student had not attended the university before March, did not carry out the plan and even though he is still considered as a promoted student at our department, he hasn't shown up in the clinic since March". In the analogous report of the Department for childhood diseases professor E.I. Nelyubov pointed out: "The promoted student Beletskaya as a fourth year student at the [Faculty – authors] of maternity and infancy care, despite her large academic workload, managed to meet the plan in satisfactory way although the were breaks in regular attendance of the clinic" [8].

It should be noted that all these measures did not lead to rapid transformation of social composition of Soviet universities. For example, in the end of 1920s the social composition of the academic and teaching staff at Tomsk state university was almost the same as it had been before the October Revolution in 1917. Among professors, people coming from clergymen, petty bourgeoisie (*meshanstvo*) and servicemen families. There were no those coming from working class families. The social group of peasants comprised approximately 9 %. The social composition of the teaching staff was a little different. Despite the fact, among them people coming from clergymen, petty bourgeoisie (*meshanstvo*) and servicemen families prevailed, a group of those from workers' families emerged (workers -6, peasants -10) that comprised 23 %. Having said that, to speak about "proletarization" of academic and teaching staff at Tomsk state university would be premature because out of total number of professors there were only 5,5 per cent of people of proletarian origin.

In 1935 out of 22 Professors of Tomsk State university 14 came from servicemen origin (5 of them obtained higher education after 1920), 1 from merchant, 1 from petty bourgeoisie, 2 from worker (both obtained higher education after 1920) 1 from peasant family backgrounds, three professors were foreigners. Out of 37 Associate Professors of TSU, 23 came from servicemen (17 of them obtained higher education after 1920), 1 from merchant, 1 from craftsmen (obtained higher education after 1920), 3 from worker (2 of them obtained higher education after 1920), 9 from peasant (obtained higher education after 1920) family backgrounds. Out of 59 teaching assistants who worked at Tomsk state university in 1935, 31 represented servicemen (all of them obtained higher education after 1920), 2 - petty bourgeoisie (*meshanstvo*) (both of them obtained higher education after 1920), 1 - craftsman, 11 - working class, 10 - peasant family backgrounds (all of them obtained higher education after 1920) [9].

Conflicts between "old" and "new" professors. The Soviet authorities implemented the policy, according to which the line of breaking with "old intelligentsia" was chosen, led

to gradual renewal of academic and teaching staff by employing those of worker and peasant family backgrounds. 1920–1930s represent a long period of "coexistence" between "old" and "new" professors in Soviet universities. The existence of socio-political sympathies and antipathies led to strong tension inside academic and teaching intelligentsia.

A particular telling case was with British public activist Gibson, who got the permission to financially support professors and students in Russia including Tomsk. In September 1922 Gibson invited academic staff of Tomsk universities to the Assembly Hall of Tomsk state university. Professors who held anti-Soviet views proposed to drive out professor who worked at worker's faculties – the first creation of Soviet authorities in the sphere of education. As a result of a vote the latter leaved the meeting. All in all, power among Tomsk professors and teachers there were more opponents of Soviet than its supporters [10].

In this regard, the newspaper "*Krasnoe Znamya*" published the article called "Political escapade of Tomsk professors", where not only the fact of the banishment of workers faculty professors but also singing of "Gaudeamus" was regarded as counter-revolutionary act of professors [11].

The fact that act of stigmatization of professors were taken not only by authorities but also by their colleagues was a completely new characteristic of relationship with academic and teaching staff of Tomsk state universities in 1930s.

For example, political views of professors and lecturers of Tomsk state university were characterized in the Klimov's (university communist) report entitled "On ideological struggle at the university" (4 March 1930). "We have part of our professors – he asserted – standing reactionary ground and trying to engage others. The other part is how the saying goes "I will follow those who give more". The third part are those who go with us hand in hand and also an insignificant part of our communists. Unfortunately, there is still just a few of them" [12].

The escalation of conflict between "old" and "new" professors on the one hand and "old" professors and student community on the other was exacerbated also by reforms of training process in Soviet universities Starting from 1920s the People's Commissariat for education (*Narkompross*) began to limit the role of professors in the university training process, introducing new methods of teaching (the so-called brigade-laboratorial method). The was a hard opposition to these measures on the part of "old" professors and lecturers. The professordom of Soviet universities protested against using this method of teaching and insisted on keeping lectures in place.

Resignation. Circumstances, atmosphere and conditions of 1920s–1930s led to resignation of a plethora of professors. Forced resignation in large measure concerned humanities. For instance, in 1930 following the joint decree by the Siberian department for people's education and Board for management of Tomsk universities the majority of the Law Department professors were dismissed. Among them were V.M. Gribovsky, I.I. Anosov, V.F. Zalessky, B.P. Ivanov, N.Ya. Novombergsky, P.A. Prokoshev, I.V. Mikhailovsky, I.Ya. Galakhov.

Voluntary resignation of university teaching profession was instigated by the conditions of labor. "In higher education institutions <...>, the wage-pack for qualified specialists: engineers, chemists, agriculturalists, bank and other servicemen, which are occupied in so-called production People's commissariats (*Narkomats*). This fact is exactly the cause for many professors who have even a tiny chance to apply their knowledge in such and such industry, prefering not to load themselves with teaching work at universities but aiming at just not breaking connection with them, they build their material wealth on earnings from factories of *VSNkH* (Supreme Council of National Economy – author), *Narkomzem* (People's Commissariat for Agriculture – author), *INKVneshtorga* (People's Commissariat for international trade). <...> The union of workers of enlightenment in a number of its publications and reports pointed to the harmful and dangerous character of such multi-jobholding for the development of science in our republic" [13]

Forced and voluntary emigration. In the course of the campaign to expel intelligentsia in autumn 1922 the following professors were driven out of the country: professors of Petrograd university L.P. Karsavin, B.N. Odintsov, P.A. Sorokin, A.A. Ovchinnikov, G.Ya. Troshin, I.A, Stratonov (Kazan university) and S.L. Frank (Saratov university) were forcedly expelled. These people were unwanted by the Soviet power because of their ideological views or because of their reportedly active involvement in anti-Soviet actions.

Part of the academic community voluntarily resolved the problem of choosing life perspectives in favor of emigration. S.I. Mel'nikov who left Petrograd for Crimea wrote to his colleague in November 1017: "If all this filth keeps going in Russia I will emigrate some where in America or Paraguay. I just hope not to see this stupidity and scoundrelism anymore. I would prefer to be a shoe-shiner in America than a director of a Laboratory in such disgraceful country as Russia" [14].

#### CONCLUSION

The exhaustion of crisis. As a result of the processes considered above the academic and teaching community in Soviet Russia (from 1922 on - USSR) underwent tremendous changes compared to pre-revolutionary period. In a way the crisis of corporate identity of university lecturers was exhausted before the second half of 1930s due to generational change and the formation of renewed academic and teaching staff in Soviet universities. In historical studies there is an opinion according to which the abolishment of universities' autonomy in 1920s, "that was one of dominating aspects in the system of values of community of professors", the academic and teaching corporation ceased to exist [15]. All that considered, "the rules of the game" that from mid 1930s determined professional lives of university lecturers, had some elements which were akin to pre-revolutionary state of affairs. The egalitarian idea of the revolutionary epoch was replaced by hierarchy and academic differentiation of university lecturers. Traditions of writing and defending dissertation were so strong that even after the abolishment of this practice, oldest universities kept it and 1934 academic degrees were re-introduced and the constantly flowing practice of defending dissertations was launched. However, the highest-possible level of state control over social life including system of education formed the new system of interactions within academic and teaching community that remained in place for classic Soviet time.

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