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*EARLY DISSENT WITHIN THE PARTY:
ALEXANDER SHLIAPNIKOV AND
THE LETTER OF THE TWENTY-TWO¹*

On February 26, 1922, twenty-two Russian Communist party members² of working class origins appealed in writing³ to the Executive of the Communist International (Comintern) to help “heal the rift” they thought had emerged between workers and party leaders in Russia. The Twenty-Two were former metalworkers, had played some role in the All-Russian Union of Metalworkers, and had a long history of advocating worker activism and leadership within the Bolshevik party. A. Kollontai (1898) and Z. Shadurskaia added their signatures to those of the original Twenty-Two. As they thought all leading bodies of the Russian Communist party (RCP/b/) had ignored their grievances, the Comintern was their last and highest court of appeal. The signatories complained that “bourgeois” elements had flooded into the party, diluting the influence of “proletarian” members and fostering the suppression of dissent among worker Communists. They protested the suppression of participatory democracy within trade unions and the trend toward unilateral decision-making by the “party and

1. This article is drawn from my doctoral dissertation (Barbara C. Allen, “Worker, Trade Unionist, Revolutionary: A Political Biography of Alexander Shliapnikov, 1905-1922,” Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, Bloomington, 2001), for which I conducted research in Russian archives and libraries in 1995. My research stay was funded by Fulbright-Hayes and IREX. I am grateful to Irina Alexandrovna Shliapnikova and Irina Sergeevna Medvedeva for permitting me to study their fathers’ classified files in the archives of the Federal Security Service and of the Central Control Commission. I would like to thank Alexander Rabinowitch, Hiroaki Kuromiya, Alexis Pogorelskin and Beatrix Farnsworth for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

2. Those who signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two, with date they entered the party: M. Lobanov (1904), N. Kuznetsov (1904?), A. Polosatov (1912), A. Medvedev (1912), G. Miasnikov (1906), V. Pleshkov (1918), G. Shokhanov (1912), S. Medvedev (1900), G. Bruno (1906), A. Pravdin (1899), I. Ivanov (1899), F. Mitin (1902), P. Borisov (1913), M. Kopylov (1912), Zhilin (1915), M. Chelyshev (1910), A. Tolokontsev (1914), A. Shliapnikov (1901), I. Barulin (1917), V. Bekrenev (1907-9/1917), A. Pavlov (1917), A. Tashkin (1917), *Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii* (hereafter RGASPI), f. 17, op. 71, d. 3, ll. 1-2.

3. The letter was published in *Odinnadtsati s’ezd RKP(b), mart-aprel’ 1922 goda: stenograficheskii otchet* (Moscow: Gos. izd. polit. lit., 1961), pp. 749-50, and as “*K chlenam mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii kommunisticheskogo internatsionala*,” in *Materialy po voprosu o gruppe rabochei oppozitsii na XI s’ezde RKP, otchet komissii i rezoliutsiia XI s’ezda RKP o nekotorykh chlenakh byvshei “rabochei oppozitsii”* (Moscow: Izd. otd. Ts.K RKP (b), 1922), p. 16. The letter is also located in RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 3, ll. 1-4. For an English translation of the text, see the web site <http://www.marxists.org/archive/shliapnikov/1922/appeal.htm>.

trade union bureaucracy.” Russian party leaders responded with consternation to the “Letter of the Twenty-Two” and pressured Comintern leaders to denounce it. Further, they initiated a campaign in the press to distort the letter’s contents and slander those who signed it. The Fifth Congress of the All-Russian Metalworkers’ Union served as an arena for party leaders to rehearse the campaign against the “Twenty-Two” that they would mount at the Eleventh Party Congress. Debates at open and closed sessions of the party congress, and political maneuvering behind the scenes revealed much about the dialogue between party leaders and highly placed members on the meaning of party discipline and the limits of internal political discussion and disagreement. It is important to rediscover the “workerist” tendency within the party that the Twenty-Two represented, but that is not the purpose of this article. Rather this article argues that events surrounding the “Letter of the Twenty Two” constituted a critical episode in the party’s internal debate over the extent to which members could criticize party policy and over the meaning of party discipline at a time when the influence of Lenin over the party was fading and that of Stalin was rising. Re-examination of this episode, using newly available sources, can help trace the Bolsheviks’ course toward personal dictatorship and determine key turning points along that path.

Background

The Comintern was founded in March 1919 in Moscow as a replacement for the Second International, which had collapsed in 1914, as member parties disagreed over support for national war efforts. The assumption on which the Comintern was initially based was that world revolution was imminent and its chief goal was to “hasten international socialist revolution.” The Comintern and its Executive were to be the supreme organs of the international communist movement and their decisions were to take precedence over those of any member party. In practice, because the Comintern was based in Russia and Grigory Zinoviev, a RCP(b) politburo member, chaired it since 1919, the Russian party leaders held increasing sway over the body. Lenin and Zinoviev had authored the guiding Twenty-One Points, adopted by the Comintern in 1920.⁴ One of the points stipulated that individuals belonging to any member-party had the right to appeal to the Comintern as the highest organ of the international Communist movement, either separately or collectively, if their grievances were not satisfied by the leading organs of their national party.

The Twenty-Two therefore had reason to believe that their appeal to the Comintern was “legal.” An expanded Comintern Executive was to meet from February 24 to March 4, 1922⁵ to discuss the Russian party leaders’ proposed

4. “The Comintern,” *Enemies Within the Gates?: The Comintern and the Stalinist Repression, 1934-39*, eds. William J. Chase and Vadim Staklo (New Haven, CT/London: Yale Univ. Press, 2001), pp. 11-19.

5. *Die Taktik der Kommunistischen Internationale gegen die Offensive des Kapitals; bericht über die Konferenz der Erweiterten Exekutive der Kommunistischen Internationale. Moskau, vom*

“united front,” which was to unite all revolutionary socialists (including anarchists and syndicalists) and social democratic workers in struggle against international capital and reformist socialist leaders. In fact, the leadership of the Russian-dominated Comintern intended to centralize the international communist movement under its leadership. Thus, the occasion provided an opportunity for the Twenty-Two to reveal the deep disagreements existing within the RCP(b); but in so doing, the Twenty-Two undermined Russian party leaders’ campaign for a united front.

At the center of the controversy was Alexander Shliapnikov (1885-1937),⁶ a party and trade union leader of working class origin (a skilled metalworker) who believed strongly in worker initiative and self-emancipation; his devotion to those goals stood out as the guiding principle behind his political and trade union work. In 1919-1920, Shliapnikov, with leaders of the Russian Metalworkers’ Union, had formed the “Workers’ Opposition,” which called on trade unionists and party members to allow trade unions the leading role in directing the economy. Alexandra Kollontai⁷ mentored the Workers’ Opposition, participated in some of its meetings, spoke on its behalf, and published a brochure about the group for the Tenth Party Congress (*Rabochaya oppositsiia*). The changes Shliapnikov had perceived in the leadership’s attitudes toward workers and in workers’ role in the new society had moved him to organize.⁸ In his view, Bolshevik intellectuals and Soviet leaders had developed a pessimistic view of workers’ potential to govern. At the same time, bureaucratic and reactionary “elements” had taken advantage of the harsh exigencies of Civil War to “disempower” workers and annul the achievements of the October revolution as he viewed them.

24. *Februar bis 4. März, 1922*. (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1967, rept. of 1922 edn.); *Desiat' let Komintern v resheniakh i tsifrah*, comp. A. Tivel and M. Kheimo (Moscow/Leningrad: Gos. izd-vo, 1929).

6. The most up-to-date and extensive biography of Shliapnikov is my doctoral dissertation. V. P. Naumov wrote a short biography of Shliapnikov: *Aleksandr Gavrilovich Shliapnikov: stranitsy politicheskoi biografii* (Moscow: Znanie, 1991, *Novoe v zhizni, nauke, tekhnike: seriia politicheskaiia istoriia XX veka*, no. 8). For brief biographical entries on Shliapnikov, see the *Encyclopedia of Russian History*, ed. James R. Millar (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003); *Biographical Dictionary of European Labour Leaders*, ed. T. Lane (London: Greenwood Press, 1995); *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, ed. Joseph L. Wiczyinski (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1976), vol. 35, and the online *Encyclopedia of Marxism* at <http://www.marxists.org/>. Shliapnikov published an autobiographical entry in *Deiateli SSSR i oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii: avtobiografii i biografii* (Moscow: Russk. bibliograficheskii institute Granat, 1927-29), 3: 244-51.

7. A. M. Kollontai (1873-1952), a Russian noblewoman, was an internationally known socialist feminist. For biographies of her, see Barbara Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist: The Life of Alexandra Kollontai* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979), and Beatrice Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai: Socialism, Feminism, and the Bolshevik Revolution* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univ. Press, 1980).

8. For more on the events and developments that spurred Shliapnikov to critique Soviet policy toward workers, see my article, “Alexander Shliapnikov and the Origins of the Workers’ Opposition, March 1919-April 1920,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 53, no. 1 (2005): 1-24.

To renew the party's commitment to worker empowerment, the Workers' Opposition called for a "workerization" of the Communist party, by introducing a preponderance of workers into leading party organs. The opposition also called for trade unions to exercise controlling influence over government economic organs and to implement economic policy. The Workers' Opposition gained strength and its proposals acquired momentum during the winter of 1919-1920, especially after Trotsky's theses calling for the "militarization of labor" outraged trade unionists.⁹ When the trade union debate, which had been simmering throughout 1920, was opened in the party press in December of that year, the Workers' Opposition began to organize a campaign to elect delegates to the Tenth Party Congress, scheduled for March 1921. Kollontai wrote a pamphlet in support of the Workers' Opposition,¹⁰ which appeared in print as the Tenth Party Congress opened and which became the best-known document of the group. Kollontai's passionate and lucid exposition of the Oppositionists' views created a stir among the delegates. Influenced by the Kronstadt uprising and Lenin's frightening warnings of the ideological threat posed by the Workers' Opposition, congress delegates not only voted against the opposition's proposals, but censured the oppositionists, banning further factionalism within the party.

With Lenin's support a few concessions were made to the opposition. The congress elected Shliapnikov and two other Workers' Oppositionists to the party central committee (CC), he was selected to chair a commission to improve workers' living conditions, and he and other oppositionists were included in purge commissions entrusted with the task of "cleansing" the party of "opportunist elements." Through his new positions, Shliapnikov attempted to expand the role of trade unions in the Soviet state to include management of production. Shliapnikov's commitment to worker control of industry through unions and to state investment in heavy industry, however, clashed with the party's concessions to private industry and to peasant agriculture in the New Economic Policy (NEP) approved by the Tenth Party Congress. When he criticized some aspects of NEP before an audience of factory-level Communists, he provoked a confrontation with the politburo.

The majority of the politburo aligned with Lenin and Zinoviev and sought to strengthen the party's control over trade unions. Their policy included diluting the strength of the former Workers' Opposition within the Metalworkers' Union. The Leninists could not allow Shliapnikov and his supporters to make a faction-

9. On the trade union debates within the Russian Communist party, see Robert Daniels, *The Conscience of the Revolution: Communist Opposition in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1960; revised edition, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988); Jay Sorenson, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism: 1917-1928* (New York: Atherton Press, 1969); and Larry E. Holmes, *For the Revolution Redeemed: The Workers Opposition in the Bolshevik Party, 1919-1921*, The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East European Studies, no. 802 (Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Center for Russian and East European Studies, 1990). My dissertation ("Worker, Trade Unionist, Revolutionary") contributes new findings on the debate.

10. Alexandra Kollontai, *Rabochaia oppozitsiia* (Moscow: Izd. otd. Ts.K. R.K.P. (b), 1921).

al weapon from the Metalworkers' Union. In the course of 1921, Shliapnikov was removed from his position as chairman of the Metalworkers' Union and the union leadership was packed with supporters of the politburo's trade union line.¹¹ Shliapnikov was nearly expelled from the CC in August 1921 on charges of violating party discipline and encouraging factionalism within the party.

He and his supporters did not operate from the same set of assumptions about the meaning of "democracy" within the party and about the role of workers in directing their organizations, as did the Leninists. The opposition perceived the Leninists' actions as part of a coordinated effort to denude the production unions of their strongest defenders. In response, Shliapnikov and his colleagues, the Twenty-Two, decided to make one last appeal, this time to the Comintern, as the highest court in the international communist movement.

Private meetings of the Twenty-Two

Shliapnikov and his supporters decided to appeal to the Comintern only after much discussion. In February 1922 Shliapnikov held several secret meetings with colleagues in the Metalworkers' Union to discuss their tactics, goals, and a course of action at the upcoming Fifth Congress of the Metalworkers' Union and the Eleventh Party Congress. Those meetings, organized by Sergei Medvedev¹² (Shliapnikov's friend since 1907 and co-leader of the Workers' Opposition), are of interest for the diversity they show among the oppositionists, the way in which Shliapnikov analyzed his fellow oppositionists' proposals, and for what they reveal about Shliapnikov's cautious political tactics. The meetings reveal divisions between oppositionists at the center and at the local level, between advocates of trade unions and advocates of soviets as organs better suited for democratization of Soviet life, and between those who thought it necessary to stay within the Communist party and those who wanted to create a new, improved workers' party. Participating in the February meetings were communists, all former metalworkers, who perceived the role of workers within the Communist party as diminishing.

11. For a detailed examination of these events, see my article, "The Evolution of Communist Party Control over Trade Unions: Alexander Shliapnikov and the Trade Unions in May 1921," *Revolutionary Russia*, 15, no. 2 (2002): 72-105.

12. S. P. Medvedev (1885-1937) joined the RSDRP in 1900, participated in the famous Obukhov workers' strike in 1901, worked in the underground section of the insurance committees' movement on the eve of and during World War I, spent part of the war in exile (in the same location as Stalin), was chairman of the Achinsk soviet in 1917, a Bolshevik Party organizer in Achinsk, and an editor of *Sibirskaya Pravda*; later in 1917 he was chairman of the executive committee of the 12th army and a delegate to the Third Congress of Soviets. In 1918-19, he held various posts on the front in the Civil War, in 1920 worked for the Commissariat of Transport and was elected to the central committee of the Metalworkers' Union (RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9102, ll. 174-88, autobiography for central purge commission, February 10, 1922). He is best known as the author of "Letter to a Baku Oppositionist" (1924), for which the CCC investigated him and Shliapnikov in 1926. The letter was published in *Kommunisticheskaia oppozitsiia v SSSR, 1923-1927*, ed. Iu. Fel'shtinskii, 4 vols. (Moscow: Terra, 1990), 1: 90-101.

A close connection existed between participants and the former Workers' Opposition. Eight had signed the theses of the Workers' Opposition,¹³ while nearly all had supported the opposition. The chief exception was Gavril Miasnikov,¹⁴ who would go on to found the "Workers' Group" within the RCP(b). Medvedev took notes of the proceedings (the account of the meetings provided below is based on his handwritten notes, which were confiscated by Soviet secret police upon his arrest for political crimes in 1935 and which are now stored in the archives of the Federal Security Service).¹⁵ The first meeting in mid-February 1922 was devoted to discussing the political thoughts of workers at the local level, the role of unions under NEP, the attempt to create a united workers' front in Europe (announced at the December 1921 CC plenum), and the group's further plan of action.

All participants reported a dismal mood among both communist and nonparty workers. F. Mitin¹⁶ flatly stated that party and union life were dead, that discussion was often forbidden, and that many communists and unionists no longer tried to make proposals or discuss important questions because they felt it did not matter. Miasnikov reported that in Perm everyone was afraid of the political police (Cheka) and in Ekaterinburg unionists were afraid to publish anything. He reported that entire cells of communists were leaving the party, some enticed back only by gifts of boots from party leaders.¹⁷ A participant from Moscow spoke of apathy among Moscow worker-communists and indignation at the Soviet government's ordering industrial products from abroad rather than subsidizing their production within Russia.¹⁸

The oppositionists blamed one another for missed opportunities. A participant from Ukraine complained that leading oppositionists there had missed the opportunity to galvanize opposition to leaders of the Metalworkers' Union at a recent trade union conference; he believed that the opposition could have taken over the leadership if only its leaders had rallied and spoken. Local representatives blamed Shliapnikov and others in the "center" (Moscow) for not showing

13. RGASPI, f 17, op. 71, d. 3, ll. 1-2.

14. Gavril Miasnikov (1889-1945), a metalworker from the Urals and a Bolshevik underground activist since 1906, had been a Left Communist in 1918. He was not a member of the Workers' Opposition. In 1923, he formed an opposition faction called "Workers' Group of the Russian Communist party" (Paul Avrich, "Bolshevik Opposition to Lenin: G. T. Miasnikov and the Workers' Group," *Russian Review*, 43, no. 1 (1984): 1-29). For Miasnikov's autobiography and materials on the "Miasnikov affair," see "*Miasnikov – filosofii ubiitsa*," *Minuvshee* 18 (1995): 137-91.

15. *Tsentrāl'nyi arkhiv Federal'noi Sluzhby Bezopasnosti* (hereafter TsA FSB), R33718, vol. 41, ll. 68-69, Sergei Medvedev's handwritten notes, dated February 10 or 16, 1922; and vol. 40, ll. 127-128.

16. Flor (Frol?) Mitin (b. 1882) joined the party in 1902 but was a Menshevik until joining the Communist Party in March 1920. Positions he held included chairmanships of the Metalworkers' Union in Donetsk guberniia, Tula, Kharkov, and Ekaterinoslav (RGASPI, f. 5667, op. 5, d. 226, l. 199).

17. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 41, l. 68.

18. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, l. 127.

enough direction and leadership and for allowing a gulf to open between leaders of the opposition and potential supporters.

The situation in Nikolaev was instructive. Mitin urged Shliapnikov and his supporters to provide leadership for an already existing “underground” organization in Nikolaev, which had no leadership of its own.¹⁹ According to one of the participants (possibly Mitin), the Workers’ Opposition in Nikolaev had been so strong that its supporters had proven to be the overwhelming majority (eighty-four of one hundred) at the local congress of trade unions. When the congress’s oppositionist majority clashed with the Leninist majority in the guberniia union committee, central party leaders sent D. Manuilsky²⁰ (a CC member and Leninist) to Nikolaev; Manuilsky transferred about ninety prominent supporters of the Workers’ Opposition elsewhere. Some in Nikolaev continued to organize, but lacked capable leaders. They reportedly resented Shliapnikov and other central opposition figures in Moscow for not giving leadership or rendering aid. Shliapnikov refused to discuss the possibility of providing leadership for the Nikolaev group, although he said that he saw nothing harmful in the organization of such groups and clubs in Russia.²¹ Thus, he tacitly encouraged his supporters to form groups on the local level, but refused to set up a centralized network of leadership that would bring charges of factionalism from party leaders.

To Mitin’s criticism of him and others in the “center” for absence of leadership, Shliapnikov responded that he and the “centrists” had sensed no support from the regions. Shliapnikov rebuked his local supporters for not working closely enough with workers in the factories, for providing insufficient material for a political platform, and for offering little concrete information about the moods, desires and life of workers at the local level. The problem lay not only at the local level. Shliapnikov admitted that the opposition itself had to a certain extent become demoralized.²² Despite their dejection Shliapnikov and his supporters attempted to explore where their views coincided and to develop the future tactics of the group. The most important issue was the role of unions under NEP.

A discordant note was sounded by Miasnikov’s views on unions’ and soviets’ roles in the management of production. He shared Shliapnikov’s concerns about the party dictatorship, but went further than Shliapnikov in his criticisms of it. Like Shliapnikov and his supporters, Miasnikov had suffered at the hands of party leaders for outspoken criticism of the diminishing role of workers in the party and in management of the economy. Miasnikov and the Workers’ Opposi-

19. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 41, ll. 68-69.

20. D. Z. Manuilsky (1883-59) had joined the party in 1903, participated in the 1905 revolution, had been a *Vperedist* in 1907, was an internationalist during World War I, a *Mezhraionets* in 1917, and in 1920-21 was Commissar of Agriculture of Ukraine, secretary of the party CC in Ukraine, and editor of the newspaper *Kommunist (Odinnadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b), stenograficheskii otchet, mart-aprel' 1922 goda*, [Moscow: Gos. izd. polit. lit., 1961], p. 834).

21. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, ll. 128, 143.

22. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, ll. 127-28.

tion could not agree on precisely who should manage production; Miasnikov advocated the soviets, the Workers' Opposition advocated unions. Most of Shliapnikov's supporters were opposed to Miasnikov's proposal to give management of production to the soviets, seeing the likelihood of further strengthening the peasantry's influence over state policy. Shliapnikov harshly criticized Miasnikov's plan for management through the soviets, saying it in essence meant the "organization of peasant unions." He concluded, "The working class should not organize a unit hostile to it." Later in the meeting Shliapnikov expressed the fear that the Communist party was degenerating and falling into the hands of "a peasant element, which wants to become the complete master of Russia."²³ The fact that Shliapnikov would invite Miasnikov to discuss his views, despite Shliapnikov's adamant opposition to them, reflects the importance that he placed on including communists of worker origin in party discourse.

Discussion of Miasnikov's views on soviet vs. union management of production led to a more general discussion of what role unions should assume in the face of their exclusion from an important managing role in production (whether by soviets or by state economic organs). Pravdin²⁴ exclaimed how perplexing he found the fact that the proletariat could be removed from management in a proletarian state. He questioned whether the Communist party was "really the party of the proletariat" and if it were, why had the proletarian party "overthrown the proletariat." All participants saw NEP as a setback for the revolution. Tolokontsev²⁵ for one, although accepting the necessity of NEP, believed that the working class should lead its implementation. As for the role of unions under NEP, he declared that if they would not be allowed to manage production, then they should "defend the interests of their members." In essence, he argued that unions should resume their pre-revolutionary role as defenders of workers' rights in the workplace. Another participant thought this role impossible under existing conditions; he declared that trade unions could not resort to carrying out strikes, the ultimate method of pressure against employers, because they had no strike funds.²⁶

23. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, ll. 127-28.

24. A. G. Pravdin (1879-1943) had joined the party in 1899, participated in the 1905 revolution, was on the editorial board of *Pravda* in 1912-14, and after the October 1917 Revolution worked in the NKVD (*Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 843).

25. A. F. Tolokontsev (1889-1937) joined the party in 1914, distinguished himself during 1917 in the factory committee movement, and after the revolution was chairman of the board of artillery factories and a leading member of the Metalworkers' Union, as well as a member of the VSNKh presidium (*Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 853). In an August 10, 1921 memo to Lenin, P. A. Bogdanov of VSNKh described him in glowing terms: "To the highest degree an energetic worker, quick at making decisions, capable of displaying great strictness and being demanding, accompanying this with great tact in relation to his subordinates, including specialists. . . . this is one of the most interesting people who I have met during the October revolution (RGASPI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 910, l. 3).

26. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, ll. 127-28.

The final question on the agenda of the meeting concerned further tactics. Views differed considerably. Tolokontsev believed it reasonable for the meeting's participants to entertain the idea of splitting from the Communist party and creating a worker party. Pointing to the example of the underground organization in Nikolaev, which was in need of leadership, he suggested that potential supporters for a worker party were available. One participant favored delaying a decision on whether to split from the party, because the group had not prepared and organized well enough for such an act. Instead, he proposed to organize "circles with a leading group" within the Communist party. Pravdin was totally opposed to a split; instead, he called for "strong means" to heal the party (but did not specify what means he thought were necessary). An attempt to form a new party would make a strong symbolic statement but would also be suicidal; the Cheka would crush it, and its participants would have no further chance to influence party policy. Both Miasnikov and Vladimirov,²⁷ secretary of the All-Russian Metalworkers' Union, called for Shliapnikov and Medvedev to prepare a platform and present it to their supporters for discussion. Others seemed to agree, but Medvedev objected that he and Shliapnikov could not just compose a platform; it had to be the product of collective work. He found this quite unlikely, however, because of the diversity of opinions within the group. Further, he commented sardonically that some of those demanding a platform feared to "write anything that would diverge from the decrees of the CC." Shliapnikov flatly called the demand for a platform "impossible."²⁸ He was deeply committed to observing party legality; he knew that to present a platform would violate the ban on factionalism passed by the Tenth Party Congress.

Nevertheless, against Shliapnikov's protests, his supporters voted to assign him and Medvedev to elaborate a political platform that would be discussed at a meeting on February 20, 1922 for presentation to the Eleventh Party Congress. Medvedev's notes indicate that he and Shliapnikov prepared not a platform but a set of theses that were discussed at a meeting that included Shliapnikov and those sympathetic to his views.²⁹ Neither Shliapnikov nor Medvedev ever presented these theses to a party assembly. The fact that Shliapnikov's colleagues would order him and Medvedev to prepare a platform and that they would ignore that order and prepare a different type of document, perhaps even for an audience different from the one that the others at the meeting intended, testifies

27. Mikhail Petrovich Vladimirov (1880-1938) joined the party in 1899, worked in metals factories in Sormovo, Moscow and Petersburg while pursuing illegal revolutionary activities and trade union organization, was arrested and sent to Siberian exile several times. From 1917 to 1922, he was secretary and treasurer of the Metalworkers' Union's central committee (*Deiateli revoliutsionnogo dvizheniia v Rossii* (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1974); *Rasstrel'nye spiski: Moskva 1937-1941* (Moscow: Obshchestvo "Memorial," 2000). This is not the same person as Miron Konstantinovich Vladimirov (née Sheinfinkel) who worked in Narkomprod and died of natural causes in 1926.

28. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, ll. 127-28.

29. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 40, l. 128, ll. 133-39.

to the chaotic relationship between Shliapnikov and those who shared his concern for a workers' role in socialist society.

Despite talk of presenting a platform or theses, in the end Shliapnikov and his colleagues decided both of those steps would too easily provoke charges of factionalism and entail prosecution by party leaders. Instead, Shliapnikov and twenty-one others decided to appeal to the Comintern. He believed that an appeal to the Comintern would be less likely to smack of factionalism than would the platform or theses of a group.³⁰ Kollontai could also be effective in that setting. Although she had not collaborated with Shliapnikov in opposition since summer 1921 and there is no evidence that she was present at any of the private meetings Shliapnikov held with the original signatories in February 1922, she shared Shliapnikov's concerns, as well as his hopes for the Comintern's impartiality and his sense that appeal to it was the only route that remained. Shliapnikov and Medvedev had always valued her talents as a persuasive speaker (in several languages) and hoped she might sway an international audience. Moreover, Kollontai was scheduled to speak on the "woman question" at the Comintern's conference and so there was the possibility that she, more easily than others of the Twenty-Two, could interject some words on behalf of the appeal. It is telling that Shliapnikov sincerely believed that the appeal had a chance of consideration by the Comintern. His commitment to the ideas of worker empowerment and internationalism blinded him to the influence of Russian party leaders in the Comintern, which was so strong that realistically his tactics were hopeless.

At the Comintern Executive

The "Letter of the Twenty-Two," with the signatures of Kollontai and her close friend Zoya Shadurskaia³¹ added to those of the original twenty-two, was presented to the Comintern Executive on February 26, 1922. In the letter, the twenty-two signatories called on the Comintern, before approving the Russian party leaders' plan for a united workers' front in Western Europe, to "heal the rift" between workers and party leaders in Russia. Shliapnikov found it unlikely that the Russian Communist party could lead an international effort for a "united workers' front," when there was so much disunity and reduction of workers' role within the Russian party itself. The signatories further claimed that the "proletariat's" influence over the Russian Communist party had been weakened by a strong influx of "bourgeois" elements into the party. They complained that party leaders had crushed dissent within the party, especially from proletarian members. They revealed that suppression had extended to trade unions where members were not allowed to elect their own leaders and the decisions of union congresses were annulled or ignored by the "party and trade union bureaucracy."

30. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 1, l. 10.

31. Z. L. Shadurskaia (1873-1939) was a close friend of both Kollontai and Shliapnikov; she shared their ideals and their concern that the revolution was taking a wrong course.

As a result, the twenty-two communists declared, communist workers were becoming disillusioned and leaving the party. Finally, the signatories expressed their support for a united international workers' front, but first asked that the Comintern intervene to help heal the rift between Russian communist workers and their leaders and to "eliminate the threat of a schism hanging over our party."³²

When Kollontai attempted to speak before the Comintern conference on February 26, 1922 on behalf of the views expressed in the appeal, Russian party leaders (most notably Trotsky and Zinoviev) on the presidium³³ of the Comintern conference had her name removed from the list of orators. In a private meeting with Kollontai, they urged her not to speak. Zinoviev insisted that support for the united front was a party directive that the entire Russian delegation had to pursue without reservations. When Kollontai proved recalcitrant, Trotsky forbade her to speak and issued a decree, in the name of the CC, ordering all members of the Russian delegation to "obey the directives of the party."³⁴ Thus, both Trotsky and Zinoviev stifled criticism in the name of party discipline.

On the next day, February 27, the politburo delegated Zinoviev and Trotsky to convince the Comintern Executive³⁵ that the claims within the Letter of the Twenty-Two were distortions and that the letter was a factionalist statement of the former Workers' Opposition.³⁶ The Comintern created a commission to investigate the letter. It included Clara Zetkin, the French Communists Ludovic-Oscar Frossard and Marcel Cachin, and the young Italian Communist Umberto Terracini (b. 1895)³⁷; they interviewed Shliapnikov and Kollontai on March 3, 1922. According to Kollontai, the commission only "hastily" questioned her and

32. "K chlenam mezhdunarodnoi konferentsii kommunisticheskogo internatsionala," p. 16.

33. Other presidium members were Radek and Bukharin (Russia), Brandler (Germany), Souvarine (France), Terracini (Italy), Kreibich (Czechoslovakia), and Carr (née Ludwig E. Katterfield, USA. For more on Carr, see John Haynes *et al.*, *The Soviet World of American Communism* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 19, 360.

34. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, ll. 33-35.

35. The Executive, as elected at the July 1921 Comintern Congress, consisted of: Zinoviev, Bukharin, Radek, Lenin, Trotsky (Russia), Gehert and Frohlich (Germany), Souvarine (France), Burian and Kreibich (Czechoslovakia), Terracini and Gennari (Italy), and seventeen other members. The extended session in late February - early March 1922 was attended by 105 participants from 36 countries (*Desiat' let kominterna*, p. 160). For biographical information on leading members of the Comintern at this time, see *Agents of the Revolution: New Biographical Approaches to the History of International Communism in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, eds. Kevin Morgan *et al.* (Oxford, Peter Lang Publishing Group, 2005).

36. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 273.

37. Other members were Arthur MacManus of Great Britain, Kreibich of Czechoslovakia, and Vasil Kolarov of Bulgaria (RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 3, l. 13). Syndicalist Alfred Rosmer and anarchist Victor Serge recalled Frossard and Cachin as types who would change their views according to the prevailing wind (Rosmer, *Moscow under Lenin*, trans. Ian Birchall [New York/London: Monthly Review Press, 1971], 152; and Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. Peter Sedgwick [London: Oxford University Press, 1963], p. 104). In her biography of Kollontai, Beatrice Farnsworth describes Zetkin in early 1922 as "old, upset over the death of Rosa Luxemburg, and easily flattered and manipulated by RCP leaders" (Farnsworth, *Aleksandra Kollontai*, pp. 262-63).

Shliapnikov and then sat in a long session with Trotsky and Zinoviev, after which it roundly condemned the letter and its signatories. The commission censured the Twenty-Two and warned them not to make such an appeal in the future. Kollontai recalled the scene in her diary:

Kreibich . . . pronounced an accusatory, prosecutorial speech against us, woven out of cunning attacks (the author, obviously, was Radek). . . . Radek spoke crudely against us, chiefly against me. . . . And no one protested! Even the old lady Clara [Zetkin] was silent. To what degree has Zinoviev developed lackeyism, cowardice!

In retrospect, it is difficult to see how the Twenty-Two could possibly have succeeded in having the Comintern approve their appeal because Zinoviev and other Soviet Communist party leaders held that organization so tightly in rein. Their appeal to the Comintern signified that Shliapnikov and the others had already been backed into a corner and could not pursue any productive course of action. Kollontai's assessment of the appeal underlined a vague hope in its significance as a principled act: "At least someone decided to speak the truth. And I think, that this act will not pass in vain, it will force some to think, to understand that it is not possible to continue thus in the future."³⁸

Fifth Congress of the Metalworkers' Union

A few days after the twenty-two Russian communists had presented their appeal to the Comintern, the Fifth Congress of the Metalworkers' Union convened. The communist fraction of the congress met from March 2-8. Before the congress began, Shliapnikov and those who shared his views had determined to wage a campaign to reassume the leadership of their union, but this seemed unlikely. Since the last session of the union's central committee in October, some of Shliapnikov's backers had vacillated in their support. In addition, the politburo took determined measures before the congress to ensure that candidates it approved would lead the union. Finally, as the fraction convened, it appeared doubtful whether Shliapnikov's supporters comprised a majority of delegates.

On the eve of the congress, Shliapnikov and his allies were uncertain of their strength. At one of their meetings before the congress began, it was notable that Vladimirov was not present. He had apparently withdrawn from the struggle. Those who remained decided that their primary goal at the congress would be to give "rebuff" to the "coalition of fools and careerists" in the union's leadership. If they could win a majority of the fraction, they would push for implementation of their decisions. If half of the fraction were with them, they would push for proportional representation in the union's leadership. If they had a "resolute"

38. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, ll. 36-38, March 12, 1922. No protocol was recorded at the session when the Comintern commission interviewed Kollontai and Shliapnikov, but one of the commission members restored it later from memory (RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 15-16).

large minority, they would carry the struggle to “lower organs” of the union.³⁹ They did not address the question of what to do if they had a majority but the CC (or politburo) struck down their decisions, as had occurred at the last congress, when Shliapnikov and many of his supporters submitted to party discipline.⁴⁰

Meanwhile, the politburo was preparing for a confrontation at the congress. On February 20, 1922, it accepted Lenin’s proposal to create under the orgburo a “special commission for the verification and renewal of the leading heights of the trade union movement.”⁴¹ On February 23, the politburo instructed the orgburo commission and the bureau of the communist fraction of VTsSPS to decide the composition of the new central committee of the Metalworkers’ Union. The politburo further instructed guberniia party committees to decide the composition of gubernia-level union committees.⁴²

The communist fraction of the central committee of the Metalworkers’ Union met on February 24, 1922 to consider theses to endorse for the congress. I. Lepse,⁴³ a Leninist and Shliapnikov’s replacement in 1921 as chair of the union, presented theses. No rival theses were offered. If Shliapnikov’s supporters had planned to present theses, they backed down before this meeting. Sixteen voting members were present.⁴⁴ Eight of them had formerly supported the Workers’ Opposition. Nevertheless, eleven of the sixteen voted for Lepse’s theses, indicating that several of Shliapnikov’s supporters had shifted. Of six candidate members present,⁴⁵ five voted against Lepse’s theses, with one in favor, but their votes did not count in the official total.⁴⁶

39. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 43, l. 148, Medvedev’s handwritten notes. A list of names is included with this document (likely a list of those who attended the meeting): Shliapnikov, Medvedev, Chelyshev, Bruno, Tolokontsev, Borisov, Pravdin, Budniak, Kubiak, Miasnikov, Tashkin, Chernov, Lobanov, Kolesnikov, Mitin, Polosatov, Zhilin, Pavlov, Tarasov, Deulenkov, Mikhailov, Vasilev, Kuznetsov, Babkin, Kutuzov, Fabb, Ignatev, Kubyshkin, Barulin, Mikov.

40. Notable exceptions were Ivan Perepechko and V. L. Paniushkin (for more on their dissent, see my dissertation and that of Simon Pirani, “The Changing Political Relationship between the Moscow Workers and the Bolsheviks,” PhD diss., Univ. of Essex, 2006).

41. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 271, l. 4, February 20, 1922. Members of the commission were All-Russian Council of Trade Unions leader M. Tomsky, A. Andreev, and S. Syrtsov. Andreev also worked in VTsSPS, had supported Trotsky during the trade union debate, but eventually became a devoted Stalinist. Syrtsov led agitation and propaganda work for the CC.

42. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 271, February 23, 1922. The politburo added that this directive should not be published.

43. Ivan Ivanovich Lepse (1889-1929) joined the party in 1904, worked in Riga and Petrograd; in 1917 he held posts in the Bolshevik party and in the Metalworkers’ Union, served in the civil war, and from 1921 to 1929 was chairman of the Metalworkers’ Union central committee (*Biographical Dictionary of European Labor Leaders*, 1: 563-64).

44. Tashkin, Bukhanov, Tarygin, Ianson, Lepse, Ignatev, Shliapnikov, Mikhailov, Stepanov, Vorobei, Gurevich, Mitin, Vladimirov, Fedorov, Tolokontsev, Lavrentev.

45. Klinov, Budniak, Bruno, Lobanov, Medvedev, Pavlov.

46. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 8, l. 33.

One more important meeting occurred on the eve of the congress. The bureau of the communist fraction of the central committee of the Metalworkers' Union met with representatives of the larger regional delegations of the congress to nominate candidates for the presidium of the congress. Shliapnikov did not attend. Lapse and Vladimirov (who was not present) were unanimously elected to the presidium. The only supporter of Shliapnikov who appeared to be present was Deulenkov of Moscow, who nominated Shliapnikov as the representative to the presidium from Moscow. All others present voted against Shliapnikov.⁴⁷

The communist fraction of the Fifth All-Russian Congress of the Metalworkers' Union convened on March 2, 1922, with 161 communist metalworkers attending. The bureau of the communist fraction of the union's central committee presented one list for the presidium of the congress; Skliznev, a supporter of Shliapnikov, presented another list.⁴⁸ Vladimirov and Tarasov removed their names from the list of the bureau of the fraction; Tarygin and Lapse removed their names from Skliznev's list. The fraction's vote immediately showed that those loyal to the politburo (and opposing Shliapnikov) had a majority, although not an overwhelming one. By 85-76, the fraction confirmed the bureau's list for the presidium (Lapse, Vorobev, Gurevich, Klinov, Radchenko, Matrozov, Tarygin, Bukhanov, Balandin and Damaskin).⁴⁹ None of these were Shliapnikov's supporters.

Shliapnikov had made a few brief comments before voting for the presidium took place. He urged that delegates not let their votes be influenced by accusations swirling around the Letter of the Twenty-Two to the Comintern. Furthermore, he withdrew from his supporters' struggle to resume control of the union. He asked that his name also be removed from Skliznev's list for the presidium, since he could "already see what is going to come of this congress."⁵⁰ Nevertheless, voices from the floor nominated Shliapnikov for the presidium. Ianson rejected their calls and, disparaging Shliapnikov, said, "It is possible to bandy one's name about, to be a noisy cart, but to do little in everyday work." Ianson proposed Vladimirov instead, as an example of a diligent and hard worker.⁵¹

In refusing his nomination to the presidium, Vladimirov, as at the previous congress, spoke passionately. He declared that he had never yearned for high-ranking posts, but had worked hard "because I sensed the vibrancy of this work." Nevertheless, for the preceding six months, he had suffered more at his

47. RGASPI f. 99, op. 1, d. 7, l. 27, undated. Attendees: Lapse, Vorobev, Mikhailov, Gurevich, Ianson (all from the bureau of the communist fraction of the union's central committee), Klinov from Petrograd, Tarygin from Tula, Padchenko and Matrozov from Donbas, Potaskuev from Ekaterinburg, Deulenkov from Moscow, Kaigorodov from Izhevsk, Denisov and Bazhin from N. Novgorod, Balandin from Perm.

48. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 1. I do not have a list of the names on Skliznev's list.

49. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 7, l. 24; RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 4, 6. Gurevich, Balandin, and Bukhanov were confirmed in place of Vladimirov, Tarasov and Tashkin, who had removed their names from the bureau's list.

50. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 2.

51. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 4.

job than he had in tsarist prisons, he said. Furthermore, he maintained that he would refuse to hold a post in the union's central committee, even if he were to be charged with violating party discipline. Vladimirov concluded, "I am thankful for your trust in me for four years, but this time I ask you to leave me in peace." Lepse cast aspersions on Vladimirov's loyalty to the party, but the fraction allowed him to resign and replaced him with Gurevich. When Kiselev requested that Tashkin replace Balandin on the presidium, Tashkin refused, for the same reasons as Vladimirov.⁵² Thus, these proceedings showed disarray among Shliapnikov's supporters, between those such as Skliznev and Kiselev, who still wanted to fight, and, on the other hand, Shliapnikov, Vladimirov, Tashkin, and Tarasov, who refused to participate.

Next, Medvedev gave a speech on the role of the Metalworkers' Union under NEP. Medvedev was only allowed to speak after forty-two communist metalworkers signed an appeal to the union's leadership to allow him to do so.⁵³ His central theme was unions' role in defending workers under NEP. He called for the right of workers in capitalist enterprises to strike and for the union to create strike funds and unemployment funds; for without those, capitalists would not abide by collective agreements.⁵⁴ Significantly, he wanted to extend this discussion to consider unions' defense of workers not only in capitalist enterprises, but also in state enterprises, implying his doubts that the "proletarian state" actually ruled in the interests of the "proletariat."⁵⁵ Finally, Medvedev declared unions should use their influence in the soviets to defend workers. He made it clear that he was not calling for independence of unions from state power, as did the Mensheviks and SRs; on the contrary, he believed that if unions were independent, they would have far less influence over state policy. Gurevich called Medvedev's proposals "anti-Marxist" and said that it was no longer necessary to use "old methods" of trade union work. He complained that since Medvedev had not presented theses, his opponents had not had the opportunity to make a thorough critique of his views.⁵⁶ Conversely, since Medvedev did not present theses, there was no opportunity to gauge support for his views among delegates.

Shliapnikov, who spoke after Medvedev and Gurevich, explained that Medvedev had not offered any theses because he, Shliapnikov, and their supporters had "learned from bitter experience" that when they introduced theses their opponents accused them of creating a faction. In response to Gurevich, Shliapnikov said that old methods of trade union work would not be necessary

52. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 5.

53. Among the forty-two were: Fokin, Ivanov, Safronov, Sukhanov, Tarasov, Poplavsky, Petrov, Firsenskov, Romov, Rogozhinsky, Sidorov, Makhnevich, Shokhanov, Safatinov, Gorunenko, Markov, Kunenko, Komissarov, Bolshakov, Parov, Lukka, Uvarov, Zhilin, Kosov, Brykov, Petrov, Kondratev, Sobolenko, Deulenkov (RGASPI f. 99, op. 1, d. 7, l. 42). I found the other signatures to be illegible.

54. *Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (hereafter GARF), f. 5469, op. 17, d. 3, ll. 4-5.

55. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 23-25.

56. GARF, f. 5469, op. 17, d. 3, l. 6.

only if “everything in our government had changed.”⁵⁷ Unfortunately, Shliapnikov continued, government policy “now is not new but old.” War communism and the nationalization of enterprises, he declared, had been a “new economic policy.” Rather than being a necessary outgrowth of the hardship of civil war, he argued, those radical policies had provoked civil war. Shliapnikov said, “Let’s call ‘new’ the economic policy which was new in relation to capitalism and not that which is our policy at the present time.” Shliapnikov’s hawkish defense of war communism illustrated the uncompromising nature of his views on how to build and lead a socialist state. Despite his defense of Medvedev’s assumptions about the nature of NEP, Shliapnikov differed with Medvedev on the use of strikes. Rather than assume strikes were the most effective recourse against capitalists who had leased factories, Shliapnikov advocated that “state laws and courts” be used to enforce collective agreements between concessionaires and workers and their unions.⁵⁸ Shliapnikov, then, demonstrated more confidence in the state than did Medvedev.

After Shliapnikov’s remarks, delegates prepared to vote on two lists for the new central committee of the union. But before their vote Tomsy informed delegates of the politburo’s highly critical view of the Letter of the Twenty-Two. Ianson, a loyal member of the union’s “new” leadership, responded by proposing a list for the new central committee of the union that would exclude those old members who led the appeal to the Comintern. Thus, Shliapnikov accused Tomsy of provoking a split.⁵⁹ Contrary to Ianson’s proposal, Medvedev urged delegates to elect a “strong, authoritative central committee” that would be able to exert its influence on such vital questions as the “necessity to stop orders abroad for equipment that could be made at home.” Further, he warned delegates against being pressured to participate in persecution of dissenters.⁶⁰

During the debate over elections to the new central committee, Shliapnikov’s sympathizers criticized the central committee that had existed between the fourth and fifth congresses for having accomplished nothing, because, as appointees, its members had no credibility. In response, Lapse pointed out that the majority of the central committee had nearly always been on Shliapnikov’s and Medvedev’s side. He neglected to mention that decision-making power had been reserved for the secretariat and presidium of the union, which were dominated by Shliapnikov’s opponents. Arguing that “appointmentism” was a legitimate tradition in the history of Communist (or Bolshevik) relations with trade unions, Lapse accused Shliapnikov of having been an appointee in 1917.⁶¹ Shliapnikov protested this attempt to revise party history, recalling that when the CC assigned him to win over the Metalworkers’ Union in 1917, he was the sole Bolshevik in the bureau leading the union. The other two members were Menshe-

57. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 76.

58. GARF, f. 5469, op. 17, d. 3, l. 11.

59. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 26.

60. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 35-37.

61. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, ll. 49, 51-52.

viks. When he and his comrades won the union, Shliapnikov insisted, “we consistently did so by means of elections.” His response drew applause from the delegates.⁶²

Despite delegates’ applause for Shliapnikov, predictably, his supporters did not prevail when the time came to vote for the new central committee of the union. Vorobev nominated a list in the name of the old central committee of the union and of major regional committees. Skliznev, presumably representing Shliapnikov’s supporters, nominated a rival list. Vorobev’s list included representatives from the regions⁶³ and members who would work continuously in Moscow.⁶⁴ Tomsky endorsed Vorobev’s list, emphasizing that only those from the former Workers’ Opposition who were “serious workers, not those who will conduct politics,” could be allowed in the new central committee of the union.⁶⁵ On Vorobev’s list, only three nominees either were supporters of Shliapnikov or sympathized with him; Vladimirov was among the full members of the central committee on his list; Tolokontsev and Orlov were among the candidate members. Skliznev’s list contained twenty-five full members, of whom at least half shared Shliapnikov’s views on the role of unions.⁶⁶ Vorobev’s list passed with ninety-nine votes, as opposed to eighty-four for Skliznev’s list.⁶⁷

By the March 6 session of the communist fraction of the Metalworkers’ Union’s congress, the Comintern had made its decision censuring the Twenty-Two. Zinoviev and Clara Zetkin appeared at the fraction’s session that day to inform delegates of the Comintern commission’s decision. In response, the fraction voted unanimously (with five abstentions) to “caution” those who signed the appeal “from further such acts, threatening a split of the most disciplined communist party in the world – Russia’s.” The unanimous vote is surprising, since a large minority of the delegates were supporters of Shliapnikov. A March 7 politburo resolution confirms that nearly the entire minority group at the congress had indeed voted for the “caution.”⁶⁸ Those of the minority who so voted apparently did so to indicate their loyalty to party discipline and recognition of the Comin-

62. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 148.

63. These were: Klinov (Petrograd), Tarygin (Tula), Ivanov (Moscow), Maltsev (Donbas), Sazhin (N. Novgorod), Sabarin (Vyksa), Kolomensky (Southeast), Firsov (Briansk), Kaigorodov (Izhevsk), Vakulov (Kharkov), Balandin (Perm), Parov (South Urals), Potaskuev (Middle Urals), Arefev (Kolchugino) (RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 104).

64. Lapse, Vorobev, Gurevich, Ianson, Vladimirov, Nikolsky, Mikhailov, Zheltov, Andreev, Matrozov, Evreinov (engineering section) (RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 104). Candidate members were: Bukhanov, Maslennikov, Korolev, Denisov, Trofimov, Romanov, Kozelev, Tolokontsev, Orlov, Kuibyshev, Glimenko (RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 105).

65. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 107.

66. Tarasov, Klinov, Tarygin, Volkov, Korolev, Kubyshekin, Maltsev, F-fenko, Brykov, Potaskuev, Parfutin, Klimenko, Firfov, Zaitsev, Kaigorodov, Shliapnikov, Tolokontsev, Lapse, Vorobev, Lobanov, Andreev, Vladimirov, Ianson, Skliznev, Evreinov and thirteen candidates: Mitin, Kuibyshev, Medvedev, Zheltov, Khararez, Kharitonenko, Luka, Bukhanov, Deulenkov, Pavlov, Maslennikov, Samarin, Ustanov (RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 105).

67. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 2, l. 107.

68. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 7, l. 28; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 277.

tern as the highest party court. The five who abstained most likely were among those who signed the appeal.

Despite the fraction's unanimous vote to "caution" Shliapnikov and others who signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two, Shliapnikov's supporters continued to rally around him in the struggle to maintain some influence over the union. As Shliapnikov and his colleagues had agreed in their meeting before the congress began, after the fraction's majority had accepted Vorobev's list for the new central committee, they proposed proportional representation in the central committee and agreement of lists. The fraction could not decide whether to accept proportionality and on March 7 asked the CC for a final decision. The politburo, in the name of the CC, rejected proportionality, stating that the list of the majority was sufficiently representative of all different views among the union's members. Furthermore, it referred to those on Skliznev's list as comprising "a group, being the minority of the fraction and censured by an international conference."⁶⁹

The Fifth Congress of the Metalworkers' Union ended on March 8, 1922 without a single victory for Shliapnikov and those who shared his views. Rather, the votes of the communist fraction of the congress had made clear that the new leadership of the union had managed to eke out a majority among the delegates. The large minority of votes received by Shliapnikov and his fellows at this late date testifies to the depth of their support among rank-and-file metalworker unionists and the difficulty the party and new union leaders had in extinguishing it. Shliapnikov had not accepted defeat by delegates at the Tenth Party Congress or by the party politburo at the Fourth Congress of the Metalworkers' Union. After censure by the Comintern and defeat by delegates to the Fifth Congress of his own Metalworkers' Union, he had almost no hope for recovery.

The interlude

Until the Eleventh Party Congress in late March-early April 1922, Shliapnikov and others who had signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two were in political limbo. Some among the party leadership were not content to stop with the Comintern's decision, but intended to prosecute the Twenty-Two for factionalism. The Twenty-Two were on the defensive, forced to explain repeatedly in writing and in person what had compelled them to appeal to the Comintern. As the Eleventh Party Congress drew nearer, Shliapnikov and other prominent figures among the Twenty-Two faced the prospect of exclusion from the Communist party. The decision of the Comintern was used as fodder in the Soviet press to attack the signatories and other former supporters of the Workers' Opposition for violation of party discipline and for continuing to conduct factional work. The party press falsely described the signatories as ideologically tainted by Menshevism, anarchism and all other political associations especially repugnant to Russian communists at that time.

69. RGASPI, f. 99, op. 1, d. 7, ll. 29-31; RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 277.

Nikolai Bukharin, who edited *Pravda* from 1917 to 1929, must have been complicit at the very least in the campaign against the Twenty-Two and at the most in charge of it and a chief participant. Although he would not have undertaken the campaign without approval from the politburo, Bukharin had his own reasons to press it. He was strongly opposed to factionalism within the party, he increasingly was identified as a chief advocate of NEP, and finally, he had developed an argument justifying the party's dictatorship by claiming that the proletariat was incapable of generating an "intellectual elite" from its own ranks with the ability to organize "all of society." Bukharin thought that the proletariat had been unable to do this because of "bourgeois" control over education in capitalist society.⁷⁰ Shliapnikov and his colleagues were a threat to Bukharin's interpretation both because of what they stood for and because of who they were: proletarians who had educated themselves and had proven to be capable organizers and administrators during the Civil War and early NEP. Kollontai named Karl Radek as another of the principal authors of the press campaign to "smear" the Twenty-Two (she used the words "*bul'varnaia*" and "*poshlaia*" to describe one of his articles).⁷¹ Lenin could not have been actively involved in the press campaign, since for much of March 1922 he was outside of Moscow, recuperating from illness.⁷²

Despite furious accusations in the press against Shliapnikov and others of the Twenty-Two, Shliapnikov still received letters of support from individual worker-communists and party cells scattered across Russia. These letters, no doubt, boosted his morale in the trying month of March 1922; although it was neither widespread nor deep – support came chiefly from old members of the party who knew him well. In expressing their solidarity with the Twenty-Two, those supporters overcame enormous pressure from party leaders to condemn the appeal to the Comintern; but as one informed Shliapnikov, there were few like them left.⁷³ Indeed, in his research on the relationship between Moscow industrial workers and the Russian Communist party during the Civil War and NEP, Simon Pirani found no interest among factory-level Moscow communists in the discussion about the appeal of the Twenty-Two to the Comintern, only ritual condemnations. I. I. Litvinov, a memoirist, also wrote of apathy among Moscow workers toward the appeal, but acknowledged that at higher levels in the party there was a large measure of sympathy for the Twenty-Two, even among their opponents.⁷⁴

70. Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography, 1888-1938* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 142, 156.

71. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 36.

72. Richard Pipes, *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 457.

73. TsA FSB, R33718, vol. 41, ll. 22-24, 84-85.

74. Pirani, "The Changing Political Relationship between the Moscow Workers and the Bolsheviks," "'Ptitsegonstvo nadoelo do smerti...,' Iz dnevnika I. I. Litvinova. 1922 g.," *Neizvestnaia Rossiia XX vek*, ed. I. D. Koval'chenko (Moscow: Mosgorarkhiv, 1993), 4: 108-09, March 14 entry.

Despite expressions of support that Shliapnikov received from individual workers, a campaign grew in the party press and in higher party organs to go beyond the Comintern's censure and to punish the twenty-two communists more harshly. This campaign was mounted on the basis of the letter itself but also on allegations regarding what Shliapnikov and Kollontai had said to the Comintern commission on March 3. In a letter to the CC, Shliapnikov protested distortions in the press of his statements to the Comintern commission that investigated the Letter of the Twenty-Two. Shliapnikov denied press accusations that he had threatened "worker uprisings," insisting that he had only pointed out that worker dissatisfaction was so deep that sometimes it "erupted in the form of strikes." The party press derided Shliapnikov for allegedly claiming that the Cheka had subjected him to a search. Shliapnikov explained that a person bringing him a letter had been searched and relieved of a letter addressed to him, and that he had complained to the Comintern commission about it. He clarified that many other letters to him had been "lost" in the mail, which to him demonstrated "the absence of mutual trust" between himself, a prominent worker-communist, and leading party organs.⁷⁵

The campaign in the party press also utilized any flaws, real or apparent, in the political background of Shliapnikov's supporters. For example, Shadurskaia's signature on the Letter of the Twenty-Two did not include the year in which she joined the Communist party. This served as a pretext for party leaders to portray her as politically suspect, which tainted the rest of the Twenty-Two and their appeal. In fact, as Shadurskaia wrote to the politburo, she was a long-time party member, as she was sure party leaders were well aware.⁷⁶

Miasnikov, another communist who had signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two, was expelled from the Communist party by the politburo on February 20 for "repeated violations of party discipline" and for attempting to create a faction within the party. Shliapnikov claimed he learned of this only after Miasnikov had signed the appeal to the Comintern. He immediately appealed to the politburo to reconsider its decision. The politburo refused. Shliapnikov's opponents used Miasnikov's exclusion and his signature on the Letter of the Twenty-Two to discredit the letter itself and those who had signed it.

Shliapnikov did not back away from Miasnikov's defense. On March 8, he again asked the politburo to review the Miasnikov case, but the politburo refused. Later, at the Eleventh Party Congress, Shliapnikov reminded delegates that Miasnikov had never been a member of the Workers' Opposition. He insisted that Miasnikov would not have been among the signatories of the Letter of the Twenty-Two if his expulsion had been known. Nevertheless, Shliapnikov openly disagreed with the politburo's decision on Miasnikov. Calling Miasnikov

Litvinov (b. 1896) worked in VSNKh in 1920, was a staff member of Sverdlov University in 1921, and in the same year enrolled in the Institute of Red Professors.

75. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 1, ll. 5-8, March 1922.

76. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 280, l. 15, March 8, 1922.

“a proletarian (who has given his whole life for the party),” Shliapnikov argued that the party should work with such a person, not “throw him over the side.”⁷⁷

Political pressure on Shliapnikov and his colleagues increased in March 1922. Even earlier, they had agreed that one option for them was to relinquish their party-appointed positions voluntarily and return to manual labor. A March 9, 1922 letter from Sergei Medvedev to the *orgburo* illustrates this tactic. In the letter, Medvedev complained of the abuse *Pravda* had hurled against him after he signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two. As a result, he wrote, he felt towards himself, “no political or personal trust whatsoever from the CC or its organs.” He declared that he would not accept future work assignments from the organs of the CC but instead would return to work in his specialty, in a metalworking factory.⁷⁸ It is not clear whether Medvedev ever delivered the letter to the *orgburo*. He continued receiving work assignments from the CC well into the second half of the 1920s.

The tension the twenty-two communists felt regarding the reaction of party leaders to their appeal increased after an incident that Shliapnikov believed to be a provocation. He reported to the politburo that on March 10, a “German comrade,” who introduced herself as Goldstein and claimed to be a representative of the German Communist Workers’ Party (KAPD), came to his residence in Moscow. She invited him and the “Workers’ Opposition” to participate in a conference of the Fourth International. Shliapnikov reported that he told her that there was at that time no “Workers’ Opposition” and that the group existing by that name before the Tenth Party Congress had never been a special faction or party. He added that he would condemn an attempt to split the Third International. Goldstein replied that a faction within the KAPD disapproved of the creation of a Fourth International. Somewhat inexplicably (and reinforcing Shliapnikov’s suspicion that she was a provocateur), she then asked him to give an answer to her invitation in writing and to discuss the position of the Workers’ Opposition in the German press. Shliapnikov refused.⁷⁹

Party leaders used not only the party press but also the Central Control Commission (CCC) against the oppositionists. The CCC was formed at the Ninth Party Conference in September 1920 and its role and responsibilities were defined at the Tenth Party Congress in 1921. Among its early leaders were Dzerzhinsky and Iaroslavsky. Although a chief responsibility of the commissions at the center and at the local level was to try ethical infractions among par-

77. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 270, February 22, 1922, d. 278, March 8, 1922, and f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, l. 61. Shliapnikov’s speech to a closed session of the Eleventh Party Congress, April 2, 1922.

78. RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9102. A soldier and Communist party member named Nudolin found this copy of Medvedev’s letter in the fourth volume of Pokrovsky’s history of Russia, which Nudolin had checked out from the library in December 1922. Nudolin sent copies of the letter to the political administration of the army (GPU) and to the CC. It is unlikely that Medvedev would have been so careless as to leave a copy of his letter in a library book; most probably this was a copy that he had circulated among friends and sympathizers, one of whom misplaced it.

79. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 3, d. 280, l. 15.

ty members, the commissions were also an important tool in discovering and punishing factionalism within the party.⁸⁰ The CCC conducted formal interrogations of the twenty-two communists. The first step in this process was a formal letter from Krivov,⁸¹ the secretary of the CCC, to Shliapnikov, as presumed leader of the Twenty-Two, requesting that he present in writing his evidence for accusing party centers of “struggle against proletarians with their own opinions.” Krivov also required Shliapnikov to explain why he did not present his evidence to the party before submitting it to the Comintern. More provocatively, Krivov wanted Shliapnikov to answer whether he thought that his accusations could “lead to a party split.” Krivov asked Shliapnikov whether he would comply with the Comintern commission’s ban on future appeals. He ended by suggesting ominously that the Letter of the Twenty-Two violated the Tenth Party Congress’ resolution on party unity.⁸²

Shliapnikov prefaced his answers to Krivov with the comment that he considered it “unusual” for the CCC to become involved in an exclusively political matter. Moreover, since the Comintern, as the highest court in the communist movement had already made a decision on the affair, he considered it inappropriate for the CCC, as a lower court, to re-examine it. Nevertheless, Shliapnikov provided Krivov with examples of persecution. After citing numerous cases, Shliapnikov added wryly, “I have no doubt that in your files there is rather more material than I have in my memory.” In reply to Krivov’s second question, Shliapnikov wrote that he had tried to get the CC to discuss his grievances but had been unsuccessful in doing so. As to whether his accusations could weaken the party, he declared forcefully that in the past the Bolsheviks had never feared discussion of their faults. Rather, elimination of the causes for these faults would strengthen the party. He declared emphatically that he did not intend to violate the Comintern’s ban on future appeals. Nevertheless, he said that he believed the appeal had not violated the Tenth Party Congress’s ban on factionalism.⁸³ Shliapnikov rejected the CCC’s designation of him as “leader” of the Twenty-Two, insisting that his replies to Krivov’s letter were only on his own behalf and that he did not speak for others who had signed. By insisting on these points, he avoided confessing to factionalism but may have inadvertently enhanced the probability that his colleagues would also be interrogated.

On March 17, 1922, the CCC met with the Twenty-Two collectively.⁸⁴ Medvedev demanded to know whether this meeting was an interrogation or a

80. Michael David-Fox, *Revolution of the Mind: Higher Learning among the Bolsheviks, 1918-1929* (Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), pp. 115-16.

81. T. S. Krivov (b. 1886) had been a party member since 1905 and had served as secretary of the Urals bureau of the CC RCP(b) after the revolution (*Odinnadsatyi s’ezd RKP(b)*, p. 828).

82. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 1, l. 9.

83. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 71, d. 1, l. 10.

84. Although CCC records in RGASPI are still mostly off limits to researchers, records of this meeting were preserved in Shliapnikov’s personal CCC files, to which I had access for my research.

precursor to a criminal prosecution. Ozol and Smidovich⁸⁵ of the CCC replied that this was not a question of crime and punishment, but of investigating grievances for the sake of healthy “party life.” Significantly, the CCC would not give Medvedev a guarantee that there would be no criminal prosecutions arising from the Letter of the Twenty-Two. In most cases, the interviewees’ statements corresponded to Shliapnikov’s answers to Krivov. Medvedev, after echoing Shliapnikov’s explanations of why the twenty-two communists appealed to the Comintern, added that he found it ironic that party leaders had published the appeal in *Pravda*, which “made it available to counterrevolutionary forces.”

Each of those present emphasized different reasons for signing. G. Bruno⁸⁶ explained that he signed the appeal because he, as a member of a guberniia purge commission, had witnessed central organs restore to the party “alien elements” purged by the guberniia commission. Disillusion with the results of the purge, he insisted, caused the “best elements to leave the party.” Tolokontsev said agreements made to buy manufactured products (especially locomotives) abroad, rather than to produce them in Russia, drove him to sign the Letter of the Twenty-Two. He did not number himself among those who had been persecuted for membership in the opposition since he held several positions of higher authority. Despite his high positions, Tolokontsev said, he could not remain silent in the face of “actions, which kill the proletariat.” Kollontai said the intention of the appeal to the Comintern was to force the party to think seriously about its problems. She was most concerned, she said, with the “mass departure of workers from the party,” which to her meant that workers’ influence on the party was diminishing. She added, “When we gather for a meeting, the suspicion is raised that this threatens a split in the party, an undermining of someone’s authority.” She acknowledged that she would obey the Comintern’s directive, but added that she would not keep silent if nothing changed. Mitin stated that he too would continue to air grievances as an individual, although perhaps not again with others in an appeal.⁸⁷

85. S. N. Smidovich (1872-1934) had been a party member since 1898 and after the October 1917 revolution served as secretary of the Moscow oblast bureau of the CC, was a leader of Zhenotdel, and was secretary of the Presidium of the Moscow Soviet (*Odinnadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b)*, p. 849).

86. G. I. Bruno (1889-1945) joined the party in 1906, during the civil war held important posts on the front, in the Cheka, and as chairman of the board of the artillery industry (*Odinnadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b)*, p. 812 and RGASPI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 910, l. 3). In a memo to Lenin, P. A. Bogdanov of VSNKh described him thus: “A very interesting worker, energetic, efficient, able to broadly and in a versatile manner take charge of the matter he is responsible for. A few Chekist approaches he has are gradually diminishing and I consider him one of our best administrators. Coworkers and specialists work very well with him” (RGASPI, f. 5, op. 1, d. 910, l. 3, August 10, 1921).

87. RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9103, vol. 3, ll. 97-106 (as with many documents in this delo, pagination was in reverse, so that l. 106 was the first page of the document and l. 97 the last page). CCC members present were Krivov, Solts, Sedoi, Ozol, and Smidovich. Most of the Twenty-Two were present. At least one, Polosatov, had been questioned earlier and was not present. This text appears to be incomplete.

Members of the CCC responded with condemnation rather than debate. A. Solts⁸⁸ urged them to recant. Z. Sedoi⁸⁹ warned the signatories that they had taken “the path to the creation of special groupings and factions.” A tense exchange occurred between Ozol and Medvedev in the course of which Ozol asked Medvedev if he thought that the current members of the CC and CCC had no right to sit in these organs. Medvedev replied tersely, “The [Tenth Party] Congress elected you; I did not vote.” Obviously annoyed, Ozol repeated his warning from the Tenth Party Congress that Medvedev and Kollontai would not change their behavior because of the congress’s decrees.⁹⁰ At this point, the archival record of the interrogation breaks off, but it appears that the meeting continued, perhaps without a stenographer. After its investigation, the CCC recommended the exclusion from the party of those members of the Twenty-Two who had been “guilty of frequent, systematic violation of the Tenth Party Congress’s decree on party unity.”⁹¹ The CCC’s investigation set the stage for an investigation by a commission of the Eleventh Party Congress as to whether Shliapnikov and others should be expelled from the Communist party for violation of the Tenth Party Congress’s ban on factionalism. Shliapnikov’s troubles did not end there. On March 25 the CC officially put on hold his work as a member of the Genoa conference delegation for the duration of the Eleventh Party Congress.⁹² For practical purposes Shliapnikov was not permitted to participate in the Genoa negotiations.

Eleventh Communist Party Congress

At the Eleventh Party Congress (March 27-April 2, 1922), Shliapnikov and his supporters defended themselves against charges of having violated party unity with their appeal to the Comintern. Their opponents charged them with having continued to organize themselves as the “Workers’ Opposition” and of having pursued a line contrary to party policy. Because of the party leadership’s campaign in the winter of 1921-22 to remove supporters of the former Workers’ Opposition from their organizational bases, only four of thirty-seven known Workers’ Oppositionists at the Tenth Party Congress were voting delegates at

88. A. A. Solts (1872-1945) had joined the party in 1898, in 1912-13 was a member of the Petersburg committee of the RSDRP, in 1917 was a member of the Moscow committee of the RSDRP(b) and an editor of *Sotsial-Demokrat*, was a Left Communist in 1918, and from 1921 worked in the CCC (*Odinnadtsatyi s’ezd RKP(b)*, p. 851).

89. Z. Ia. Litvin-Sedoi (1876-1947) joined the party in 1897, was a leader of the December 1905 uprising in Moscow, lived in emigration from 1906-1917, returned to Russia in 1917 and participated in the Civil War, then worked in the Commissariat of Transport and central board of military supply (*Odinnadtsatyi s’ezd RKP(b)*, p. 832; *Deiateli SSSR i oktiabrskoi revoliutsii*, 3: 31).

90. RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9103, vol. 3, ll. 97, 103.

91. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, l. 3.

92. RGASPI, f. 17, op. 2, d. 77, l. 2, March 25, 1922. The Genoa conference (April 10 - May 19, 1922) was to bring representatives from Germany and the USSR together for the first time with representatives of thirty-two other European nations to discuss trade and financial questions. No agreement was reached, however, on repayment of tsarist debts or cancellation of Russian wartime debts.

the Eleventh Party Congress.⁹³ Therefore those who sympathized with the grievances of the Twenty-Two represented a very small number of delegates to the Congress. Nevertheless the congress was characterized by “a rebellious mood” directed against some features of NEP and against the expanding powers of the party control commissions. The Twenty-Two thus stood some chance of benefiting from the delegates’ mood, especially since two high-ranking leaders were absent or had a reduced presence at the congress. Lenin, whose charisma and persuasive powers could sway a congress, missed a number of sessions due to his poor health; and Bukharin, a highly effective speaker and critic of the Twenty-Two, was not present at the congress.⁹⁴

Aware of the numerical inferiority of his supporters at the congress, Shliapnikov attempted to appeal to a broad range of delegates. His purpose was not to convince them to support his ideas for change but at the least to convince them that the party’s relationship with workers was truly troubled and in need of repair. Most of all he wished to reveal the party leadership’s condemnation of the Letter of the Twenty-Two as an attempt to cover up rather than resolve the party’s problems. In a speech at an open session of the congress, Shliapnikov denied that the Workers’ Opposition had continued to function as a group, explaining that “for someone it is necessary to create this ‘Workers’ Opposition’.” He meant that party leaders would rather blame the party’s troubles on a scapegoat, on a conspiracy of malcontents, rather than address genuine problems. Shliapnikov went on to warn that worker discontent posed a real threat to the party, declaring that workers were saying that it was “better to lose power now, in order to take it anew in ten years.” In response to Lenin’s contention that the Russian proletariat had ceased to exist as a class in the Marxist sense, Shliapnikov pronounced the sarcastic phrase often repeated since by historians of the period, “Allow me to congratulate you [congress delegates] on being the vanguard of a nonexistent class.” Shliapnikov did not share the view that the Russian proletariat had degenerated; rather, he thought this perspective was an attempt to seek “justification for political maneuvers, searches for support in other social layers.” He insisted, “Another and ‘better’ working class we will not have and it’s necessary to be satisfied with the one we do have.”⁹⁵

Ever fond of militaristic metaphor, Lenin accused the Twenty-Two of having created panic in the party ranks with their appeal. Lenin expanded the metaphor when he reminded delegates that in a real army those who created panic during a retreat were shot “and correctly so.”⁹⁶ Shliapnikov gamely retorted that the Comintern was “not a maneuvering army.” With this answer Shliapnikov underlined the danger posed to the Russian party by its leaders’ unwillingness to discuss serious problems with fellow communists. Shliapnikov even questioned the

93. Sorenson, *The Life and Death of Soviet Trade Unionism*, p. 167.

94. Bukharin and Radek had traveled to Berlin at the head of a Comintern delegation to discuss the united front with international socialists (Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*, p. 151).

95. *Odinadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, pp. 103-04.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 24.

basis for prosecuting any of the twenty-two communists at the Eleventh Party Congress since all of those who signed had already accepted the decision of the Comintern. Shliapnikov tried to remind party leaders and delegates of their formerly comradely relations and to emphasize that the fading of these relations posed a danger to the party's very existence. If the party turned its back on its core constituency of workers, Shliapnikov believed, it would lose its right to rule. He warned that the atmosphere in the party reminded him of that in 1907 when intellectuals abandoned the workers and showed apathy toward the cause of revolution. He reminded delegates that he and his supporters were not alien political elements weakening the Communist party; rather, they were communists of worker origin who represented the party's core constituency.⁹⁷ Shliapnikov proclaimed finally and dramatically, "This should not be forgotten. We came from [the working class] to this tribune, and back [to the working class] we will return."⁹⁸

Kollontai described in her diary the atmosphere on the eve of the congress and during its first few sessions. Although there was talk of excluding her, Shliapnikov, and Medvedev from the party, she sensed "vacillation" and a "wait-and-see attitude" at the top (Lenin for one might not have taken a clear stance toward exclusion of the three from the party).⁹⁹ She believed that a core group of "yes-men" around party leaders were pushing for expulsion and even more (perhaps she meant criminal prosecution). Yet once the question of exclusion was spoken aloud at the congress, she sensed "at once sympathy toward us from part of the congress." Many delegates, she wrote, were dissatisfied with the CCC's decisions; although those delegates condemned the decision to appeal to the Comintern, they sympathized with the content of the appeal. In her diary Kollontai wrote that the commission appointed by party leaders to investigate the Twenty-Two had no members sympathetic to the opposition; nevertheless,

97. Sedoi of the CCC had attempted to smear Sergei Medvedev with Menshevism; Shliapnikov reminded him that when he (Sedoi) was enlisting in the French army as a volunteer (against the Party's instructions), Medvedev was on his way to Siberian exile for organizing Petrograd workers to strike in protest against the arrest and trial of antiwar Bolshevik Duma deputies ("*Vot ironiia sud'by*," Shliapnikov drily added). *Odinmadsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, pp. 187-88. Sedoi protested Shliapnikov's accusation (*ibid.*, p. 190), but judging from Sedoi's own autobiography in *Deiateli SSSR i oktiabr'skoi revoliutsii*, 3: 30-31, his stance toward the war was ambiguous, to say the least.

98. *Odinmadsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 188.

99. At a meeting between Shliapnikov and CCC presidium members in late 1926, Kuibyshev claimed that Lenin had favored Shliapnikov's exclusion from the party in 1922, while Shliapnikov protested that Lenin was against his exclusion. When Solts (who had been CCC chair in 1922) declared that Lenin had never spoken against exclusion, Shliapnikov replied that Stalin had told him that it had been a mistake to propose exclusion of Shliapnikov, Medvedev and Kollontai at the Eleventh Party Congress and that Lenin had not made that mistake. Shliapnikov thought that if Lenin had spoken in favor of exclusion, then it would have passed (RGASPI, f. 589, op. 3, d. 9103 (Shliapnikov's CCC file), vol. 1, ll. 149-68, CCC presidium session, October 23, 1926). At the very least, it appears that Lenin did not speak in favor of exclusion.

even they hesitated to vote for exclusion and had to be pressured by higher-ups to do so.¹⁰⁰

On April 2, 1922, delegates to the Eleventh Party Congress met in a special closed session to hear, discuss, and consider the findings and recommendations of the commission formed to investigate the Twenty-Two.¹⁰¹ The commission's task was to decide whether those members of the Twenty-Two who had earlier belonged to the Workers' Opposition had violated the Tenth Congress's ban on factionalism and to make appropriate recommendations. The commission's report determined that there were ideological and organizational links between the former Workers' Opposition and meetings of those who signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two. The CC had recognized that party members had the right to appeal individually to the Comintern. The commission could not therefore accuse the twenty-two communists of factionalism simply on the grounds of their letter. It had to prove that the meeting arranged by Shliapnikov and Medvedev to discuss the appeal was the culmination of "constant long-term factional work" by Shliapnikov, Medvedev, and other oppositionists. The evidence the commission produced of this "long-term factional work" was based chiefly on a letter Mitin had sent to Medvedev in the summer of 1921,¹⁰² in which Mitin referred to meetings of the former Workers' Opposition after the Tenth Party Congress and to his tactics for taking over the Donbas party organization.¹⁰³

The commission singled out Shliapnikov, Medvedev, and Kollontai as those most guilty of having continued "factional work" and it recommended their expulsion for an indefinite period for having violated the Tenth Party Congress' directives on unity and against factionalism. Of the remaining signatories, the commission recommended to expel only Mitin and N. Kuznetsov.¹⁰⁴ In the case of Mitin, actions described in his July 1921 letter to Medvedev and having hidden his past membership in the Menshevik party called for expulsion. Kuznetsov was charged with having been deceptive as to when he entered the party and for having misrepresented his social origins. Those signatories who were not targeted for exclusion proclaimed their solidarity with Shliapnikov, Kollontai and Medvedev (but notably not with Mitin and Kuznetsov). They announced that if

100. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 37. The commission was composed of nineteen members, including Solts, Zinoviev, Stalin, and Dzerzhinskii (Clements, *Bolshevik Feminist*, p. 218). For its report, see *Odinnadtsatyi s"ezd RKP(b)*, pp. 702-10.

101. The proceedings of this session were not published in the stenographic report of the congress, but were preserved in Communist party archives and became available to researchers only in the 1990s.

102. The letter was published in *"Rabochaia oppositsiia": materialy i dokumenty, 1920-1926* gg., ed. M. Zorky (Moscow/Leningrad: Gosizdat, 1926), pp. 51-53.

103. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 3-7.

104. N. Kuznetsov (1898-1935) entered the party during World War I (not in 1904) and before the war had worked as a grocer, not a metalworker, a commission of Old Bolsheviks established. Kuznetsov joined Miasnikov's "Workers' Group" in 1923.

those three were expelled from the party, they would resign as well. Lebed of the CCC warned that they were in possible violation of party discipline.¹⁰⁵

Following Lebed's warning, Shliapnikov, Kollontai, and Medvedev spoke. Kollontai, who spoke first, protested the growing tendency of party leaders to make a "faction" out of any group of communists meeting informally. She noted pointedly, "When two of us are together, we can talk, but when the third comes (laughter), we drop silent. We fear one another. We think that this third communist can suppose that we two are the Workers' Opposition." Kollontai said that the party should consider it healthy for its members to meet as friends and discuss issues of vital importance to the party. The party, she insisted, could only gain from this. Kollontai steadfastly denied that the Twenty-Two had formed a faction. Next, Kollontai addressed charges that she and Medvedev were particularly unrepentant about their appeal to the Comintern. She said that they were told that if they had shown "sincere repentance," then they would have been treated differently. In a gently mocking manner, Kollontai recalled a tale of the nineteenth century Russian satirist M. Saltykov-Shchedrin:

Peasants who were sent into exile were asked: why were you exiled? – They answered, because we were unrepentant. The landowner taught us what was good, intelligent, and reasonable. He even dragged us by our hair. Still, we were unrepentant and were exiled.

Kollontai emphasized her loyalty to the party, her devotion to giving the leading role in the party and outside it to the working class, as she put it, to the "attraction of the working class into creative life in all areas" and to the implementation of the Tenth Party Congress's decree on worker democracy. Kollontai dramatically concluded, "If there is no place for this in our party, then exclude me. But even outside of the ranks of our party, I will live, work and fight for the Communist party."¹⁰⁶

Shliapnikov spoke next. Scoffing at the presentation of Mitin's single letter as proof of "systematic contact" between leaders of the former Workers' Opposition and their followers, Shliapnikov insisted that the former oppositionists had not aimed to create a faction, but only to "work within the party." The meetings of those who signed the Letter of the Twenty-Two, he insisted, were not formal meetings of a group, but of "old friends" and friends of old friends. "To make a faction out of this," he insisted, "is just as difficult to do as from a tea party or pancake suppers which take place in Moscow, even in the Kremlin." The meetings in reality were a bit more formal than Shliapnikov suggested. They were chaired, there was an agenda, a vote at the end, and a record of the discussion

105. *Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 710; RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 9-13. D. Z. Lebed (1893-1939) came to the Bolsheviks from the SRs in 1909, after the October Revolution edited the journal *Vestnik Narkomvnuudel* and later became secretary of the CC of the Ukrainian Communist Party and chairman of the CCC in Ukraine (*Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 830).

106. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 14-24.

was made. The form of the meetings was nonetheless consistent with longstanding practice in the party and did not violate party discipline as it had been understood before the Tenth Party Congress. In this sense Shliapnikov was being truthful when he declared the meetings not to be of a factional nature. Shliapnikov emphasized, "The unity of the party is for me higher than anything. Developing a counterattack, he charged with factionalism those (among the Leninists) who condemned former opposition members. He complained that party cells were not allowed to invite him to speak to them, and he showed that there was support for him among lower level party members by referring to his election by cells of four factories as a delegate to their guberniia conferences. Shliapnikov concluded, "if you find . . . that our thoughts and worries about the fate of the working class are alien to you, then, all right, exclude us."¹⁰⁷

Medvedev, the last of the three to speak, could not restrain himself from resorting to his customary sarcasm toward the charge of factionalism against the Twenty-Two. He pointed out the contradiction between V. Molotov's proclamations in open sessions of the congress that party unity had been established and "groupings" dissolved, and Lebed's claim in closed session that the Workers' Opposition continued to exist. Medvedev expressed ironic surprise at Molotov's lack of diligence in failing to notice such a large and active group, as Lebed had described. Like Shliapnikov, Medvedev referred to the support he had among workers. Workers at the Radio Morse factory had elected him as one of their delegates to the congress of the Moscow Metalworkers' Union, even after the commission had announced its intent to pursue Medvedev's exclusion from the party. Medvedev thus declared, he had survived trial before "a court of the working class." Unlike Shliapnikov, his words carried a defiant tone; he declared that even if the congress excluded him from the party, "I do not think you will fatally wound me." Medvedev proclaimed that he did not stand in fear of the delegates' decision. "I have told the truth, and your business is to decide," he concluded.¹⁰⁸

Following the three oppositionists' speeches, four well-respected and long-time party members debated the proposal to exclude them. Two, N. Kubiak¹⁰⁹ and V. Antonov-Ovseenko,¹¹⁰ were opposed to exclusion and two did not take a clear position. D. Manuilsky spoke for "strong measures" against the oppositionists and G. Petrovsky¹¹¹ criticized the oppositionists for poor judgment, but nei-

107. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 50-64.

108. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 126-131.

109. N. A. Kubiak (1882-1942) joined the party in 1898. In 1922 he was secretary of the Dalbiuro of the CC and later secretary of the CC (*Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 829).

110. V. A. Antonov-Ovseenko (1884-1939), whose father was a tsarist officer, had been a revolutionary from 1901, a Menshevik while in emigration, and a Bolshevik since 1917. During the civil war he was commander of the Ukrainian front and a member of the NKVD collegium of the RSFSR (*Odinnadtsatyi s'ezd RKP(b)*, p. 809). Under Stalin, he was repressed.

111. G. I. Petrovsky (1878-1958) had joined the party in 1897, was a Bolshevik deputy to the Fourth Duma in 1912-14. In 1918-19, he served as People's Commissar of Internal Affairs, and

ther came out for exclusion. Kollontai rejoiced at the tone of the speakers; in her opinion, Kubiak and Antonov-Ovseenko were “for” her, Shliapnikov, and Medvedev, while Manuilsky and Petrovsky were only “weakly” opposed to them.¹¹²

Kubiak had signed the theses of the Workers’ Opposition but not the Letter of the Twenty-Two. In his speech, he reminded delegates of the long history of “struggle” played out at party congresses and in party committees between intellectuals (or students) and workers. He recalled how students edged workers out of party leadership posts because, students claimed, workers were illiterate and could not make speeches. There had been a “workers’ faction,” of which Kubiak was a member, at the 1904 congress in London, where the question of elevating workers’ role in the party was discussed and the first worker, “Foma,” was brought into the CC. Kubiak also referred to the fact that the Stockholm Congress in 1906 was “called by the workers’ party.” Presenting party history in this light, Kubiak legitimated the efforts of Shliapnikov and others to provide a “worker” perspective to party policy and to increase the role of workers in party leadership. Kubiak attacked both the arguments and the evidence for exclusion. He found party leaders’ acknowledgements that the Twenty-Two had the right to appeal to the Comintern contradicted their simultaneous condemnation of Shliapnikov and his supporters for appealing to the Comintern. Kubiak added that if individual letters (such as Mitin’s) were taken to prove the existence of an anti-party faction, then one could find letters equally worthy of discussion on Lenin’s desk from various authors, some of whom sat among the congress’ delegates. There was no evidence that Shliapnikov and his supporters “prepared for a split,” he insisted. Finally, Kubiak agreed with Shliapnikov and Medvedev that with their party history it was “the purest nonsense” to insist that they prove their “dedication to the working class.” He was not so charitable toward Mitin and Kuznetsov. Kubiak agreed that Mitin and Kuznetsov should be expelled from the party, but he proposed that the delegates simply confirm the decision of the Comintern pertaining to Shliapnikov, Medvedev, and Kollontai.¹¹³

Petrovsky rejected Kubiak’s argument that Shliapnikov’s, Medvedev’s and Kollontai’s history of service on the party’s behalf warranted a lighter punishment for them. In his opinion senior members of the party should show more discipline than should newer members. He thought that Shliapnikov and the others had unwisely surrendered to the panicked mood created among some party members by “rumors about the imminent ‘sale’ of Russia at the Genoa conference.” Recalling his own initial participation in the Workers’ Opposition,¹¹⁴ Pe-

from 1919 to 1938 was chairman of the Ukrainian Soviet and then of the All-Union Soviet. In 1922 he was a member of the CC.

112. RGASPI, f. 134, op. 3, d. 37, l. 39, Tuesday, April 11, 1922.

113. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 65-67.

114. No secondary sources have mentioned Petrovsky’s participation in the Workers’ Opposition, nor did I find archival confirmation of it. Nevertheless, Petrovsky’s surprising admission should

trovsky said he still supported the goal of bringing more workers into the CC, but that he found this single goal an inadequate basis for forming an “entire opposition.” He abandoned the group, he said, when he began to see “former Mensheviks” and persons who were “not mature, seasoned proletarians” at the group’s meetings. He blamed Kollontai for attracting “former Mensheviks” into the opposition and for the opposition’s venture into “heresy.” Nevertheless Petrovsky did not seem to think Shliapnikov’s and Kollontai’s mistakes warranted severe punishment (significantly, he omitted mention of Medvedev). Concerning use of Mitin’s letter and remarks made by Shliapnikov and Kollontai to prove their disloyalty to the party, Petrovsky concluded that one could not “look at all documents from a gendarme’s point of view.” Rather than analyzing “each letter of a word,” one had to consider whether true factional activities had occurred.¹¹⁵ Petrovsky seemed to think that they had not occurred; he did not call explicitly for the exclusion of anyone from the former opposition.

Antonov-Ovseenko gave the most effective speech against excluding Shliapnikov, Kollontai, and Medvedev. He assured delegates that as a special plenipotentiary of the CC in Samara in 1921-22, he had worked closely with members of the former Workers’ Opposition and had not sensed any underground, anti-party work. On the contrary, they had shown the greatest dedication to work within the party. Noting that some of Shliapnikov’s, Kollontai’s, and Medvedev’s statements met with “applause” at the congress, he said one could not deny that there was a “hidden illness” in the party. Echoing Shliapnikov, Antonov-Ovseenko said that exclusion of those who called attention to the party’s illness would not overcome factionalism but only cause more harm. He openly described the commission’s case as “contrived” and “quite obviously unfounded.” He argued that the Russian party congress could not call for greater punishment than had the Comintern without discrediting the latter as the highest organ of the international Communist movement. He suggested a ritual condemnation of the Letter of the Twenty-Two, abiding by the Comintern’s decision on the matter. Antonov-Ovseenko was thus against excluding Shliapnikov, Medvedev, and Kollontai from the party unless they violated party discipline in the future, proposing a resolution to that effect.¹¹⁶

Manuilsky, severely criticizing the Twenty-Two, repeated charges that their work had been directed toward the formation of a liberal workers’ party and that their appeal had been exploited by Mensheviks to discredit the Communist party. In juxtaposition to Shliapnikov’s and Medvedev’s claims of worker support, Manuilsky cited scores of resolutions by assemblies of party members across Ukraine, unanimously demanding to exclude the offenders from the Communist party. He nonetheless stopped short of recommending expulsion from the party,

be taken at face value; obviously, he had no motivation to boast falsely about having been a participant of a banned faction.

115. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 70-71.

116. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 72-73.

but only emphasized the need “to act severely in regard to frequent offenders.”¹¹⁷ Manuilsky’s phrase left open the door for letting the oppositionists go with a warning.

Following the debate there ensued a complicated series of resolutions, amendments, and votes. A detailed treatment of this is necessary for two reasons: 1) to elucidate what has until now been a hazy and ambiguous event in Soviet history and 2) to support this article’s argument that the episode of the Twenty-Two was crucial in the party’s transformation during the transition from Lenin’s leadership to that of Stalin. Two resolutions on whether to exclude five members of the Twenty-Two were presented to this closed session of delegates to the Eleventh Party Congress: one, from the commission, to exclude Shliapnikov, Medvedev, Kollontai, Kuznetsov, and Mitin; a second, from Antonov-Ovseenko, to support the Comintern’s resolution, but to go no further. An initial hand vote was so close that a clear judgment based on it could not be made. A majority of delegates rejected a roll-call vote, indicating that they did not want their votes to go on record. They revoted by upraised hand. The count established 215 for Antonov-Ovseenko’s resolution and from 227 to 245 for the commission’s resolution. Then the chairman announced that the Petrograd delegation (under Zinoviev’s control) had offered an amendment to the commission’s resolution which would allow the excluded comrades to rejoin the party after one year, if they maintained good behavior and showed dedication to the principles of the Communist party. A majority of the delegates accepted the amendment. Then, a delegate named P. A. Kin proposed a correction to the resolution which called for excluding Kuznetsov and Mitin and accepting the Comintern’s decree only in relation to Kollontai, Shliapnikov, and Medvedev. Delegates accepted Kin’s amendment by a vote of 225-235 against 215. The chairman objected that the combination of the original resolution with the amendment and correction would look confusing “to Russian and foreign workers.” M. Tomsy added another correction, allowing the CC to exclude Shliapnikov, Medvedev, and Kollontai if they violated party discipline in the future. An overwhelming majority of the delegates passed the commission’s resolution after it was edited to take into account Tomsy’s and Kin’s corrections. The delegates therefore decided by a narrow margin to exclude Kuznetsov and Mitin; but to allow Shliapnikov, Kollontai, and Medvedev to remain in the party unless they committed further violations of party unity.

Conclusion

During February-April 1922, Shliapnikov and his colleagues sensed a political conjuncture that allowed the opportunity to air their grievances against some features of NEP and to convey their sense that party-worker relations were troubled. The meetings, rather close to one another in time, of the Comintern Executive, the Fifth Congress of the Metalworkers’ Union, and the Eleventh Party

117. RGASPI, f. 48, op. 1, d. 14, ll. 75-78.

Congress meant that a small group could obtain the attention of a large audience (Russian communists, Russian metalworkers, and foreign communists) for its views. In addition, it was legitimate, within the framework of proper party procedure, to appeal to these forums. Shliapnikov and his allies therefore chose this time to act.

The character of the actions Shliapnikov chose to take on his own behalf and on that of his supporters was consistent with his past political behavior and his attitude toward party politics. His political behavior was shaped by a certain sense of party legality. Shliapnikov took care to avoid actions that smacked of “factionalism” not only to escape punishment but also because he sincerely desired party unity, a unity based on responsiveness to workers’ initiative. His understanding of factionalism did not include “comradely” meetings with his supporters to discuss important issues of the day. In his opinion such meetings were firmly rooted in party tradition. He did not create a centralized organization with local branches; rather, he and his supporters communicated with one another through informal means. He emphasized that building an organization had to occur through local initiative. Not merely an attempt to avoid charges of factionalism, this accorded with Shliapnikov’s belief in initiative from below. If there were no such initiative, then there was no reason to continue opposition at the center. Finally, the most important reason for Shliapnikov to make an appeal to the highest levels of the party and to the international communist movement was to leave a historical record so that future generations of workers might make use of it as an “organizing moment.” Although he tried carefully to balance respect for the opinions and wishes of his supporters and sympathetic rank-and-file worker-communists with the demands of party legality, his opponents in the party leadership flouted traditions of internal party democracy when they resorted to intimidation and slander.

The controversy around the “Letter of the Twenty-Two” to the Comintern was crucial to the process by which the party defined the meaning of party discipline and the limits of political discussion within it. The vote by Eleventh Party Congress delegates, by a narrow margin and in a closed session, to allow Kollontai, Shliapnikov, and Medvedev to remain in the party “until further outbursts” signified that there was still much support within the party for their right to state their views. The maneuvering that took place around the vote revealed much about the dialogue between party leaders and highly placed members on the meaning of party discipline and the limits of internal political discussion. Some within the party leadership apparently had wanted to take measures beyond exclusion, possibly criminal prosecution. Certainly hints of this were present both in the campaign within the party press and in remarks of CCC members in interviews with the Twenty-Two. In her diaries Kollontai alluded to rumors of criminal prosecution. Among congress delegates, there was much resistance to exclusion of prominent and well-liked Communists from the party. When Lenin implied that “machine guns” could be used against opponents within the party, most old party members probably understood he was speaking fig-

uratively. Nevertheless, his choice of words, perhaps made more extreme by his illness,¹¹⁸ might have overstepped the bounds for many of these older delegates and contributed to their sympathy for the Twenty-Two. On the other hand, his reluctance to call outright for expulsion of Kollontai, Medvedev, and Shliapnikov may have emboldened other delegates to resist that option.

Congress records also reveal that many delegates wanted to observe communist “legality,” according to which the Comintern’s decisions prevailed over those of member-parties. Delegates, many of whom were experienced party activists, confidently resisted the leadership’s campaign to expel the twenty-two, but were sufficiently concerned about retribution to resist a roll-call vote. Party leaders, sensing that delegates might balk at outright exclusion, did not risk a confrontation over this question. Instead, they decided to allow delegates to choose lesser measures. The possibility of criminal prosecution for dissent had nonetheless become a part of the political discourse within the party. As newer members recruited during the Civil War would increasingly replace “Old Bolsheviks” at party congresses, leaders’ intensely violent language would come to be understood more literally than had been the case in the past.

Aside from questions of internal party “democracy,” crucial matters of policy led congress delegates to sympathize with the Twenty-Two and to resist the proposal to exclude Shliapnikov, Kollontai and Medvedev from the party. Many in the party felt guilt and discomfort over the ideological compromise that NEP entailed and they feared that concessions to the peasantry posed a danger to urban and industrial worker hegemony. Nevertheless, this very compromise with the peasantry and the consequent vulnerability of the “proletarian party” drove hard liners to insist that the party close ranks and stifle heterodoxy in order to survive the transition to socialism through NEP. Thus, the events surrounding the “Letter of the Twenty-Two” were a defining moment in the transitional stage between an era of relatively open discussion within the party and one in which party members could be vilified, stigmatized, and isolated for expressing opinions that differed from the line set down by the politburo.

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118. Pipes, in *Russia under the Bolshevik Regime*, pp. 457-58, argues that Lenin’s illness induced him to greater intolerance and erratic behavior.