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MUKHITDINOV ON THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

The further fall of Nuritdin Akramovich Mukhitdinov, who has just been appointed Ambassador to Syria, demonstrates once again how hard it is to be a whiz-kid in Moscow. At the age of only 40 Mukhitdinov, who was born in 1917, was summoned by Khrushchev from the highest post in Uzbekistan, where he was then 1st Secretary of the Central Committee, to Moscow to become a Secretary of the C.C. CPSU, and a candidate member of the Presidium.

That was in July 1957, when Khrushchev was restaffing the top leadership of the Kremlin after the purge of the "anti-party group" (who had previously had a majority in the Presidium). In the reshuffle other promotions went to Yekaterina Furtseva, who was then only 47, and who was made a full member of the Presidium; to Frol Kozlov, who was born in 1910 like Furtseva, and was also appointed a full member of the Presidium; and to A. I. Kirichenko, born 1908, who was already a full member of the Presidium before the storm over the anti-party group broke out, but who was given a Secretaryship as well as a result of the purge.

At the time observers in the West understandably noted that the rapid rise of these younger leaders to the top appeared to be part of a deliberate policy of "rejuvenation of the cadres," as it was termed by Khrushchev's spokesmen.

Like numerous other new policies introduced by Khrushchev in those years, this one has scarcely stood the test of time. Furtseva, it is true, is still Minister of Culture, but she has been deprived of her policy-making functions, lost her Secretaryship in 1960 and was removed from the Presidium in 1961. She is now purely an executive, and the dismal lack of success of Brezhnev's cultural policies in the past few years makes it seem increasingly likely that she will before long be sacrificed as a scapegoat in the hope of assuaging at least some of the intellectuals' wrath.

Kozlov died of a heart attack in 1965, after being seriously ill for about 18 months. He had become the successor-designate to Khrushchev in 1960, after the elimination of Kirichenko from that role, but his health was not good enough to compete with the energetic rise of Brezhnev. Moreover, Kozlov, who was noticeably more conservative than Khrushchev in cultural matters, had had at least one brisk disagreement with Khrushchev when the former allowed the Mayday slogans to go out without listing Yugoslavia as a "socialist" country. Khrushchev, who was on holiday by the Black Sea at the time, rapidly had that altered by a rare "correction" published in Pravda, but by then the damage had been done. Relations between the two never fully recovered.

The case of Kirichenko is even more remarkable. By 1959 it was widely known that he was acting in Moscow as Khrushchev's "crown prince." Yet in January 1960 he was suddenly transferred to Rostov Oblast as 1st Secretary, and within six months he was sacked from that position, moving into the total obscurity in which he died.

Mukhitdinov, too, has been on the downward path for several years. After being eliminated from the Presidium in 1961, he was made a mere member of the Board of the Central Union of Consumers' Cooperatives. Subsequently he rose again slightly (under Brezhnev) to the level of 1st Deputy Chairman of the Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, but now he is en route to Syria, as a mere Ambassador in a country filled with Arab "hotheads," to judge by Pravda's recent reports, and where the last Ambassador had to swelter for seven long years.

Soviet-Syrian relations are at present in a lamentable state, due to the Kremlin's support for Arab leaders such as Nasser who want to "make revolution" by being patient. Mukhitdinov's arrival is not likely to improve them appreciably. Receipt of a fallen whiz-kid is not going to increase the confidence of Damascus in the Kremlin's constant chant of "I'm backing Nasser."

Moreover, this sad recital of the fate of Khrushchev's "rejuvenation of cadres" policy can easily be paralleled by a listing of the other "young Turks" who Brezhnev and Kosygin have seen fit to scatter to the four winds. Semichastny (ex-chief of the KGB) is out in Kiev, Goryunov (the man who took over Tass when he was only 45) is in Kenya, and S. K. Romanovsky, yet another ex-Komsomol Secretary who was until January 1968 Chairman of the State Committee for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries, is now kicking his heels in Oslo.

Shelepin's former colleagues are now in the diaspora, and whatever other policies may guide Brezhnev and Kosygin in their cadre manoeuvres, "youth at the helm" is clearly not one of them, particularly if the young men concerned were once selected for high office by Khrushchev.

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