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"We can and we must": The scientificity of trade-union history-writing in the Soviet Union in the 1920s[1]

Abstract

In the 1920s, the young Soviet Republic, rejecting the old social system, turned to the study of the past. Instead of engaging with professional historians, the new regime initiated a whole range of large-scale participatory projects incorporated into political and public institutions to produce new, revolutionary history. In this article, instead of approaching this topic in terms of ideology and memory I put it in the context of history of science.

[1] This article is based on the research I have done in the European University at St. Petersburg in 2014–2017.

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Focusing on the case of trade unions, I suggest considering the early Soviet non-academic history-writing as a form of radical citizen science. Even though trade unionists had no special education, they dared to use scientific methods in their research that ended with positive results. This story allows us to question the opposition between amateurs and professionals in the field of citizen science.

Keywords: *history-writing, citizen science, trade unions, The USSR, the 1920s, Marxism, archeography*, *Istprof*

„Możemy i musimy": Naukowość pisarstwa historycznego o związkach zawodowych w Związku Radzieckim w latach 20. XX wieku

Abstrakt

W latach 20. XX wieku młoda Republika Radziecka, odrzuciwszy stary układ społeczny, zwróciła się ku badaniom przeszłości. Zamiast współpracować z profesjonalnymi historykami, nowy reżim zapoczątkował całą gamę dużych projektów partycypacyjnych pod kontrolą instytucji politycznych i publicznych, których celem było stworzenia nowej, rewolucyjnej historii. W tym artykule, zamiast podchodzić do tego tematu w kategoriach ideologii i pamięci, umieściłem go w kontekście historii nauki. Skupiając się na przypadku związków zawodowych, sugeruję rozważenie wczesnego sowieckiego, nieakademickiego pisarstwa historycznego jako formy radykalnej nauki obywatelskiej. Mimo że związkowcy nie mieli kierunkowego wykształcenia, odważyli się wykorzystać metodę naukową w swoich badaniach zwieńczonych pozytywnymi rezultatami. Przykład ten pozwala nam kwestionować opozycję między amatorami i profesjonalistami w dziedzinie nauki obywatelskiej.

Słowa kluczowe: *pisarstwo historyczne*, *nauka obywatelska*, *związki zawodowe*, *ZSRR*, *lata 20. XX wieku*, *marksizm*, *archeografia*, *Istprof*

1. Introduction

In 1925, a year after Vladimir Lenin's death, two thin mass-circulated books with similar titles were published in the Soviet Union: Georgii Lelevich's *Lenin as a Historian of the Party and the Revolution* and Vadim Bystrianskii's *Lenin the Historian. Historicism in Leninism*[2]. Both authors stressed that Lenin used history in political struggle, basing his decisions on discussions of historical trends. Although Lelevich and Bystrianskii wrote about Lenin's use of history in the political sphere – an activity that is usually considered to be the opposite of academic history-writing – for both of these authors Lenin's use of history was scientific. Indeed, Soviet Marxists did not find in the interconnection between history and politics anything preventing truly scientific research of the past. This view was possible, in part, because the words "academic" and "scientific" were not synonyms for the Bolsheviks.

Marxists claimed that Marxism itself was a particular type of doctrine, scientific socialism, opposed to the utopian ideas of pre-Marxist socialists[3]. The Bolsheviks were committed to building their political program on scientific evidence and to correlate it with Marx's general social theory. Science for them was thus not only a way to interpret the world, but also a powerful tool for changing it. Even outside the academy, making war or conducting the economy, the Bolsheviks were engaged in science. This fact had a twofold consequence. On the one hand, right after the revolution the Soviet state started to invest heavily in scientific institutions supporting fundamental and, especially, applied research. On the other hand, the scientificity of Marxism undermined the independence of academic elites. The Bolsheviks deprived professionals of their monopoly over science, paving the way for the wide participation of amateurs in the production of scientific knowledge. The notion of citizen science is a very fruitful lens that allows us to see not only repressive, but also productive side of the Bolsheviks' scientificity. In this paper, focusing on trade-union history-writing, I will demonstrate how the scientificity of the Soviet regime determined both the intellectual

[2] Bystrianskii 1925; Lelevich 1925.

[3] Kotkin 1995, pp. 7–8.

and institutional contexts of the production of knowledge in the 1920s. But first, let me elaborate why I believe that it is necessary to consider Soviet history-writing in the context of history of science.

2. Early Soviet history-writing: Literature and context

The approach of several generations of scholars who have studied history-writing in the early Soviet Union has been shaped by the political implications of this topic. History-writing has been seen as a space of political struggle. Soviet historians who started to study this issue in the 1960s wrote about a bitter ideological struggle between "bourgeois" and "Marxist" camps in the historical discipline[4]. At the same time, scholars in the United States also began to explore how the new Soviet government had worked with the past. They wrote about the rivalry between Marxist and non-Marxist historiographies, exploring the mechanisms that allowed history to be used for propagandist and ideological aims[5]. In both cases, the Communist Party was the main character of the story, described either as the protector and patron of a truly scientific history, or as a manipulator and tyrant trying to monopolize its interpretations and schemes.

An important shift in the historiography of the Soviet history-writing occurred with the development of memory studies. As early as 1983, Eric Hobsbawm wrote about "invented traditions", which are "responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition".[6] Hobsbawm and other contributors to the landmark volume *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) were highly critical of nationalist movements and focused their attention on the problem of how contemporary interests and social relations constructed the past. This new wave led to a certain normalization of the Soviet experience, where the annual Royal Christmas Message in the United Kingdom was just as much an "invented" tradition as Soviet May Day marches, and the French nation as much an "imagined" community as the Soviet *narod*.

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[4] Alekseeva 1968, p. 7. See also: Fediukin 1965; Ivanova 1968; Alatortseva 1989; Klushin 1971; Maksakov 1959.

[5] Enteen 1976; 1986; White 1985; Frankel 1966; Holmes, Burgess 1982.

[6] Hobsbawm 1983, p. 2.

Despite the importance of the contribution that memory studies have made in the field of Soviet history, it has an important limitation: it tends to focus on the pragmatics of the Bolsheviks' use of history, which leads to an overestimation of their freedom in constructing narratives. The overwhelming focus has been on history-writing as a useful tool for the legitimation of the revolutionary regime and for the mobilization of population. Frederick Corney writes about the "foundation tales" of the Soviet regime, which were constructed by the inscription of personal memoirs into the official scheme of revolutionary events. The Bolsheviks did not invent the history of the revolution, but they provided a vocabulary and structure for the narrative that was filled by numerous personal stories. This allowed the Bolsheviks to prove that October was not a *coup d'état*, but a real revolution, and that the people's will allowed them to take power. Corney writes, "Like all foundation narratives, the story of October is by definition a *legitimizing* process"[7].

Other scholars have emphasized how history was used in Stalin's 'Great Retreat' to shift the ideological focus away from class-oriented and internationalist revolutionary ideals to nationalist rhetoric in order to mobilize the population. David Brandenberger works with Russo-centric Stalinist mass culture and argues that the Party's use of Russian national heroes and myths to promulgate the dominant Marxist--Leninist line

> signaled a symbolic abandonment of an earlier revolutionary ethos in favor of a strategy calculated to mobilize popular support for an unpopular regime by whatever means necessary.[8]

The heroes of Russian national history represented in movies, textbooks, and popular brochures replaced the revolutionary imagery and played a pivotal role for the development of national identity that survived even after 1991.

It is difficult to reject the claim that history was used under the Bolsheviks as a tool in their political struggles,[9] but I claim that although the

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[7] Corney 2004, p. 5. See also: Hartzok 2009; Narskii 2004; Dobrenko 2008, p. 6.

[8] Brandenberger 2002, p. 2. See also: Platt, Brandenberger 2006; 1999.

[9] For example, see the political "Literary discussion" around Trotsky's historical writings. See: Corney 2015.

Bolsheviks were engaged – in the words of Pierre Bourdieu – in "strategic action" as they worked with history, history remained a part of the scientific endeavor of the Communist project. Bourdieu's nuanced approach to science is helpful here, as it allows us to see that "strategic action" need not negate the scientific qualities of knowledge.[10] It is necessary to shift the focus from the question "what was history used for?" to the question "why was it constructed in that particular way?" in order to see the social and intellectual contexts of the process. In this paper, I argue that to answer this question we have to scrutinize the specific scientificity of the Soviet regime. Focusing on the trade-union historical commissions, I will show that the composition of the Soviet revolutionary narrative was tightly bound, on the one hand, to the particular institutional context of the development of science, and, on the other, to the tension between inductive and deductive forms of scientificity in the history-writing of the 1920s.

Although the combination of "science" and "history" might look strange in an English language context, in Russian the two terms are more closely connected.[11] "Science" is not a precise translation of the Russian word *nauka*. Formed under heavy influence of German tradition in the 18th and 19th centuries, Russian *nauka* was closer to *Wissenschaft* than to "science" – this term had a broader meaning and also included the social sciences and humanities.[12] And this is more than a matter of words. "In the same boat" with scholars of the natural and social sciences who had begun to accomplish practical functions – providing new technologies for industry and new tools of population management – history also moved beyond the borders of academia.

The Bolsheviks did not introduce Russia to the utility of science. Indeed, the convergence of the scientific and political spheres was well under way in Russia long before 1917. As Peter Holquist writes, in the middle of the 19th century in Russia, as in other European countries, the idea that the population could be counted, managed and even improved,

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[10] Bourdieu 1975, p. 19.

[11] See, for example, Tikhonov 2016. In this work, he considers the historical discipline an integral part of Soviet science.

[12] Dmitriev 2015, p. 11. See also: Ringer 1990 (1969), pp. 102–103; Novick 1988, p. 24.

appeared. This attitude towards the population was based on the development of the social sciences, such as statistics, economics, anthropology, and criminology. These disciplines promised to equip governments with tools that would make social processes visible and manageable; this "contributed to officials' belief that they could grasp and manipulate such processes".[13] This allowed imperial officials after the revolution to adapt and to continue to work under the Bolsheviks quite easily, because they shared the same technocratic ethos.[14]

After the 1917 revolution, the development of applied social and natural sciences continued at a new level. In the 1920s, applied psychological disciplines such as pedology, defectology, psychotechnics, clinical psychology, pedagogy, and others institutionalized;[15] the ideas of eugenicists were utilized in medicine, especially in the sphere of reproductive healthcare;[16] physical anthropologists consulted economic planners;[17] the Bolsheviks' national policy was forged in close cooperation with ethnographers of the Russian Geographical Society and of the Academy of Sciences;[18] several criminological research centers were founded in order to rationalize the penal system.[19]

In addition, a similar process took place in the natural sciences, which moved from pure fundamental knowledge closer to applied research. This shift was reflected in the new types of scientific organizational structures formed in the USSR in the 1920–1930s. These were not universities, but rather special research institutions that played a pivotal role in the science of that time. Scientists in these institutions did not teach and could not freely choose the topic of their research, because they were tightly connected to the aims of the industry and the planned economy in general. This type of science was far from the noble values of independent research but gave scientists new opportunities. As Alexei Kojevnikov writes,

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[13] Holquist 2001, p. 113. See also works on the population management by means of social sciences: Beer 2008; Engelstein 1994; Tolz 2011.

[14] Holquist 2010.

[15] Iasnitskii, Zavershneva 2009; Iasnitskii 2015.

[16] Krementsov 2011.

[17] Mogil'ner 2008.

[18] Hirsch 2005.

[19] Beer 2008, pp. 165–204.

> [u]nder Bolshevik rule, scientists lost much of their autonomy and independence but acquired more social prestige and de facto influence on politically important decision making.[20]

In general, the immediate post-revolutionary years were a boom period in the institutionalization of new research and educational centers. This process was initiated at once by both the academic community and the new regime. Although many of the most ambitious projects were not realized, they were an important component of the revolutionary moment in the history of science in Russia.[21]

History was considered to be one of the sciences in the USSR, and it is possible to see a similar pattern in its development in the 1920s. However, there was a crucial difference in the way the historical discipline was applied. In the cases of anthropology, criminology, pedagogy, and others the Bolsheviks engaged directly with professional communities, bolstering their institutionalization or employing the facilities of existing scientific institutions. In the case of history, on the contrary, the new regime was highly suspicious toward the academic establishment of the classical universities and the Academy of Science. Instead of engaging with professional historians, scientific method was utilized by amateurs. The manufacturing of a revolutionary narrative was initiated immediately after the Civil War with the creation of special centers – historical commissions incorporated into political and public institutions such as the Bolshevik Party, trade unions, the Komsomol, the Red Army, and others. These non-academic historical commissions were rarely staffed by professional historians. In most cases, their members were rank-and-file employees who did not research history as such but produced histories of (and for) particular institutions, while at the same time claiming to use scientific methods.[22]

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[20] Kojevnikov 2008, p. 122. See also: Kojevnikov 2002.

[21] Gruzdinskaia, Metel' 2018; Metel' 2017; Dolgova 2017.

[22] As Evgeniia Dolgova rightly notes in her article, the 1920s were a period of deep crisis in the historical discipline. Debates and disorientation took the place of positivist methodological consensus at the beginning of the twentieth century. See: Dolgova 2013. Attempting to use historical methods in their work, party members and trade unionists could not but internalize these methodological discussions. Severe conflict broke out in 1924, for example, between the leaders of the Party historical commission,

Later historians have paid much attention to the Commission on the History of the Party (Istpart) that was directly subordinated to the Central Committee of the Bolshevik Party and had branches in every governorate.[23] Although Istpart was highly influential, it was just one case in a whole range of similar historical commissions. If we lose sight of other centers, we see a false picture, whereby the construction of revolutionary narratives was fully monopolized by the Party from the very beginning of the Soviet era. To move beyond this limiting approach, I focus on the case of trade-union history-writing to show how the scientificity of the Soviet regime influenced institutional and intellectual contexts of the history-writing in the 1920s. The Commissions on the History of the Professional Movement (Istprofs) existed within the complex structure of Soviet trade unions. Just as the institutional systems underlying Soviet history-writing were heterogeneous and complex, so the narratives they produced co-existed and competed with one another. The narratives of the history of professional movement did not contradict the Party line, but at the same time were not reducible to it.

I believe that recent developments in citizen science provide us with a fruitful lens for reconsidering the Early Soviet history-writing and the case of Istprofs in particular. Elena Aronova notes that there are two conflicting understandings of citizen science in literature. On the one hand, natural scientists and some historians of science use this term when writing about loyal participation of amateurs in the projects driven by professional scientists. For Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholars, on the other hand, citizen science is a type of grassroot movement that challenges established scientific institutions and practices and produces alternative local knowledge.[24] I would like to use the Aronova's juxtaposition of "active volunteers' engagement" and "activist democratic engagement" as a framework for the analysis of the complex relationships between Istprofs and professional historiography. Istprof commissions were definitely not a loyal supplement to some academic research projects. They were staffed and ruled by trade unionists, not professional historians. However, rather than challenge existing historiography, Istprofs

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Vladimir Nevskii and Mikhail Ol'minskii, who could not agree on the application of methods of primary source critique. See: Gilmintinov 2015.

[23] Corney 2004; Holmes, Burgess 1982; Zelenov 2000.

[24] Aronova 2017.

produced an alternative one. Before the 1917 revolution, very recent history of trade unions had not been considered as a legitimate research topic among professional historians, who had focused on the Medieval and Early Modern periods. That is why professional historiography was considered irrelevant for Istprofs, rather than being a rival.

In the following section of the paper, I will be comparing Istprofs and another historical commission incorporated into the same structures of trade unions, i.e. the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia: unlike Istprofs, it was staffed with professional historians. These two commissions coexisted for almost four years but failed to cooperate. I will then outline the scientificity of Istprofs, showing how it related to Marxist epistemology and the historiographical mainstream of the 1920s. I will demonstrate that Istprofs' research program did not exclude relations with professional historiography; even though Istprof members scarcely communicated with contemporary academic historians, they addressed their work to a "future historian". This will conclude with an examination of Istprofs' publishing strategy, in order to juxtapose Istprofs and archeography, an important historical sub-discipline that was engaged in similar activities, i.e. the preparation and publishing of materials for researchers. This comparison allows me to underline how much the particular institutionality of Istprof influenced the research agenda of its members.

3. The incorporation of history-writing into the structure of trade unions

At the Fifth All-Russian Conference of Trade Unions in November 1920, among intense arguments about the unions' role in the proletarian dictatorship, Mikhail Tomskii, the leader of the Soviet trade unions, announced organizing special commissions on the history of the professional movement within the institutional structures of the trade unions. Although the Bolsheviks were still very far from the victory in the Civil War at the time of the conference, Tomskii claimed that "the moment has come when we can and we must think about the preparation of our labor history".[25] The commissions were named Istprofs, and very

[25] [N.N.1] 1921, pp. 177–178.

soon they had developed into a branching network. At the same time, the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, an agency that administered union organizations in the former capital of Russia,[26] founded an independent historical commission – the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia. In this section, I use the cases of these two commissions to show the complexity of the quest for a proper form of non-academic history-writing in the 1920s.

Let us begin with the Istprofs. Their agenda and structure echoed those of the Party historical commission (Istpart), which had been founded just before Istprofs. Initially, the leadership of the Soviet trade unions even considered delegating the historical work to a subcommission of Istpart.[27] However, once the structure of Istprofs was established, there is no evidence among their documents to show that party historians attempted to control the work of their union colleagues.

Istprofs were so deeply incorporated into the structure of the trade unions that we can see their narratives of the professional movement not only belonging to trade-unionism as a whole, but also to the agendas of particular trade union organizations. The commissions were not managed and funded centrally, but by each trade union organization separately. Although the central Istprof was the leading commission that enunciated the aims and scientific methods of the professional movement's research, it could not directly control the activities of other Istprof commissions. They depended more on their trade union organizations than on the central Istprof; this led to a polyphony in the professional movement narratives, which were written from different points of view.

These organizations were formed into two parallel hierarchies: spatial and sectoral. The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS), controlled, on the one hand, central committees of particular

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[26] St. Petersburg, the capital of the Russian Empire, was renamed Petrograd in 1916 and then Leningrad in 1924. In 1918, Moscow became the capital of the Soviet Russia.

[27] David Riazanov, a prominent Bolshevik intellectual and union activist, who was initially appointed as the chief of the central Istprof, was too busy to tackle the history of the professional movement as well. See one of the first reports of the central Istprof: The State Archive of the Russian Federation (here after GARF), fond 6935 *Komissiia po Izucheniiu Istorii Professional'nogo Dvizhenia pri V sesoiuznom Tsentral'nom Sovete Professional'nykh Soiuzov*, op. 1, d. 2, l. 4.

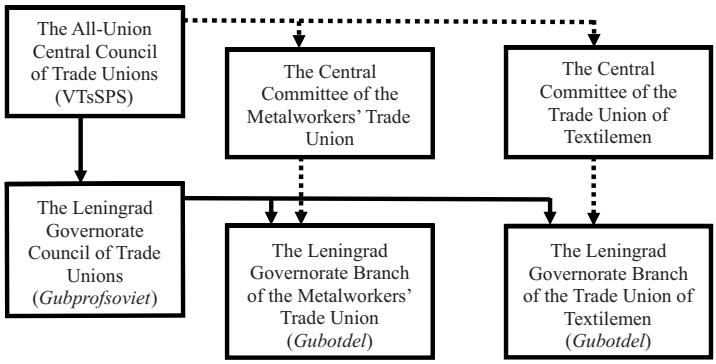

Diagram 1. Drawing on the example of the trade unions of metalworkers and textilemen in the Leningrad governorate, the intersection of the sectoral and spatial hierarchies is shown here. The dotted arrows demonstrate hierarchic lines from VTsSPS to the trade unions of particular industries and through them; the black arrows indicate the spatial scale of Soviet trade unionism – the subordination of the governorate councils to the VTsSPS.

industrial trade unions in Moscow, and, on the other hand, the governorate councils of trade unions (*Gubprofsovety*). Particular trade unions also had governorate branches – *Gubotdely*, which were subordinated to the *Gubprofsovet* of their governorate and at the same time to the central committee of the union as well (see Diagram 1).

The depth of Istprofs' incorporation into the trade unions was reflected in the sensibility of the professional movement narrative to the interests of the trade union organizations to which they were subordinated. Indeed, for example, one of the first books published by the Istprof of the Leningrad council was a collection of materials on the history of the professional movement in St. Petersburg in 1905–1907. S.I. Gruzdev, its editor and a member of the Leningrad Istprof, described the first moments of the uprising among the metalworkers of the Putilov factory. He proudly wrote that "the proletariat of Petersburg was the initiator of the movement".[28] Former metalworker Fedor Bulkin, in the book *The History of the St. Petersburg Union of Metalworkers* released by the Istprof of the Central Committee of the Metalworker's trade union in Moscow, described the same events with similar pride, but shifted focus from the spatial context to the sectoral one – he highlighted that

[28] Gruzdev 1926, p. 36.

metalworkers were the catalyst for the uprising.[29] The workers of the Putilov factory were Petersburgers and, at the same time, metalworkers, but they played different roles in the narratives of different trade unions – their residence was much more important for the Leningrad council, while the Metalworker's trade union focused on their profession.

Istproftran – the Istprof of the Railwaymen Trade Union – provides us with one of the most interesting cases showing the complexity of the relations between the spatial and sectoral scales of the professional movement narrative. Istproftran was one of the most active commissions and started to release books even earlier than the central commission of the network, the Istprof of the VTsSPS. Furthermore, local branches of Istproftran had always avoided active participation in the activities of the Istprofs of the governorate councils, being tightly bound to their central commission in Moscow. This shift from spatial hierarchies to sectoral ones might be explained by the specific structure of the Railwaymen Trade Union, as it was divided not into governorate branches like other trade unions, but rather into certain rail lines. These lines usually passed through the territories of several governorates, and the Istproftran network did not match the network of the governorate councils of trade unions. Railwaymen hardly ever placed anything in the collections of materials published by trade unions councils and only occasionally participated in the councils' meetings.

Unlike Istprofs, the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia did not have a strong connection to the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, the trade union organization that funded it. The crucial difference lay in the membership profiles of these commissions. Whereas Istprofs consisted of trade unionists (many of whom were former workers), the Commission on the History of Labor was headed by one of the leading figures of Russian historiography, Professor Sergei Platonov of the Academy of Science. Although direct administration was conducted by less eminent historians and economists of that time (Yulii Gessen, Iosif Kulisher, Alexander Presniakov, and others), they were also members of the Petrograd academic community. The only representative of the Petrograd trade unions among the members of the commission was Grigorii Tsiperovich – one of the leaders of the

[29] Bulkin 1924, p. 6.

Petrograd trade unions council who held several more appointments in the Soviet and the Party offices and thus could not participate in the commission activities.

The agenda of the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia included the processing of recently unveiled archives and the compilation of catalogues of literature and materials containing data on the history of labor. In addition, the commission published a journal *Archive of the History of Labor in Russia* that was enthusiastically received among professional historians. In 1921, the commission joined the Council of Scientific Institutions and Institutions of Higher Education that was founded in 1918 and united the most influential educational and academic institutions of Petrograd, the former capital of Russia.[30]

Despite this almost purely academic format, the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia did not avoid setting practical goals for their activities. In the programmatic article, "The History of Labor and its Significance" in the first volume of the *Archive* Evgenii Tarle wrote:

> It is impossible to glean in any historical field as many lessons are to be found in the field of economic history. Economy depends so little on the individual: on the contrary, people with their so-called "free will" depend so much upon economic evolution, and the laws and character of this evolution are still so mysterious and barely perceptible that, of course, it is only through a clear understanding of the past that we can hope to obtain at least some sort of guiding threads for the future.[31]

Tarle promised the policy-makers that studying the history of labor would provide them with guiding threads, in other words, he claimed that history might have a forecasting power. This was an ambitious declaration, but it was not particularly connected to the agenda of the trade unions.

In 1921–1924, the network of Istprofs co-existed with the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia. The latter was considered as

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[30] This issue was discussed during the meeting of the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia on 25 October 1921. The Central State Archive of St. Petersburg, f. 6276 *Leningradskii Oblastnoi Sovet Professional'nykh Soiuzov*, 1917–n.v., op. 46, d. 1, l. 74.

[31] Tarle 1921, p. 8.

an appropriate substitute for an Istprof commission in Petrograd until 1924. However, since the central Istprof had to collect local materials and form them into the All-Russian history of the professional movement, it was difficult to avoid the use of materials from Petrograd – the former capital of Russia, where many important revolutionary events had happened. In 1923, the central Istprof member V. Lifshits was sent to Petrograd to familiarize himself with the work of the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia and to try to come into contact with it in order to combine both commissions' activities. However, Lifshits reported that the Commission on the History of Labor could not be a substitute for the Istprof in Petrograd, because its members "delved into the remote ages" and did not process the archives of trade unions. The Istprof of the VTsSPS meeting took the decision to try to lead the Petrograd council to allocate several trade unionists for Istprof activities.[32] By the end of 1923, the commission was finally organized. In 1924, both Istprof and the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia co-existed, but soon Istprof remained the only historical commission in the structure of the Leningrad trade unions council.

4. Istprofs and forms of scientificity in history-writing in the Soviet Union in the 1920s

The Istprofs consisted of trade unionists, not professional historians. While they lacked theoretical training, they operated within a scientific framework shaped by a mixture of positivist and Marxist ideas. This amalgam included attitudes such as emphasis on archival documents rather than on memoirs, cumulativeness, collectivity, objectivity, and the impossibility of interpreting events of the near past. I will focus on one crucial idea – that the analysis of history should be preceded by a long period of accumulating facts. And the Istprofs' aim was articulated as preparation materials for the "future historian". But first I will show the wider contexts in which this form of scientificity evolved.

In the two works on Lenin's use of history with which this paper began, both Georgii Lelevich and Vadim Bystrianskii celebrated Lenin's use of history, but, despite the similarity of their accounts, they were

[32] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 11, l. 1.

significantly different. Bystrianskii and Lelevich explained in two quite divergent ways the question of why Lenin had been so successful using history, of what in particular had made him both a brilliant historian and an auspicious politician. Lelevich, on the one hand, induced "lovers of head-spinning hypotheses and aprioristic generalizations" to learn from Lenin how to fastidiously analyze "raw factual material" and base all their conclusions on it.[33] Bystrianskii, on the other hand, wrote that Lenin did what no regular historian could do – he oriented himself in "contemporary history", when there was not and could not be "evident factual material" such as statistics or archival documents, which could allow a historian to unveil the "genuine face" of the past. Nonetheless, Lenin correctly treated contemporary history, because he was a consummate Marxist and "Marxism is historical in its essence", and this theory explained the main pathways of history, which was much more important than the accumulation of facts.[34]

What is the basis for truly scientific knowledge – reliance on solid facts or having a correct view of the whole? This was an open question for Soviet Marxist historians in the 1920s. In *Anti-Dühring* (1877), a widely read text in that period, Friedrich Engels, on the one hand, wrote that the extraction of any fact from its "natural or historical connection" was an artificial operation; dialectical method implied a view of the world as an entire whole.[35] On the other hand, Engels claimed that the cognitive decomposition of nature into separate parts had allowed science to reach the "colossal achievements" in modern times. It had been a reliance on "real facts" that had made Marx's theory a scientific socialism, not a utopian one. Marx's ideas and implications were not the results of his fantasy, his personal experience or peculiarities of his character, but necessary conclusions arising from the very facts of social and natural life.[36] For Engels analysis and synthesis were two separate stages of cognition, and analysis should precede synthesis, i.e. the overall picture must be derived from individual facts. Elaborating his idea in the brochure *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) he wrote: "A certain amount of natural and historical material must be collected

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[33] Lelevich 1925, pp. 47–48.
[34] Bystrianskii 1925, p. 7.
[35] Engels 1987 (1877), p. 22.
[36] Engels 1987 (1877), pp. 592–593.

before there can be any critical analysis, comparison, and arrangement in classes, orders, and species".[37]

This contradiction between the inductive approach, which took the individual facts as the basis of knowledge, and deduction, which saw the particular only through a common picture, had a tremendous impact on the formation of the Soviet revolutionary narrative. Both of these attitudes were quite legitimate in 1920s, as both could be viewed as Marxist and scientific.

Giving the first lecture of his course on Russian historiography at the Petrograd Communist University in 1923, Mikhail Pokrovskii, the most influential Marxist historian of that time in the Soviet Russia, exhorted his students that non-Marxist historical works should not be used even to seek ordinary facts, because what they would find there (even if supported by references to authentic documents) were not facts, but

> ideology, i.e. the reflection of facts. All ideologies are made from pieces of reality, an absolutely fantastic ideology does not exist, and yet every ideology is a distorting mirror, which gives us everything but the true picture of reality.[38]

Indeed, not only was secondary literature distorted, but primary sources were too. Pokrovskii said that historians always see the past with the ruling classes' eyes, and in order to catch sight of the suppressed they must be able to make an allowance for the optics of primary sources. Facts for Pokrovskii were not the basis of theory, nor did they form a general picture of the past, because they were deflected by ideological lenses.

Nonetheless, "ideology" for Pokrovskii was not a rigorous term. Although while arguing against "bourgeois historians" he called their ideology a "distorting mirror", he does not seem to consider ideology as only meaning false consciousness, because in other writings he discusses the "ideology of Marx".[39] So for Pokrovskii ideology was not only a "distorting mirror", but also could be a "magnifying glass", a tool allowing one to see what would be otherwise hidden. Facts were always refracted through an ideological lens, but they could be deflected both

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[37] Engels 1989 (1880), p. 299.
[38] Pokrovskii 2012 (1933)a, p. 10.
[39] Pokrovskii 2012 (1933)b, p. 98.

in a right and wrong way, and it was a historians' primary goal to focus their lens to make the class struggle visible.

For Istprof members, the approach to the problem of the ideological distortion of facts was quite different. One of the leaders of the commission, Vasilii Iarotskii, argued that the main problem of the historiography of the professional movement was that authors approached material "not as historians, but as people practicing politics". For example, he treated the book *The Professional Movement in Russia* by the Menshevik Viktor Grinevich (who had held the chair of the Central Committee of Trade Unions in 1917) as nothing but a justification for his own political mistakes. Iarotskii wrote,

> And instead of an analysis of the role of circumstance in the class struggle, in this work we have… a political pamphlet.[40]

It is important to emphasize that Iarotskii criticized not so much Grinevich's Menshevist ideology, but rather his involvement of a political agenda in the theme being studied. Unlike Pokrovskii, Iarotskii's aim was not to focus an ideological lens correctly, but to eliminate ideology from research altogether.

These attitudes of the Istprof members meant that it seemed necessary for them to divide the research process into two separate stages: 1) the accumulation of an exhaustive set of primary sources alongside an ascertainment of the facts and 2) the analysis and explanation of materials. The editors of the main organ of the Istprof network *Materials for the History of the Professional Movement* (1924) wrote in the introduction to the first volume:

> The materials necessary for the study of the issue [of the history of the professional movement] are not yet available to researchers, and the implementation of their broad literary plans should be preceded by long, painstaking and systematic work of collecting and studying the primary sources, as only they can serve as a basis for the research of the said issue.[41]

The statement that the primary aim of the Istprofs was the accumulation of sources for the "future historian" was repeated in most

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[40] Chekin (Iarotskii) 1924, p. 11.

[41] [N.N.2] 1924a, p. 4.

books, brochures and documents of the commissions. For that purpose, archives of the trade unions, factories and pre-revolutionary state departments were collected and systematized. Istprofs composed card catalogues of the relevant sources and secondary literature and published great numbers of documents. Iurii Milonov, one of the leading figures of the central Istprof and the author of its main manifestos, highlighted that the truly scientific historical analysis must be based on a vast amount of materials, thus their collecting and publishing became the "center of gravity" of the commission's activities.[42]

The correspondence between Istprof activists gives us further insight into the approach that the commissions tried to follow. Evsei Shatan, secretary of the Istprof of the Ukrainian Council of Trade Unions, sent his article on the history of the professional movement of the Donbass coal miners to R. Iakub, a member of the Istprof of the VTsSPS, in June 1925. In the cover letter, he explained the reasons for the delay and the inaccuracies in his work and reminded the recipient about the honorarium he expected to receive for his article. Shatan also wrote: "I kept in mind your requirements – to follow the method *exposer*, not *proposer* and to try to provide more original documentary material".[43] The French words *exposer* (to expose) and *proposer* (to propose) were written by hand and inserted into the gaps in the original typescript in Russian. Authors of the Istprof editions were instructed to "expose" the facts in their articles, to accumulate materials instead of "proposing" their views. In his reply, Iakub criticized Shatan's article for its length and inaccuracy and informed him that it was finally approved for publication in the fourth volume of the *Materials for the History of the Professional Movement*,[44] yet several sections of the article were cut as they contained data that was already known.[45]

Initially, when Istprof authors wrote about the "future historian", they seemed to refer to distant communist future. However, after accumulating materials for several years, Milonov and his colleagues considered themselves ready to start writing history of the professional movement in Russia. In 1928, participants of the All-Union Conference

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[42] Milonov 1924, pp. 20–21.

[43] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 50, l. 157.

[44] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 50, l. 166.

[45] Osipov (Shatan) 1925. This article was almost one-third contained of the citations from archival materials.

of Istprofs (May–June 1928) recognized that there were enough materials published and collected in Istprofs' archives to start the preparation of a "scientific and analytical" history of the trade unions.[46]

After this conference, Istprofs changed their mode of work. Introducing readers to the history of woodworkers' union, for example, Iurii Milonov and M. Rakovskii wrote that they wanted their 1928 book to be more than just a "chronicle of events":

> We considered it necessary to ascertain not simply the consequences of the events of the woodworkers' struggle… but also their relation to each other. We also considered it necessary to investigate the relationship between the woodworkers' movement and the labor movement in general, as well as their dependence on the political and economic situation.[47]

Milonov and Rakovskii not only told the story of the woodworkers' union but also put it in a wider context to explain the ebb and flow of the movement. They sought to identify patterns rather than communicate "pure facts" to the reader.

Istprofs did not have a chance to develop this activity, though. In 1929, the "right opposition" of Nikolai Bukharin, Alexei Rykov, and Mikhail Tomskii, who together championed a moderate program of economic development, lost their struggle to Joseph Stalin. Tomskii stepped down from his position as chairman of the VTsSPS in May 1929. Many of his supporters were purged from leadership positions in the unions, while the press harshly criticized his policies as anti-Bolshevist.[48] Trade unions lost the last vestiges of their independence. They had to stay "closer to the masses" to help the Party to mobilize workers for enthusiastic work. Moreover, funding to the VTsSPS was dramatically decreased.[49] In this context, Istprofs' ambition to write an analytical and scientific history was unachievable; in 1930, its archive and library were transferred to the Communist Academy, and the network of commissions was dissolved.

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[46] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 68, l. 24.
[47] Milonov, Rakovskii 1928, p. 5.
[48] Nosach, Zvereva 2009, p. 149.
[49] [N.N.4] 1930, pp. 129–136.

5. The publishing strategy of istprofs and possibility of the exhaustive narrative

In this section, I show how the scientificity of Istprofs influenced their publishing strategies. The most important form of publication for Istprofs were "materials" – a genre that was tightly connected with new tendencies in the development of archeography, a subsidiary of the historical discipline. Then, I turn to the connection between materials and the institutionality of Istprofs in order to explain the commissions members' aspiration to accumulate exhaustive materials for the professional movement's narrative.

The objectivist scientificity of Istprof historians implied the accumulation of sources for the "future historian" and such claims made the question of publishing rather problematic. It was necessary to accumulate exhaustive materials for the history of the professional movement and only then to start writing it. The Istprof commissions conference in October 1923 defined the "center of gravity" of their actual works as the "reconstruction of the full and precise picture of particular moments",[50] which did not necessitate publishing anything, but called instead for searching and collecting the documents in the Istprof archives.

Nonetheless, in 1923–1929, the Istprof commissions released several dozen collections of materials, bibliographical guides, textbooks, and articles in the journals of trade union organizations. R. Iakub, a member of the central Istprof, in his report to a collective of his fellows from several other trade unions explained the reasons why the commission did not refrain from publishing activities and was releasing its main organ – the continued edition *Materials for the History of the Professional Movement*. Firstly, it was necessary because the materials collected in the Istprof archive could only be easily used by a few researchers, while many others would not be able to study them. This, he claimed, might lead to a "one-sided historical elaboration of these materials". Secondly, publishing materials supplying readers with new facts might correct the wrong common-sense accounts about seemingly well-known issues in the history of the professional movement even before "fundamental works" were published. And finally, Iakub talked about the *Materials for the History of the Professional Movement* as an organizational center for

[50] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 11, l. 19.

people who might contribute to Istprof work, but were "out of range of particular Istprofs".[51] He meant here former participants of the professional movement who were not subordinated to the trade unions' hierarchies at that moment, but might be attracted by the opportunity to publish their memoirs or documents from their personal archives in the organ of the VTsSPS. The first and the third reasons did not belong to the content of the published texts as such, but were part of a larger egalitarianism of Istprofs' goals as it attempted to organize a large number of supporters around the commissions' activities. The second point of Iakub's account explained why the facts themselves – still particular, but already reliable – were to be circulated among ordinary trade unionists: even though these facts were not enough to construct an exhaustive and scientific narrative, they carried a destructive charge that undermined unreliable existing narratives.

The way in which Istprof members defined the purposes of the commission influenced the choice of genres for its publications. The most important of them was the genre of historical materials, i.e. re--publication of historical documents. Materials never implied publishing raw documents, but rather required their selection, editing, and annotation. In this respect, historical materials were very much like physical materials such as fabric or bricks, which were already a product of the manufacturing, but not an off-the-shelf item – a dress or a building. Historical materials were some sort of semi-finished historical research, intermediates for the "future historian".

Istprofs were not pioneers in publishing historical materials; indeed this genre had a rich history in Russian literature long before 1917. Ideas regarding the necessity of a mediator between primary sources and historians began developing in Russia in the first half of the 19th century with the emergence of archeography – an auxiliary historical discipline that elaborated rules on the publishing of historical documents. The institutionalization of this discipline was associated with the initiation of the Archeographical Commission attached to the Ministry of National Education in 1834; this commission aimed to search, accumulate and publish "antiquities" – documents of the Medieval and the Early Modern history of Russia. The commission continued its activities after

[51] GARF, f. 6935, op. 1, d. 49, l. 24.

the revolution of 1917 and the discipline continued to evolve by using newly uncovered archival documents from the 19th–20th centuries in a new institutional context: due to a decree of the Council of People's Commissars in 1918, the State archival fund was established that was to unite all prerevolutionary archives into a single system.

At the First Congress of Archivists that took place in Moscow on March 18, 1925, Sigizmund Valk, a well-known archeographer from Leningrad, gave a talk about the specificity of historical revolutionary documents and the modalities of their publication. He said that in publishing materials one must, firstly, aim as closely as possible for the authentic reproduction of the original, and, secondly, undertake editorial revision according to "scientific standards" to enable the reader to understand the correct meaning of the document. Valk emphasized that "photographically precise" reprints of the original were not an appropriate solution, because they would only serve the first purpose. Documents bore many mistakes, discrepancies and features obscure to the modern reader. Moreover, there might exist several manuscripts and several editions of the original, which made the question of authenticity even more complex. Therefore, the publication of any document had to go through a juxtaposition of editions and a procedure of emendation – the correction of discrepancies of the text. However, the procedure of emendation had to be distinctively limited: an archeographer's competence embraced nothing but the formal aspects of the document, such as transliteration from the old, prerevolutionary spelling to the new, corrections of misprints, words agreement and so on.

This contradiction between authenticity and the readability of published documents raised heated discussions among the participants of the congress. Valk himself demonstrated the complexity of the issue through Lenin's manuscripts. Even before the reforms of Russian orthography in 1918, Lenin wrote without the character Ъ – a "hard sign" that was normally written at the end of a word when following a non-palatal consonant, even though it had no effect on pronunciation. If the transliteration from the old spelling to the new one was set as the common rule for publishing all prerevolutionary materials, readers would not be able to catch a glimpse of this remarkable feature of Lenin's style. Mikhail Pokrovskii, who also participated in the congress of archival workers, argued that a potential reader of materials would not always be interested in the style of the author of the document. He

provided a counter-example: bills released by the 18th century rebel peasant army of Emel'ian Pugachev. They also bore a particular "style", yet it was nothing but the illiteracy of the humble scribe, which might not be interesting in itself. In that case, Pokrovskii argued, the content of document was much more important than its style.[52]

This discussion led participants of the congress to an important idea, namely that the modalities of material publication depended on the aims and interests of the potential audience. Researchers might use the same document to answer different questions: whilst one would look for traces of the development of the author's personality and ideas – which would require the publication of earlier and later drafts – the other would use the same document to write the history of social movements and the only relevant version of the document for them would be the one that was promulgated and had an impact on social relations. After the discussion, the participants of the congress carried the resolution to elaborate unified and universal rules for the publication of documents that would be a compromise between agendas of different researchers. However, these rules only appeared ten years later – in 1935[53] – and were severely criticized by Sigizmund Valk.[54] Professional archivists and archeographers could not compromise on a neutral way of publishing documents. Through publication they were converted into materials, which necessarily implied an image of the future research product.

Iurii Milonov and M. N. Zayats, members of the central Istprof, also participated in the First Congress of the Archival Workers in 1925 and attended the panel with Valk's presentation on publishing of archival documents. However, they did not have a say in this discussion. For them, the impossibility of publishing materials that were neutral and appropriate for any reader was not a problem. This lack of concern might be explained by the particular institutionality of Istprof. Being incorporated into a non-academic structure, it had particular and articulated aims. The "future historian" mentioned in the texts of Istprof was much more unambiguous than the abstract "researchers" whose agendas the participants of the archival congress of 1925 tried to guess.

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[52] Valk 1926.

[53] Sergeev 1935.

[54] The review was written right after the publishing of the rules, but was published only in 1991. Valk 1991.

In the introduction to the first collection of their *Materials for the History of the Professional Movement* (1924), Istprof leaders wrote that as a result of their work there would be

> the emergence of a number of scientific-literary works and in particular – a whole history of the professional movement in Russia.[55]

The "future historian" was to write the concrete revolutionary history of the professional movement and trade unions, and Istprof had to provide exhaustive materials for it. This idea about the possibility of an exhaustive narrative stemmed from the particular institutionality of Istprof. Trade unions had a complex, but certain structure that preset the matrix for historical narratives. The general history of the professional movement narrative consisted of histories of particular industrial trade unions (of railwaymen, textilemen, metalworkers etc.) and of histories of particular spatial trade union organizations (republican, governorate, and municipal councils). Although this led to tensions between spatial and industrial scales in the narrative, as I described above, the very presence of the institutional matrix meant that the exhaustive narrative could be written – it required writing the history of each particular trade union on each particular territory.

However, the institutional structure of trade unions preset the matrix only for the synchronic dimension of the narrative. The diachronic scale of the trade unions history had no such univocal segmentation of the research topic. The main problem lay in the origins of the Russian trade unions, which appeared well-developed – in the words of trade unionist Reznikov – as a *deus ex machina*[56] riding on the wave of the revolutionary movements of the 1905. They could not have just arisen from nowhere, and Istprof had to find the transitional forms that preceded the trade unions.

With that problem in mind, the Istprof of the VTsSPS organized special discussions about the origins of the Russian professional movement on February 14 and 28, 1924. Vasilii Iarotskii, a keynote speaker of the discussion, offered to consider the mutual benefit societies that

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[55] [N.N.2] 1924a, p. 5.
[56] [N.N.3] 1924b, p. 18.

had legally existed from the middle of the 19th century as the origin of trade unionism in Russia. He argued that although these societies had had no revolutionary potential, they allowed workers to realize their unity, they converted class-in-itself into class-for-itself.[57] Most of the participants of the discussions did not agree with Iarotskii's account. Among other objections that were articulated, R. Iakub suggested that the origin of trade unionism might be found in the economic struggle of workers: they usually organized special temporary committees during strikes to support each other.[58] For Iakub, trade unions were a permanent and well-developed form of strike committees. David Riazanov, an eminent Bolshevik intellectual and leader of the Marx-Engels Institute, claimed that trade unions developed from the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and from its main organization – the Social-Democratic Party.[59] Several more opinions were expressed, but members of the discussions did not come to an agreement.

It is important to highlight that this discussion did not raise questions about the *causes* for the rise of trade unionism in Russia – this was to be done by the "future historian". Istprof members were simply trying to reduce the origins of the Russian trade unionism to a particular organizational form, be it the legal mutual benefit societies, the strike committees, or the Social-Democratic Party. Istprof members tried to avoid the mistake that Marc Bloch twenty years later would call "the idol of origins": historians' tendency to confuse two different categories – causes and beginnings. They explained phenomena with their beginnings instead of paying attention to actual causes that lay both in the past and in the present.[60] Istprof members, on the other hand, discussed only the beginnings of the trade unions – preexisting organizational forms without raising the question of the causes of this phenomenon.

Istprof members' idea that the subject of their research had an exhaustible nature and that the history of the professional movement consisted of a countable number of elements had an important implication: this attitude eliminated any hierarchy in the narrative. If the

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[57] Chekin (Iarotskii) 1924.

[58] Iakub evolved his response to Iarotskii's account into a long article. See: Iakub 1924.

[59] [N.N.3] 1924b, pp. 23–27.

[60] Bloch 1992 (1941), pp. 24–27.

aim was to describe *all* the events of the professional movement, there was no need to divide them into important and secondary ones, because eventually they all were to be described. Particular events, facts, and characters had to be exposed, not located on the coordinate system. For example, in the collection of materials published by the Istprof of the Nizhny Novgorod Council of the trade unions, Alexander Belozerov wrote about professional movement in the region in 1905–1910. Seeking to write an exhaustive narrative, Belozerov described all the professional organizations he had information about. One of these organizations – the Union of Pharmacists – was far from being a proletarian and revolutionary. Although this union was founded earlier than most of other organizations, it did not play any role in the professional movement of the region remaining nothing but a local and separate community. In spite of this, Belozerov wrote: "Let us be objective and tell all that we have in our materials about this organization".[61] Pharmacists were included in the history of the professional movement in Nizhny Novgorod only in order to make it exhaustive.

6. Conclusion

The Istprofs' "future historian" was not entirely an imagined figure. One of the crucial goals of Bolshevik cultural policies in the 1920s was a training of a generation to succeed the party leadership as well as "red specialists" who would combine loyalty to the regime with high qualifications.[62] The recent graduates of Sverdlov Communist University, the Communist Academy, and the Institute of Red Professors played a pivotal role in Stalin's Great Break campaigns at the turn of the 1930s, yet many of them were later purged amid the Great Terror of 1936–1938.[63]

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[61] Belozerov, p. 217.

[62] See: David-Fox 1997.

[63] For instance, Mikhail Pokrovskii's students from the Institute of Red Professors helped their professor to pave the way for the infamous "Academic affair" of 1929–1930 which resulted in widespread repressions against the old academic establishment. Such members of Pokrovskii's school as Grigorii Zaidel', Semen Tomsinskii, and Grigorii Fridliand, however, were also purged and sentenced to death in 1937–1938. See: Perchenok 1995.

The "future historians" eventually emerged, but instead of using the materials carefully prepared by Istprofs, they dismissed them out of hand. The dissolution of Istprofs in 1930 was followed by a special conference organized at the Communist Academy, which inherited the abundant archives of the union historical commissions and employed a share of Istprofs' staff. The keynote address was delivered by Efim Mil'shtein, a former worker-typesetter who joined the Bolshevik party in 1920, graduated from Moscow State University in 1926, and entered the PhD program in history at the elite Institute of Red Professors in 1929.[64] In his speech, Mil'shtein criticized the Iurii Milonov's idea that definitive arguments could be made only about the events of the distant past because authors who wrote about recent history could not help but replace the "real meaning" of facts with their own "desirable interpretations." For Mil'shtein, the Istprofs' inductivism was a symptom of methodological eclecticism and a lack of party-mindedness.[65] As he put it,

> This led to the tenet of the veracity of facts communicated by […] political enemies of the Soviet power. In thrall to bourgeois historical methodology, comrade Milonov forgot that those facts, gleaned in a particular manner, were the *ideology* hostile to the proletariat.[66]

A doctoral student with Mikhail Pokrovskii at the Institute of Red Professors, Mil'shtein echoed here his professor's idea that there were no "pure" facts because they were always reflected through ideological lenses.

The dissolution of Istprofs was doubtless a part of the wider political campaigns in Stalin's Great Break and in the struggle against the "right opposition" in particular. Yet this external political context did not negate the intellectual meaning of the methodological and theoretical

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[64] Dolgova 2018, p. 913.

[65] Vladimir Lenin's concept of *partiinost'*, which is usually translated as partyness or party-mindedness, implied that there was no such thing as neutral social theory. As class conflict was the backbone of social life, historical materialists must be able to recognize this conflict and openly adopt the standpoint of a particular social group. By the end of the 1920s, this concept had been diluted, and in the Stalinist Soviet Union *partiinost'* meant that scientific knowledge was irrelevant if it did not serve the regime's objectives. See: Barber 1979; Joravsky 2013, pp. 24–44.

[66] [N.N.5] 1932, p. 10.

discussions among trade unionists and Bolsheviks, historians and archeographers, or amateurs and professionals.

By moving away from the dominant paradigm of political pragmatics through which the Soviet official history-writing is routinely perceived and narrated, we can better appreciate the complicated contexts of this topic. In this paper, I aspired to demonstrate how the scientificity of the Soviet regime shaped the intellectual and institutional frameworks of the Soviet history-writing in the 1920s. Similar to other social and natural sciences, history moved beyond the borders of academy at that period, but this process was institutionalized in the form of citizen science rather than applied research. Against the background of the abortive experience of the engaging with the professional historians, trade unionists themselves utilized scientific methods to write their history. Funded by and formally subordinated to the Petrograd Council of Trade Unions, the Commission on the History of Labor in Russia consisted of well-known and experienced professional scholars who addressed their work to the academic community and promised nothing but obscure "guiding threads for the future" to policymakers. The Istprofs, on the other hand, were tightly bound to trade union organizations, not only providing them with historical narratives, but also accomplishing routine functions. Nevertheless, Istprofs remained connected with the scientific sphere too, but in quite a different manner: its members were not consummate historians, but they used methods and procedures that they considered to be scientific.

The basic tenet of the scientificity of the Istprofs did not coincide with the Soviet historiographical mainstream of the 1920s, i.e. Pokrovskii's claims that it was not possible to avoid the ideological lens in the historical research. Iurii Milonov and his colleagues, on the contrary, clearly differentiated the process of accumulation of "pure facts" and their analysis and evaluation. Because the Marxist canon was still flexible in the 1920s, the Istprofs' inductive form of scientificity was also considered as Marxist and legitimate up until 1930.

The juxtaposition of the Istprofs' publishing strategies with practices of archeography, an auxiliary discipline that worked on the theory of historical documents publication, shows how the incorporation of Istprof into a non-academic structure influenced the narrative of professional movement. Archeographers in the middle of the 1920s tried to find a way to publish documents appropriate for *any* researcher, but did not succeed.

Istprof members were free from this problem, because they prepared materials for the concrete narrative: the institutional history of trade unions.

Claiming the scientificity of Istprof, I do not mean that it was "good" as opposed to "bad" Party history-writing. Neither have I sought to evaluate a distance between Istprof and "real" historical science. My primary task in this paper has been to show that Soviet official history-writing was far from being a mere tool of political struggle, but was embodied into particular ideological, institutional and intellectual traditions, which framed the new authorities' way of constructing the historical narrative. They could not just tell an invented story about themselves, but they had to tell it in a specific – scientific – way to prove its relevance and legitimacy.

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