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EXTRAORDINARY COMMISSIONS IN TURKESTAN: FACTORS BEHIND THEIR ESTABLISHMENT AND MAIN FUNCTIONS

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Abstract:

This article examines the establishment, legal powers, and activities of the Extraordinary Commission in the Turkestan ASSR between 1918 and 1922. It analyzes the commission's role in combating alleged counter-revolutionary activities, profiteering, looting, and political opposition. Particular attention is paid to its extensive authority to conduct arrests, searches, property confiscations, and punitive operations without proper judicial procedures. The study also discusses the persecution of supporters of the Turkestan Autonomy, national intellectuals, members of the clergy, merchants, and other groups classified as hostile to Soviet rule. The commission became one of the main instruments used by the Bolsheviks to consolidate Soviet authority through violence, intimidation, and political repression in Turkestan.

Keywords: Turkestan ASSR, Extraordinary Commission, Cheka, Soviet government, Bolsheviks, political repression, counter-revolution, Turkestan Autonomy, national intellectuals, punitive institutions.

In January 1918, F. E. Dzerzhinsky, Chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, sent a telegram to the Tashkent Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies instructing it to establish a special organization to combat counter-revolutionary forces.



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The Tashkent Soviet immediately began implementing this directive. At the demand of the Bolsheviks, representatives of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries, Menshevik-Internationalists, and Bolsheviks assembled at the Tashkent Soviet on 16 January to discuss the establishment of this body. Under Bolshevik pressure, it was agreed to adopt Moscow's "Regulations on Revolutionary Tribunals" and establish two investigative commissions in Tashkent: one to combat counter-revolutionary activities and another to combat profiteering and looting. Moscow's regulations were adopted in full and renamed the "Regulations on Revolutionary Tribunals in Tashkent." The regulations defined the tribunal's aims and responsibilities. However, because of disagreements among the political groups, the establishment of the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission was postponed until September 1918. Until that time, its functions in Turkestan were performed by the Tashkent City Investigation Commission.

During the second half of 1918, however, the legal powers of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission were expanded considerably. It became a ruthless punitive instrument of the Soviet government in its struggle against counter-revolutionary activities. The Tashkent Soviet Investigation Commission continued its campaign against counter-revolution, looting, and profiteering until September 1918, when it was replaced by the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission.

In the second half of July 1918, following the arrival in Tashkent of V. Miskin, Chairman of the Executive Committee of Orenburg Governorate, Sidorov, head of the criminal investigation department, met with him to discuss the establishment of an Extraordinary Commission in Tashkent. The meeting was intended to resolve two issues: how the new body should be organized and how the experience accumulated by the Orenburg Extraordinary Commission in combating crime could be applied. This is also confirmed by the following correspondence between Sidorov and Miskinov:



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“To the Tashkent Investigation Commission. I hereby confirm that the following ten individuals—Zhuravkov, Karlen, Martinov, Panferov, Gribe, Selikhov, Samoylin, Susayev, and Fomin—worked for the Orenburg Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Profiteering. Zhuravkov and Martinov worked as investigators, while the others served as staff members. Selivanov served as commissioner of the counterintelligence department.”

After recruiting the personnel required for the Extraordinary Commission, Sidorov submitted a formal proposal to the Executive Committee of the Tashkent Soviet on 23 July 1918 concerning the establishment of the commission. In his letter, Sidorov emphasized the necessity of creating the Extraordinary Commission as the principal punitive institution of Soviet power in Turkestan.

On 5 September 1918, at a joint meeting of the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan, the Council of People’s Commissars, and the Main Railway Executive Committee, an Extraordinary Investigation Commission was established to combat counter-revolutionary activities, profiteering, and looting throughout the republic. The commission, which incorporated the Tashkent Investigation Commission, was granted extensive authority and placed directly under the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars.

The commission was instructed to prepare detailed regulations within three days, using the regulations of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission as a model, and submit them to the Central Executive Committee for approval. The establishment of an Extraordinary Commission in the Turkestan ASSR had first been discussed as a separate issue at meetings of the Central Executive Committee on 3 and 4 September 1918, before being submitted to the joint meeting of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People’s Commissars.

On 9 September 1918, through Order No. 34, the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR instructed all Soviets of Deputies to compile lists of



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individuals suspected of counter-revolutionary views, White Guard elements, former military officers of the Tsarist period, persons openly engaged in profiteering, and those suspected of profiteering. Information was to be collected for the purpose of depriving such individuals of their liberty. On the same day, through Order No. 35, the Central Executive Committee gave legal force to its decision to establish the Extraordinary Investigation Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution, Profiteering, and Looting.

The Turkestan Extraordinary Investigation Commission was established as a ruthless instrument through which the Soviet government sought to retain its authority in Turkestan by force and combat individuals and groups opposed to the Soviet system. Alongside the establishment of the commission, lists were compiled of people regarded as alien elements hostile to Soviet rule in Turkestan. The first persons included on these lists were members of the government of the Turkestan Autonomy, national intellectuals who sympathized with them, representatives of the clergy, national property owners, and merchants.

After lists of the bourgeoisie and individuals receiving unearned income had been compiled in Tashkent, the Central Executive Committee of the Turkestan ASSR authorized the establishment of “mobile commissions” in different localities. Their principal purpose was to eliminate sections of the population considered hostile to the Soviet system, particularly the national bourgeoisie and counter-revolutionary forces.

It is therefore evident that the Extraordinary Investigation Commission also exercised considerable influence over the political and economic life of the region. A report of the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission stated that the commission “occupied a distinctive position in the political and economic life of the region.”

According to the Regulations of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission, the commission’s activities were directed towards ruthlessly combating counter-



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revolutionary actions, profiteering, and all other economic and political activities hostile to the Soviet system, as well as ensuring the victory of Soviet rule in the region.

The regulations of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission also served as a model for investigative commissions in other regions. The commission was accountable only to the Central Executive Committee of Turkestan and the Council of People's Commissars. On 17 September 1918, the newspaper Soviet Turkestan published the regulations of the Extraordinary Investigation Commission. According to the document, the commission was authorized to carry out arrests and searches; inspect documents and other papers belonging to state bodies, public associations, organizations, private individuals, and enterprises established by them; impose fines; confiscate property before trial; and close newspapers.

The Extraordinary Commission of the Turkestan ASSR operated until 6 February 1922. Throughout this period, it was headed exclusively by individuals of European origin. It was initially led by A. S. Sidorov from September to November 1918 and subsequently by I. P. Fomenko. During the commission's four years of activity, it was administered by 18 individuals, all of whom were of Slavic origin. After I. P. Fomenko was executed together with other commissars during the Osipov uprising on 19 January 1919, A. S. Sidorov once again assumed leadership of the Extraordinary Commission.

These officials did not know the languages, religious values, traditions, or customs of the indigenous population. Their main objective was to strengthen Bolshevik rule in Turkestan by using violence, force, terror, and intimidation. However, many of these Cheka officials later became victims of the same political system and repressive policies that they had previously enforced.

The Extraordinary Commission of the Turkestan ASSR was established as a ruthless instrument of Soviet power for maintaining its authority in Turkestan



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through violence and combating individuals and forces opposed to the Soviet system. At the same time, lists were compiled of people classified as alien elements hostile to Soviet rule. These lists primarily included members of the government of the Turkestan Autonomy, national intellectuals who supported them, members of the clergy, national property owners, and merchants.

The Extraordinary Investigation Commission became the principal punitive body of the Bolsheviks in Turkestan. Without proper investigation or judicial proceedings, it sentenced representatives of the indigenous population who opposed the Soviet system to capital punishment. At the time, the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries criticized the Bolsheviks, stating that the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission was carrying out mass executions of “bourgeois elements and participants in counter-revolutionary activities” without trial or investigation.

Muslim organizations operating in the Turkestan ASSR strongly criticized the arbitrary actions of the supervisory authorities and their contemptuous treatment of the local population. For example, T. Ryskulov, Chairman of the Regional Muslim Bureau of the Russian Communist Party, sharply condemned the activities of the militia and inspection bodies, as well as those of the Red Army units in the Turkestan ASSR. He argued that instead of protecting the population from various thieves and looters, these Soviet institutions themselves engaged in looting and violent seizure. Numerous examples of such activities were also presented in the works published by T. Ryskulov during those years.

In Tashkent, the Extraordinary Commission of the Turkestan ASSR arrested 150 members of an underground organization of the Right Socialist-Revolutionaries. In assessing their activities, the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission stated: “Taking advantage of the difficult situation of the Soviet government, they secretly encouraged workers to struggle against Soviet power, peacefully entered the ranks



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of the party, infiltrated party institutions under the guise of communists, and secretly worked to overthrow Soviet authority.”

In April 1921, officials of the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission also uncovered the activities of the “Committee of National Unity,” an organization consisting of national intellectuals and Muslim scholars that had been established to struggle against Soviet power. Its members—Sadridinkhoja Sharifkhojaye, Garif Alminovich Karimov, Yusufbek Kurbonov, Muhammaddiyor Umarov, Rustambek Niyozbekov, and Abdullajon Ziyomammedov—were arrested by the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission and placed in a general prison.

In 1921, the Turkestan Extraordinary Commission arrested 150 members of an underground Right Socialist-Revolutionary organization in Tashkent. In describing their activities, the commission stated that they had secretly called upon workers to oppose Soviet power, exploited the government’s difficult situation, joined the Communist Party through peaceful means, infiltrated party institutions as communists, and covertly worked to overthrow Soviet authority.

In conclusion, the Extraordinary Commission was established by the Soviet government to strengthen and preserve its authority and became one of the principal institutions responsible for implementing the Bolsheviks’ policy of political repression. The commission and its successors—the State Political Directorate and the Joint State Political Directorate—continued to apply pressure and persecution against representatives of the indigenous population. People opposed to the political system and participants in opposition movements were subjected to psychological pressure, administrative persecution, imprisonment, physical elimination, and various forms of political repression.



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