MUSTAFA SHOKAY

THE FIRST POLITICAL EMIGRANT OF CENTRAL ASIA

The name of Mustafa Shokay is well known in Russia, as well as in his homeland of Kazakhstan, as the leader of the proclaimed but short-lived Turkestan (Kokand) autonomy (November 1917 - February 1918), which had been under Russian rule since 1864.

An educated native of the aristocratic Kazakh class, following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 he stubbornly refused to accept the Soviet system of government. Following the dissolution of the autonomy after just three months, from 1921 to 1941 he was to live in exile in France.

During this period in exile he was to face allegations of collaboration with the Third Reich during the 1930s and early 1940s.

Subsequently, research by historians conducted in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have since discredited such allegations, and the monuments erected to him in Kazakhstan and France are now considered to be justified by the high assessment of the life and work of this worthy man.

Born on December 25, 1890 in the village of Aulie-Tarangyl on the Syr-Darya River - on the land of the present Kyzylorda region of the Republic of Kazakhstan - into a noble family of enlightened aristocrats, he received his primary education in a Russian school. At the age of 12, the young Mustafa continued his studies at the Tashkent gymnasium, from which he graduated with a gold medal, and in 1910 entered the law faculty of the Imperial St. Petersburg University.

After receiving his degree, he worked for two years as a secretary of the Muslim faction of the State Duma - the Russian Parliament.

The most notable success of the young politician was his participation in the work of the State Duma Commission in Tashkent, as a result of which the head of the commission, Alexander Kerensky (the future head of the Provisional Government), prepared a report that shocked tsarist Russia on the situation of
the population of Turkestan and the reasons for people’s discontent. The young lawyer Mustafa Shokay had contributed to this work.

He settled in Kokand, where the Turkestan autonomy had been created on November 27, 1917, and became the first head of the department of foreign affairs before becoming the second head of state. In this position he refused to countenance the entry of Turkestan autonomy into the Soviet Union, as a result of which a large Russian force of troops and artillery was dispatched to Tashkent. In the resulting Bolshevik suppression of autonomy, several thousand civilians were killed.

During his sojourn in France, his detractors embarked on a campaign to destroy his reputation.

In 1941, he was imprisoned by the Third Reich along with many other well known émigrés from Soviet space. During this period he was invited to raise a legion of fighters from Turkestan from amongst the ranks of Red Army prisoners of war. This he refused to do: “Seeing how representatives of the nation, who raised such geniuses as Goethe, Feuerbach, Bach, Beethoven, Schopenhauer, treat prisoners of war ... I cannot accept the offer to lead a Turkestan Legion, and refuse further cooperation. All the consequences of my decision, I realise.”

Shortly after this, he was hospitalised in Berlin, dying on December 27, 1941, two days after his 51st birthday.

The cause of his death was recorded as “blood poisoning on the background of an emerging epidemic of typhus.” This could possibly have been contracted in a prison camp, although having previously suffered from typhus his widow considered him immune. There remains speculation that he was poisoned.

It is a matter of historic record that the Third Reich attempted to recruit “legions” from the ranks of prisoners of war. A similar attempt was made to raise a similar group from British prisoners, but was abandoned after only three “volunteers” came forward.
In the early 2000s, the head of the special Commission for Rehabilitation of the KNB Department for the Kyzylorda Region, Colonel of the USSR KGB Amirkhan Bakirov, refuted speculation about Shokay’s alleged cooperation with the Third Reich in creating the Turkestan Legion.

On the pages of AiF-Kazakhstan on April 28, 2004, he noted: “In addition to almost all the materials in the open press about Mustafa Shokay, I had the opportunity to study a 40-volume criminal case in the archives of the KNB of the Republic of Kazakhstan, where he was accused of ‘treason and aiding fascists’. The accusation is based on the organisation of the Turkestan Legion. I believe that he was not the one who created the notorious Turkestan National Committee and the Turkestan Legion, and even less that he sent them to fight the Red Army. No matter what they say about him, Shokay had nothing to do with the Turkestan Legion and the Committee.”

MUSTAFA SHOKAY AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The life and work of Shokay, described by historians in the Soviet period, is essentially a large-scale commissioned falsification created by several “authors” according to all the rules of the genre: a well-known fact from the archives was taken as a basis, which was interpreted by a pile of tall tales and artfully composed lies.

But never in any of the archival documents did Shokay call for the defeat of the Soviet Union by the Third Reich. Educated in St. Petersburg, fluent in Russian and several European languages, Mustafa Shokay believed that the future of Kazakhstan was in alliance with the neighboring Russian state.

As established in recent years by historians of independent Kazakhstan who have studied the activities of Mustafa Shokay, in his opening speech on November 27, 1917 at the IV Extraordinary All-Muslim Congress in Kokand, where Turkestan autonomy was proclaimed, Mustafa Shokay stated: “It is not easy to build a full-blooded state on the move. There are no personnel or experience for this. And most importantly, there is no army to protect the future autonomy. No matter how weakened Russia is, it is much stronger than us. We must live in peace and friendship with Russia. Geography itself dictates this.”
As all subsequent years have shown, including after the collapse of the USSR, the union and friendship of Kazakhstan with Russia have remained and remain unshakable.

INSTEAD OF A CONCLUSION

In October 2020, a republican working group was established in Uzbekistan to study the life and circumstances of the persecution of victims of repression of the Soviet period and perpetuate their memory. The work of the commission lasted more than six months, and at the end of August 2021 it became known that the Supreme Court of Uzbekistan at an open meeting issued a decision according to which Ibragimbek Chakabayev, better known as the head of the Basmach movement in Central Asia, was rehabilitated. Prior to this decision of the Supreme Court of independent Uzbekistan, the name of the leader of the Basmachia was associated with enemies of the Soviet government.

“The fate of this man reflected the complex and contradictory history of the peoples of Central Asia. In Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, Ibrahimbek is for some a despicable bandit, a cruel and illiterate savage. Others pronounce his name with admiration, are proud of him as a national hero,” wrote historian Kamoludin Abdullayev.

The same process of rehabilitation of victims of political repression is now taking place in Kazakhstan. According to the conclusion of Kamoludin Abdullayev, the leader of the national liberation movement of Kazakhstan Mustafa Shokay can be called the first political emigrant of Central Asia. And there is no doubt that this is how he will be referred to in future history textbooks published in independent Kazakhstan.