The 1937 year: Fate and tragedy of the kazakh intelligentsia

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Abstract

In this article, the fate and tragedy of the Kazakh intelligentsia in 1937 is studied. The year of 1937 is the year of the most massive Stalinist repression in the Soviet Union. KAZAKH SOVIET SOCIALIST REPUBLIC (KAZ SSR) as a part of the Soviet Union was affected by Stalinist repression. In the years of Stalinist repression, several thousands of Kazakh educated people have been repressed. Among them, there have been well-known figures of the KAZ SSR, and they were intellectuals that participated in forming up of the 1917 revolution. Repressive totalitarian state destroyed the foundation of the Kazakh intelligentsia: Bukeyhanov, Baytursinov, Dulatov, Zhumabayev, Seifullin and others. During the year of 1937, betrayal, fear and charges against each other have been widespread. The charges against each other, the stigmas such as "nationalist", "bourgeois elements", "defender of the interests of the feudal lords", were common, especially among the intelligentsia. The authors in this article reveal the essence of repression, powerless and defenseless position of Kazakh intelligentsia.

Keywords: repression; the Kazakh intelligentsia; nationalist; bourgeois element; class approach; the Soviet Union; Kazakh Soviet Social Republic(KAZ SSR).

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1. Introduction

The moral and spiritual crisis of creativity of the Kazakh intellectuals has been notable in 1937, the year of repression. In 1937, repression and accusation of the well-known Kazakh intellectuals strengthened and reached its peak. Creative works of the Kazakh intelligentsia and their opinions in these works were considered as a support of Nazism and advocate of ideas against the Soviet power. Correspondence between Stalin and a local authority over sentencing has already surfaced from the archives in accordance with the revised version of the Sheila Fitzpatrick’s work “Stalin’s Peasants”. While it was not the purpose of the article, the role of the central authority of the Soviet Union in the rural show trials was explored, the starting point of author’s argument was that the trials were “the product of central authority rather than initiative of local authority” (Fitzpatrick, 2002). 1937 was the year of the beginning of charges against members of Alashorda, who already left the history scene even those who previously were supported by local authority and people who watched over the members of Alashorda were accused of complicity and agency. Firstly, the Soviet government doubted opinions in the works of writers; they were accused of having left the party and Soviet society. Thus, critics have contributed to finding the enemies of the people. Secondly, it has been demanded that they adhered and earned their bonuses. The people in this company were accused of exposing the enemies of society, and the higher ranks were also charged.

In 1937 “the issue of members Alashorda” was revealed. The publication of Zhurgenov’s essay Cleanse our Cultural Maidan from the Nazis who was the Commissar of Education of the Kazakh SSR, member of the Bureau of the Regional Party of Kazakhstan, became a factor in the emergence of opinion that there are still Nazis and their followers. Thus, it intensified repression against people with the stigma “Nazis”. A week later Zhamankulov’s essay Let’s Increase the Pressure was published, which created problems not only in literary sphere, but also exacerbated and worsened the political and ideological situation inside of the Soviet state. Zhamankulov called members of Alashorda as the “enemy of Soviet people”. Besides that, Zhamankulov said that they still had agents and supporters. This stigma -“enemy of Soviet people” became a new cause of searching and arresting supporters of Alashorda. Direction and steps of Regional Party of Kazakhstan added tempos.

Paces were increased after the publication of essay Let’s Destroy Nazi-Fascist Literature in Their Roots. In fact, this essay aimed at criticizing the members of Alashorda by permanent rules, but they actually made the main characters of Nazis “Nazis-fascists” Saken, Iliyas and Beimbet guilty.

Maybe they knew that the days of Saken, Iliyas and Beimbet had passed, so they published many essays directed against three of them. Published at the time in the publications “The mistakes and non-quality in imaginative literature”, “Against disease among Kazakh writers” “There are mistakes in works of writers, as they don’t know the life of workers and they can’t exit from old themes, and they praise Trotsky who is the enemy of Soviet people” those claims were identified as their drawbacks (Zhamankulov, 1937). Saken’s poem Kara Burkit (Black Eagle) was addressed to Arystan Dauituly – Lev Davidovich Trotsky (Literature Arena, 1937).and it was published in 1923, and central authority used it as a good target for criticizing, blaming Saken for many years over and over again. The poem of Saken addressed to Trotsky, who was sent abroad from the country, was as an old injury. Critics of Saken did not let him forget about his poem about Trotsky and always reminded him about it. It hurt him over again and again.

The political and social situation of the Soviet Union at that time forced literature to enter into a spiritual crisis. Distrust between writers plagued the literature world of Kaz SSR, and it went further, doubting even own works as advocates against Soviet power. They walked with a fear “when and how they would be arrested”. This fear and anxiety decreased their intellectual activity. They refrained from talking about politics. It led to carelessness in their intellectual works. Their works were limited with performing orders given by the party and the central authority. However this did not remain under the watchful eye of critics.
Saken Seifullin characterized this period of life in such words: “At this period I refrained from talking about politics. I even avoided meeting with my friends. I wanted to spend my time only dealing with literature. However, nothing good happened because of that. Such a lifestyle eventually brought me to a point where I found myself not involved in any ongoing issues. This led to a decline and deterioration. Enemies of Soviet State would mock my state by saying “It serves you right! These thoughts pulled me down, enemies’ words led to my deterioration. Parts of my several literature works which were against party line were the product of such a time and such a state”.

Blaming writers and poets by finding small mistakes in their works turned into a political campaign.

It was announced several times in “Socialist Kazakhstan” in May 1937 that Seifullin did not participate in the meeting about removal of shortcomings in the writers’ works conducted on April 5-7. Afterwards, he was blamed for lack of involvement.

Performance and participation in the report of party of the Writers’ Union gave rise to even greater difficulties to Saken, Iliyas, and Beimbet. By participating in this meeting, Saken, Iliyas and Beimbet shared their opinions about the mistakes in their works as well as discussed the mistakes made by critics. Going through much criticism, Saken was acquitted: It was told that Saken devoted the verse to Trotsky called “To bandit”. At this time, he wasn’t a thug; Trotsky was the member of the politburo. Saken said: “If he is a bandit, would I begin to write?” Critics did not take this moment into account. Besides that, there was a discussion about his work "Dombyra". "To wash away my guilt, I wrote "Dombyra" to Trotsky in 1924. In 1928, recognizing that was a mistake, I wrote an article about it in the magazine. It was said in 1932 in KAZPI. It was also said in Dzhamanukolov's report." Saken said: “In this year, I complained regarding of it on elections of party. I also wrote a statement about it to Regional committee in winter days. Therefore, critics had to consider this date”. “Therefore, is it necessary to criticize over and over again?” - Saken said bitterly. The voice of soul was reflected at Seyfullin’s report for unfair criticism. But, critics looking for trick in his words in Saken’s report claimed that “companion Saken still didn't notice the mistakes”.

Maybe by feeling that their situation could become even worse, Iliyas and Beimbet recognized their mistakes. Beimbet was compelled to say this: "I admit that I had big mistakes in my works.... I will look for all measures in their correction". The meeting adopted the resolution on three individual articles, and it was told that from now on, if they repeat such mistakes that the most drastic measures will be taken in the prevention. The resolution on the direction of withdrawal and their distribution (Iliyas’s, Beimbet’s, Saken’s) harmful books was in the article.

Some articles were published in June and in July accusing Saken. By using "Hlestakov's literature method", Saken portrayed himself as "the fighter in a way of revolution". His friends-Ryskulov, Nurmakov, Saduakassov, Asylbekov who have stigma such as "Enemies of the people", Saken showed their positive side in his articles. Saken was accused with the claim that in a way of praising himself and enemies of Soviet people, he wrote "counterrevolutionary works" such as "Tar Jol, taygak keshu ", " Dombra ", etc (Literature Arena, 1937). It was the beginning of charge in open form that Saken wrote “counterrevolutionary works”. Besides that, he was also charged for being "Nazist-fascist".

In addition, Saken who was under much criticism was accused of "slowing down his works and for not writing anything worthwhile in the last year, as well as for being asocial". Despite of being criticized and having the stigma “enemy of the people”; as well as the charging against each other, between Kazakh writers for political-ideological views was rising in 1937 year, Saken did not write anything against about the writers who have the stigma “enemy of the people”. It was not left without attention.

Saken was being charged with words that: "Instead of struggling with enemies of the people, Saken shows tolerance towards their actions. Currently, when the Kazakh nationalism became the main threat of Soviet authority, former biases, opponents of Communist party were going to one
direction and becoming Nazi-fascist, Saken’s tolerance and inaction to them were considered as not helping to the party - not execution of his party debt” (Abdikadyrov, 1937).

At this time, young Kazakh writers and poets, who have not formed their viewpoint about politics and society yet, as well as prominent figures of the Kazakh literature showed weakness and started to accuse each other on the ground of Nazism. Since 1928, the dispute between Mukanov and Zhansugurov, which rose from peer review of each other’s articles, escalated even more in 1937. If we go back in time, in 1928, Sabit Mukanov who was the editor-in-chief of the Kazakh edition wrote criticism to the work of Zhansugurov called Betashar with the words that "Interests of class are not obvious". Being unsatisfied with the criticism Iliyas wrote the response paper called My Face is not Such as you Think (Zhansugurov, 1928). Afterwards, they shared criticism towards each other’s articles, and accused each other on the ground of Nazism.

However, perhaps, seeing where the criticism to each other leads, Zhansugirov showed intention of reconciliation with Sabit through writing the article We will Strengthen Bolshevist Criticism against an Inaccuracy in Literature. In the article, "Iliyas recognized that in his verses, there are mistakes of seeking of wealth, hopelessness, pessimism by not seeing the good of the life”. Despite of Sabit’s excessive criticism of his works, Iliyas recognized that in some places, Sabit was right in criticism. Thus, Iliyas made a step towards mutual understanding. When it seemed that there is friendliness in their relations, in 1937 Mukanov started again criticism of Iliyas. Not limiting himself in criticizing Iliyas’s works, Sabit switched to personal attacks. Sabit in his article called "After the Historical Resolution” (Zhamankulov, 1937), accused the book of Suyinbay on the ground of Nazism, which was published under the Zhansugurov’s edition in 1935. Sabit blamed Iliyas with the claim that “This book instigates to the conflict between Kazakh and Kyrgyz”, as well as going personal to Iliyas by accusing him in leaving his wife and 2 children in the meetings of writers. Besides that, Sabit mentioned in the meeting that “Iliyas did not only leave wife and 2 children, he also did not even recognize personal debt of paying lawful money to wife in upbringing of children” (Kazakh literature, 1937). Thus, Sabit accused and interfered on the Iliyas’s family issues. In addition, S. Mukanov noted that Iliyas in his verse devoted to Kirov’s death made a political mistake. Sabit criticized Iliyas with the words that “It is not just such a small mistake, but a big mistake” and “Iliyas did not make any effort to correct it” (Leninist youth, 1937).

Zhansugurov's charge was political in nature and search of hostility among his compositions was strengthened in such extent, so that discussion of his compositions took a distorted form. Particularly, Karizhan Daukenov was very interested in finding faults among Zhansugurov’s digest of works. Karizhan said: "By including story named Mergen and Boken (Sniper and Antelope) in the digest of his works, Zhansugurov shows the negative sides of Soviet authority to Kazakh workers, and portrays Soviet authority as a monster". Zhansugurov was under a significant impact of Kazakh Nazis. Therefore, he portrayed Kazakh workers as "Antelope", and Soviet authority as "Sniper". Undoubtedly, Zhansugurov makes a counter revolutionary work, and generated hatred towards Soviet authority among Kazakh workers, and it is basically due to the influence of Alashorda.

In addition, Karizhan wrote: "This book will not bring any benefits to our pupils and even, it will raise counter revolutionary ideas in the minds of pupils". Besides that, Karizhan wrote: "Zhansugurov collection of works can be used as a counterrevolutionary work " (Daukenov, 1937). Karizhan’s article showed that, by promoting the idea of Alashorda –independent Kazakh state and generating hatred towards the Soviet authority among workers, Zhansugurov was making rebellious work against Soviet Union, thus Karizhan exposed Zhansugurov as not only an unreliable person, but also indicated him as “the enemy of the people”. 1937 was the year of political accusations and mass repressions. Iliyas was also part of these repressions, and in the 13th and 14th June, Soviet authority arrested him.

After this case, Kazakh young writers started to write more and more articles in the press, accusing famous Kazakh writers in having counter revolutionary ideas in their works, and having the connection with Alashorda. The young writer Kalkaman Abdikadyrov wrote about Auezov that: "Five
years have passed since Mukhtar became the member of the Soviet writers. Although, he was given so much assistance in writing his works, Mukhtar only wrote 3-4 quite good works. Besides that, he publishes the digest of harmful works for Soviet Union, which was written in early period of Mukhtar, having the Nationalist, Alashorda ideas in the mind. He also did not tell anything about it. Even though, his mask of being fascist agent of past Alashorda revealed, Mukhtar still silent about affairs, secrets of Alashorda and its members, his position of being silent is suspicious. In my opinion, Mukhtar knows most of the Alashorda secrets. He had to take part in the disclosure of their secrets. But, Mukhtar did not do it.” Thus, Abdikadyrov accused Auezov for knowing the secrets of Alashorda, and keeping silence in disclosure of them (Kazakh literature, 1937).

After a while, this article was republished from Kazakh Literature newspaper editorial office. It was called "Why the Auyezov's word and case aren't the same?". "Approximately five years have passed since Auezov became the Soviet writer but we haven’t seen any worthy work of Auyezov, written in the true Soviet direction. Time goes, but Mukhtar is still repeating promise made in 1932: "Test me, I am the person who broke all ties with ideas of nationalism and capitalism". Since 1932, among the Auezov’s works, Night Tune was an attempt to write in Soviet style. But, Auezov’s plays called Apple Garden, Brave Eaglet was a slander to the Soviet youth. Auezov implicitly accused the Soviet youth in these plays as well as attempted to oppose Soviet authority. It is masking of old commitment to the ideology of the Bay (rich Kazakh people) and nationalism with Soviet work. It can be clearly seen that Auezov is mistaken not only in some works, in all his works has been shown accusations of the Soviet youth and society (Kazakh literature, 1937). In this article, Kalkaman wrote, “it is a sign of that M. Auezov did not change his political views about Kazakh nationalism, Alashorda, he is as Baitursynov, Dulatov, Aimaikut thinking about nationalism and Alashorda”.

Mukanov says that Seyfullin "was mistaken and failed", Mailin and Donentayev in initial years of revolution were mistaken, praising the enemy of the people of alash-orda, "Mailin’s mistake was deeper than Seyfullin’s mistake", and "Sabit Donentayev was mistaken more than Mailin" and all of them came to the Soviet literature. In the conclusion Mukanov says that "The fault of the Mukhtar Auyezov before the Soviet history is heavier than of these writers. If to believe his letter, published in 1932, it is possible to understand that it was against a way of Marxism-Leninism and did everything to resist to its prosperity" (Socialist Kazakhstan. 1937).

“Mukhtar Ayezov’s guilt for Soviet history is much heavier. If we refer to his letter that was printed in press in 1932, up until this year he was considered as a person who was consciously opposing Marxist-Leninist perspective and trying to hinder its proliferation”, was the opinion(Kakishev, 2007).

Articles full of critique and accusations were being published with a hectic pace. By saying “the press is still not devoid of malicious elements” Abilkhan Dildayev named and pointed the malicious ones (Abilev, 1937). He also criticized Mukhtar Ayezov by saying “In printing his erroneous collection of stories Under the Shadow of Obsolete Mukhtar made a huge mistake. Mukhtar should correct his mistake with his actions” (Kozhakeev, 1999).

Jusipbekov was also insightful. Saying “Until lately, taking advantage of naivety and infantilism of the Writers’ Organization and Fiction Publishing office, enemies of people, Sultanbekov and Zhumabaev were involved in translating fiction. Ualiakhmetov, Konuratbayev, and Aisarin were once even the heads of Writers’ Organization. Bekov and Gataulin were related to literature. The malignancies of these evil men are considerable. That is why our major obligation is to mercilessly fight against the counterrevolutionary Kazakh nationalism and its defenders”. Jusipbekov participated in incrimination of nationalists(Kakishev, 1994).

Zhumagali Sayin was even worse either because he decided to be active due to his fear of the atrocities of his age or due to his own personal reasons. His words “ Enemies of the people, cursed dogs of fascism, did not only contaminate the economic and cultural constructions, but they also used their duplicity for the sake of propagation” Their puppets, Togzhanov and Zhashugirov until today
were part of battlefield of fiction” were used by him to openly declare Togzhanov and Zhansugirov “enemies of the people” (Kazakh literature, 1937).

During the second part of 30’s even outgoing individuals that left an indelible mark on Kazakh literature were experiencing the spiritual and mental crisis. If earlier they criticized each other for point of view on class, political, and ideological basis, now they openly blamed and accused each other even being aware of innocence. Frankly speaking, every one of them tried to save their own skin. Such state induced within the population a rise of bad qualities, unscrupulousness, evasiveness, adulation, and ruthlessness. Repressions held in 1937 renewed old conflicts. Former sectarian divisions, localism, tribalism and struggles for power moved to a different level. Now people were interested in making a political indictment and chasing their colleagues. They supported repressions and contributed their voice for punitive measures through the press. Those who accused other today were being accused tomorrow. They had a fear of being caught. People were ruled by a bondage psychology which stated "no matter others, I, myself should survive": "Particularly, accusers... were in a state of dread". They were afraid of being overthrown from their armchairs because of “lack of vigilance”. They did everything for the sake of reputation; offended and made people weep, sent them to exile and killed them. By incriminating others they hoped to be seen as diligent people and tried not to be caught or lose their reputations. So they sought only their personal well-being.

Prosecution and punishment made the representatives of intelligentsia completely fall into intimidation. Even though aware of abuses they remained silent. They were afraid to vindicate each other and to raise their voices for opposing (Zhasushy, 1991).

Academician and historian Suleimenov words: “It is true that the state of 30’s-50’s repressions can still be felt today. Irrational and unfair pursuance made the representatives of our intelligentsia so startled that fear itself became a legacy which is being conveyed from one generation to the other” seem to be not only a way of offsetting history but also the undisputed truth (Socialist Kazakhhsitan. 1988). Even for Musrepov “20’s-30’s were not easy... he thought that if not today then tomorrow, if not tomorrow the day after tomorrow he will be banished”. Therefore, he packed his suitcase and included one-two pack of clean clothes, a towel, stockings, razors, a soap, a comb and other needed objects, placed it on the entrance of the room and stared at door. He forsook his writings that, in the case of being caught, could be considered as suspicious by the investigators and wrote only those of his thoughts that were profitable. Interestingly, he wrote some of his opinions and "concessions" in Russian in order to avoid potential conflicts and ambiguities in translation. For instance, on the third page of Kiz Zhibek drama, there are notes written in his handwriting: “ I ask all of you, men and women, already present ones and those to be born, if you happen to get hold of this silly thing, do not read anything beyond this page. It was written disgustingly, stupidly, ineptly and even unconscionably. The fear of being caught either today or tomorrow was experienced not only by Musrepov but by all the members of the intelligentsia (Myrza Ali Kadyr, 2002).

In fact, during the rising pace of punishing measures, the Kazakh intelligentsia, especially those of them who were already known and accused of their works were constantly remaining in a state of terror. The main driving force behind people’s lives was alternatives for survival. Also, people possessed some uncertainties such as may be the person is actually the enemy of people since the party and People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs does not make any mistakes. Therefore some members of the intelligentsia were involved in blaming followers of Trotsky’s beliefs.

A court hearing that took place between 23-30th of January 1937 based on case “Anti-Soviet center of Trotsky’s beliefs”, sentenced Pyatakov, Sokolnikov, and Radek to the death penalty. At that situation, Zhansugirov supported Pyatakov’s death penalty by saying:

"Good job, the court of my nation, you did well!"

"You sedated the furious population by exercising your authority."
Especially, the death of Pyatakov was good, as he tried to shoot Stalin, the favorite of our nation. And right after that, Zhansugirov himself was captivated and accused of nationalist-fascist beliefs (Zhansugurov, 1937).

During the panics of 1937 and when the enemies of people were being brought under the jurisdiction, numerous supportive articles and poems were being published. The representatives of intelligentsia supported and perceived repressions as a part of party policy. In his work “Revengeful rage” Zhabayev called Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Kamenev “dogs, scoundrels, and wolves” and, moreover, ended the poem by saying that they should be “shot dead” and “Glory for Stalinist days!”. Stalinist People’s Commissariat devoted a poem for Ezhov, who was involved in punishing enemies of people and who later became a victim of repressions:

- Flourishing city and steppe,
- Hollows and ledges covered with a coat made of gold.
- Everybody likes you, Mr. Ezhov,
- Elderly ones and children.

Apart from being a bitter truth of totalitarian regime, repressions were a sorrowful stage of history that made the Kazakh intelligentsia experience the testing of destiny. Certainly, we are not trying to either justify or banish the members of intelligentsia according to 1937 atrocities. However, one cannot return the history. Our role is to balance the history and learn from its experience. Also, those who at least have limited knowledge of situation during 1930’s ask themselves “Why did it take place?”.

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