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COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Party

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ANOTHER SETBACK FOR SHELEPIN

Tass¹ announces that A.N. Shelepin, who is both a full member of the Politbureau and a Secretary of the Central Committee, has been made Chairman of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions, replacing V. Grishin. For more than two years Shelepin's career has been pointed steadily downhill, and this latest development seems to be yet another step in the same direction.

It is true that the Soviet trade unions have 80,000,000 members, and therefore the Chairmanship of the AUCCTU can reasonably be said to be an influential post, but the real drawback to it from Shelepin's point of view is that it does not normally carry the rank of Secretary with it. The probability is therefore strong that after the next meeting of the Central Committee, we shall learn that A.N. Shelepin no longer is a Secretary of that body.

If this assumption proves to be correct, Shelepin will then have no power base at his disposal except for the trade unions (which have far less political weight in the USSR than in any democracy) and his membership of the Politburo (together with ten others). It will be a far cry indeed from the days in 1964-1965 when Shelepin was the only member of the Presidium (later renamed the Politbureau) to be equipped with four separate sources of power -- his Secretaryship, his post as Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, his unique job as Chairman of the Party-State Control Committee, and his membership of the Presidium.

Things first began to go wrong for Shelepin early in 1965, when he was omitted from the 65-man commission of the March Plenum which was set up to draft its decree on agriculture under Brezhnev's chairmanship.² At the end

1) 11 July 1967.

2) Stenographic Report of March (1965) Central Committee Plenum.

of March, K.T. Mazurov was made a 1st Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers over Shelepin's head, thereby ensuring that Shelepin would never again deputize for Kosygin when the latter was out of Moscow.

In September 1965 Shelepin was again passed over, this time by D.S. Polyansky, who like Mazurov was made a 1st Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers.⁴ By this time it was obvious that both Brezhnev and Kosygin were bent on deemphasizing Shelepin,⁵ and in December 1965 they abolished his Party-State Control Committee, split it into its two original constituent parts -- and left neither of them under his command.

At some time in the spring of 1966 Shelepin was given the responsibility in the Secretariat for supervising the consumer goods industries. These are certainly of growing importance in the USSR and it is worth recalling that Podgorny once had the same function before his elevation to higher spheres. But in Shelepin's case, in view of the setbacks to his career in 1965, it was at least open to question whether B and K's motive for sidetracking him into consumer goods was not largely to get him out of Far Eastern politics, in which he had been extremely active during 1965 (e.g. his visit to Hanoi in December, to Pyongyang in August etc.).

The next blow to Shelepin came in September 1966, when his close associate of the Komsomol and KGB days, V.S. Tikunov, was eliminated from the Ministry of Public Order, RSFSR, by the simple device of abolishing his Ministry and establishing an All-Union replacement with the same title -- but under the control of a colleague of Brezhnev, N.A. Shchelokov.

Tikunov was not given any appointment in the new Ministry, as far as is known, and has now vanished into limbo.

In February 1967, B and K took another slap at Shelepin, this time by allotting him to the extremely minor constituency of Kalinin for the elections to the Supreme Soviet.⁶ Since in June 1966 Shelepin had been permitted to stand for a constituency in Leningrad, it was evident that he was moving downwards not only in the Party and Government, but even in terms of the Supreme Soviet.

3) Tass, 27 March 1965.

4) Pravda, 3 October 1965.

5) See RFE Research report "Shelepin's Slip is Showing," 10 November 1965.

6) Pravda, 14 February 1967.

7) See RFE Research report "Another Slap at Shelepin," 16 February 1967.

Three months later came the next blow, when Semichastny who had worked under Shelepin in the Komsomol and who took over the KGB from Shelepin when the latter was promoted, was removed from the State Security post and replaced by Yuri Andropov.⁸ Semichastny has now been removed to the Ukraine, where as 1st Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers he was last reported making an effort to find jobs for school-leavers.

The latest disgrace for a hardliner (a reputation which Shelepin, Tikunov and Semichastny had all well deserved) came at the end of June, when N. Yegorychev was dismissed from his post as First Secretary of the Moscow City Committee of the Party. He was replaced by Grishin, whose former post in the trade unions is now assumed by Shelepin, and has since been made a Deputy Minister of Public Works and Road-Making Equipment⁹ of the USSR. There is no doubt but that Grishin has had the better of the exchange, in that Khrushchev himself used Moscow as a springboard to supreme power in 1953, and Piotr Demichev has used it subsequently on his way to the Secretariat.

As befits his role as 2nd Secretary, Mikhail Suslov was the senior party official present at the Plenary session of the AUCCTU which installed Shelepin¹⁰ (it is a long-standing tradition in the USSR that when important demotions are taking place the Secretary in charge of cadres supervises the change). In his speech Suslov called Shelepin "a prominent member of the CPSU and a Soviet statesman," and said that he "hoped" he would be a worthy leader of the Trade Unions. After all the other jobs at which Shelepin has failed in the past three years, this sounded richly ironical.

As far as the trade unions themselves are concerned, the fact that they will henceforth be led by a full member of the Politburo might be regarded as evidence of their growing power, since Grishin is only a candidate member. But it is more likely, in the light of the events of 1965-67, that Shelepin has been sent to them not to upgrade the Trade Unions but in order to give him a post which does not involve membership of the Secretariat.

Today's Radio Moscow announcement of the change seemed to be hinting at this esoterically, by describing both Suslov and Ustinov as Secretaries of the C.C. of the Party while giving their respective Politbureau ranks. On the other hand it called Shelepin "member of the Politbureau"

8) Tass, 18 May 1967.

9) Le Monde, 7 July 1967.

10) Tass, 11 July 1967.

of the Central Committee of the Party" only, omitting all reference to his role in the Secretariat. The latter may already be a thing of the past, although the formal announcement cannot be made until the next Central Committee Plenum takes place.

r.r.g.