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PRAVDA'S NEW EDITOR

On September 21st 1965, Western correspondents in Moscow learned from a Pravda official that Mikhail Vasilevich Zimyanin is the new Chief Editor of Pravda. This information seems to confirm the report published by UPI on 26 August to the effect that the editorship of Pravda would soon change hands. UPI then said that Aleksei M. Rumyantsev, who had been Chief Editor since October 1964, had suffered a heart attack and would be retiring on grounds of ill-health.

On 27th August Agence France Presse confirmed the UPI report, both as to substance and as to the reason for the resignation of Rumyantsev. The latter's last action as Chief Editor was the publication of his 5000-word programmatic article on 9th September in which he strongly opposed the use of "administrative" methods in art.¹ He noted that the Central Committee had decisively condemned the recent bureaucratic practice of issuing "crude injunctions" in the arts and "sweeping amateurish appraisals" of certain painters and their works. He said roundly that such practices were a distortion of Party guidance, and he publicly criticized the editors of both Izvestia and Selskaya Zhizn. The latter had made clumsy efforts to "excommunicate" Aksenov and Tendryakov, two young and highly popular writers, on the grounds that to portray evil is to oppose socialist realism.

Rumyantsev observed that the two editors had "substituted intolerance for a principled attitude and a biased approach for comprehensiveness." Their criticism was destructive, whereas for Rumyantsev the purpose of criticism is to "unite, not dis-unite, everything that serves the ideas of communism." He then invoked a memorable Lenin quotation:

1) See C.A. paper 10 September 1965 "Rumyantsev against the Dogmatists."

Literature is something that lends itself least of all to a mechanical approach, to the imposition of majority rule over the minority.

[Emphasis supplied]

Now Rumyantsev has gone, possibly to a less onerous post in the Academy of Sciences, of which he was made a corresponding member in 1960. But there is no indication that the trend towards liberalization in the arts has gone with him. On the contrary, Literary Gazette has just printed almost a full page of Yevtushenko's poems, Yevtushenko himself has just read "Babi Yar," his best-known denunciation of anti-Jewish feeling, to a full and cheering house in Moscow, and Ionesco's "Rhinoceros" is about to be published in Moscow for the first time.

Since "Babi Yar" is anathema to the surviving anti-Semites, dogmatists and reactionaries of the Soviet literary world and "The Rhinoceros," together with Ionesco's other works, has for years been damned in the USSR as irrevocably decadent, the evidence suggests that literary revisionism is still on the march. This fact is due to decisions taken in the Presidium as long ago as October and November of 1964, in the hectic turmoil after the removal of Khrushchev. At present there is no likelihood that the Presidium is about to change its mind.

M.V. Zimyanin

Pravda's new editor was born in 1914, was a Secretary of the C.C. of the Byelorussian Komsomol during the 2nd World War, and became a Secretary of the C.C., Byelorussian C.P. in 1945. In 1953 he was transferred to the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he became head of the 4th (European) Department, which deals with Poland and Czechoslovakia. In 1956 he was sent as Ambassador to Hanoi, where he stayed until 1958. He was then recalled to Moscow, to become head of the Far Eastern Department of the M.F.A. in 1959.

In February 1960 he was appointed Ambassador to Czechoslovakia, where he stayed until April 1965. He was then promoted yet again to the rank of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, and retained this post until he became Chief Editor of Pravda.

From these details it seems that for almost ten years, (1947-1953), he must have worked closely with K.T. Mazurov, who is now a full member of the Presidium and the 1st Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, USSR. Zimyanin is thus the

2) They are about Rome. L'Unita, 20 September 1965.

3) UPI, 20 September 1965.

4) Literary Gazette, 10 September 1965.

5) Mazurov was a Secretary of the Byelorussian Komsomol in 1942-48.

second member of the Byelorussian apparat to have moved into a leading Party position in Moscow in the past six months, following the road taken by Mazurov.

Just as Zimyanin's early ties with Mazurov are clearly visible, so are those of Rumyantsev with Podgorny. When Podgorny was 1st Secretary of Kharkov Oblast in 1950-53, Rumyantsev worked under him as a Secretary of the Oblast until 1952. But this does not mean that the resignation of Rumyantsev should be interpreted as a blow at Podgorny, because of the heart attack in August which was discussed above.

Moreover it is still likely that Podgorny has the primary responsibility for cadres in the Presidium, stemming from his position as "second" Secretary. In this case it is quite possible that Podgorny himself selected Zimyanin for the new job, although Brezhnev will certainly have had the final word in confirming the appointment.

Zimyanin's own views are not yet known, and he may never make them as explicit as Rumyantsev did. But he will take his instructions from Brezhnev and the Presidium, and therefore the broad lines of Soviet policy in the literary, cultural and economic fields will probably continue in the direction laid down during the past year. In the days when Rumyantsev was editor-in-chief of Problems of Peace and Socialism, no one would ever have dared to predict that only a year later he would be defending Aksenov and Tendryakov against the dogmatists of Izvestia and Selskaya Zhizn. It is wholly possible that a similar revisionist transformation may yet be observed in the career of that unpromising piece of raw material, Zimyanin.

R.R.G.

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