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Russian Sektarian Communities in the Azov-Black Sea Region under Soviet Rule in the 1920s: The Case of the “New Israel” Sect

Andrey A. Aganov , Aleksandr N. Usenko

Don State Technical University, Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation

✉ Aganoff.a@yandex.ru

Abstract

Introduction. With the establishment of Soviet power, a number of restrictions on sectarian communities were lifted. Although the Bolsheviks did not share the sectarians' beliefs, the Soviet authorities nevertheless maintained a neutral stance toward them until the late 1920s, refraining from subjecting them to political repression. This led to an increase in the number of sects and their followers. The sectarian movement of the 1920s reached its peak in the Salsky District. It was here that V.S. Lubkov, the leader of the “New Israel” sect, established a collective farm in an attempt to adapt to the new political system.

Materials and Methods. Documents and materials held at the Rostov Region Center for Documentation of Contemporary History, which contain information on the structure and activities of the “New Israel” sect in the Salsky District of the North Caucasus Region, have been identified, analyzed, and utilized. The following research methods were applied: descriptive, historical-genetic, and historical-systemic.

Results. Upon returning with his followers from Uruguay to the USSR, Lubkov founded a settlement in the form of a cooperative association in the Salsky District. Despite the ideals of equality and brotherhood promoted by the sect, a regime of Lubkov's personal authority was established within the settlement, and he used this power for his own personal enrichment while leading a dissolute lifestyle. In addition, the sect's leadership violated the principle of social justice, which led to conflicts between privileged and rank-and-file members of the movement.

Discussion and Conclusion. The fact that V.S. Lubkov established a collective farm indicates that the sect members attempted to use communist rhetoric to adapt to the existing realities. Later, the Bolsheviks realized that Lubkov did not share communist ideology. The “New Israel” community was an example of a movement in which the leader and his inner circle abused their authority and used their power for personal enrichment, leading to inequality among the community members. It was precisely this circumstance that led to the movement's collapse.

Keywords: Azov-Black Sea Region, V.S. Lubkov, “New Israel,” North Caucasus Territory, sectarian movement, sectarians, sects

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Оригинальное теоретическое исследование

Сектантские общины Азово-Черноморья в условиях советской действительности 1920-х гг.: на примере секты «Новый Израиль»

А.А. Аганов , А.Н. Усенко

Донской государственный технический университет, г. Ростов-на-Дону, Российская Федерация

✉ Aganoff.a@yandex.ru

Аннотация

Введение. В результате установления советской власти с сектантских общин был снят ряд ограничений. Несмотря на то что большевики не разделяли учение сектантов, тем не менее до конца 1920-х гг. советская власть от-

носились к ним нейтрально, не подвергая их политическим репрессиям. Результатом этого стал рост количества сект и их сторонников. Большого размаха сектантское движение 1920-х гг. достигло на территории Сальского округа. Именно здесь лидер секты «Новый Израиль» В.С. Лубков создал коллективное хозяйство, пытаясь приспособиться к новому политическому строю.

Материалы и методы. Выявлены, проанализированы и использованы документы и материалы, хранящиеся в Центре документации новейшей истории Ростовской области и содержащие сведения об устройстве и деятельности секты «Новый Израиль» на территории Сальского округа Северо-Кавказского края. Применяются научные методы: описательный, историко-генетический и историко-системный.

Результаты исследования. Вернувшись со своими сторонниками из Уругвая в СССР, Лубков основал на территории Сальского округа поселение в форме кооперативного товарищества. Несмотря на пропагандируемые сектой идеалы равенства и братства, внутри поселения был установлен режим личной власти Лубкова, который использовал её для своего личного обогащения, ведя разгульный образ жизни. Помимо этого, руководство секты нарушило принцип социальной справедливости, что привело к конфликтам между привилегированными и рядовыми членами движения.

Обсуждение и заключение. Факт создания В.С. Лубковым коллективного хозяйства свидетельствует о том, что сектанты пытались использовать коммунистическую риторику, чтобы приспособиться к существующим реалиям. Позже большевики осознали, что Лубков не разделяет коммунистическую идеологию. Община «Новый Израиль» представляла собой пример движения, в котором лидер и его приближенные злоупотребляли своими полномочиями и использовали свою власть для личного обогащения, что приводило к неравенству среди членов общины. Именно это обстоятельство привело к краху движения.

Ключевые слова: Азово-Черноморский регион, В.С. Лубков, «Новый Израиль», Северо-Кавказский край, сектантское движение, сектанты, секты

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Introduction. The first decade after October 1917 became a sort of “golden age” for the sectarian communities operating in Soviet Russia (the USSR). For some time, representatives of the ruling Bolshevik regime treated the sectarians with a certain degree of sympathy and goodwill, viewing them as victims of the autocracy who had been subjected to constant persecution in the pre-Soviet era. Although the Bolsheviks did not welcome the sectarians’ religious teachings, until the late 1920s the Soviet government took virtually no large-scale or severe repressive measures against sectarian communities and their leaders. All of this contributed to the development of the sectarian movement in the RSFSR (USSR) and to the numerical growth of the sects and their members. One of the regions of the RSFSR where the sectarian movement reached its greatest scale was the Azov-Black Sea region, which in the first half of the 1920s consisted of several administrative-territorial units (the Stavropol Governorate, the Don and Kuban Regions), and was subsequently formally established within the boundaries of the Southeast Region, which was soon renamed the North Caucasus Territory.

Having gained a certain degree of freedom to practice their religion and promote their ideas in the 1920s, the sectarians were, at the same time, influenced by the reality surrounding them and, willingly or unwillingly, adjusted their way of life to account for the policies of the Communist Party ruling the USSR and the expanding and consolidating Soviet innovations. As a result, during the NEP period in the USSR, a unique historical phenomenon emerged: sectarianism which adapted to Soviet realities in order to secure the most favorable conditions for strengthening its own positions and further development. One of the methods by which these sectarian communities adapted to Soviet reality was their adoption of the outward trappings of collective farms in order to win the favor of the Soviet authorities. Often, however, the Soviet collective farm model adopted by the sects did not correspond to their ideological and religious content, which provoked not only conflicts within the communities, but also punitive measures against them by the Party and Soviet leadership. A striking example of such mimicry is the “New Israel” sect, led by V.S. Lubkov, which existed in the second half of the 1920s in the Salsky District of the North Caucasus Region.

The activities of “New Israel” and the sect members’ complex relationship with the Soviet authorities have repeatedly drawn the attention of researchers. In Soviet literature, the conditions prevailing within the sect were harshly criticized, and the activities of its leadership were characterized as reactionary and antisoviet; the argument was put forward that “New Israel” ceased to exist due to Lubkov’s machinations and internal conflicts [1, 2, 3]. In the post-Soviet period, scholars, while noting the existence of serious internal problems within “New Israel,” have identified pressure from Soviet party and government authorities as one of the most significant factors in the sect’s collapse [4, 5, 6, 7, 8]. Nevertheless,

the question of the causes behind the collapse of this non-traditional religious organization remains a matter of debate. In addition, a number of other issues related to “New Israel” require further study, including the methods used by the “Lubkovites” to adapt to Soviet reality and the effectiveness of those methods. In this publication, we intend to examine these issues, drawing on new sources.

The object of this study is the sectarian movement in Soviet Russia (the USSR) during the NEP (New Economic Policy) period. The subject of the study is the emergence, structure, and activities of the “New Israel” sect, which existed in the Salsky District of the North Caucasus Region in the second half of the 1920s. The aim of this study is to identify the methods used by the leaders of “New Israel” to adapt to Soviet reality and to assess their effectiveness, as well as to examine the complex relationships that arose between sectarian leaders and rank-and-file members of this religious community as a result of their perceptions of these practices (and of Soviet reality in general).

Materials and Methods. The source base for this work consists of a variety of contemporary accounts published within the chronological framework of the period covered in this publication and, in particular, archival materials. We have analyzed and introduced into scholarly circulation the reports and memoranda on the sectarian movement in the region, including the situation in “New Israel,” held at the Center for Documentation of Modern History of the Rostov Region. These documents were intended for members of the North Caucasus Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks and are contained in the fonds of that governing body (f. 7). In addition, materials of a personal nature held in the same archive were also utilized containing information on the internal organization of this sectarian community, its economic activities, and the relationships between the sect’s leadership and rank-and-file members.

Among the research methods, in addition to the descriptive method, we note the historical-genetic and historical-systemic methods. By applying these methods, we were able to identify the distinctive features of the structure and activities of the “New Israel” sect in comparison with other non-traditional religious groups in the Azov-Black Sea region, trace the process of its development after relocating from Uruguay to the Salsky district of the North Caucasus region, and identify the causes of economic difficulties and internal conflicts, which steadily intensified in the second half of the 1920s.

Results. The religious doctrine on which the “New Israel” sect was founded is generally considered to be a later form of Khlystism. Like the Khlysts, members of “New Israel” accepted the Bible, but interpreted it in their own way. In particular, they understood Christ to be “God’s wisdom” or a certain special spirit dwelling among people and entering the most worthy individual. This gave rise to the sect’s characteristic beliefs about a “living god.” At the end of the 19th century, Vasily Semenovich Lubkov, a peasant from Voronezh, proclaimed himself such a “god” and became the leader of “New Israel.”

The sect’s members promoted the ideas of equality, brotherhood, and social justice, which won them the sympathy of the population and contributed to the rapid growth of “New Israel.” According to available data, by the early 20th century there were up to 20,000 “New Israelites” (“Lubkovites”). However, persecution by the tsarist government forced Lubkov and about 2,000 of his followers to leave Russia in 1912 and settle in Uruguay, where the “New Israelites” founded the San Javier farming colony. The sect members created a unique commune, which initially achieved notable economic success. However, as Soviet authors claimed, based on information received from the colonists, Lubkov fraudulently seized control of the collective property and began to dispose of it without oversight. This provoked outrage among the other sect members, and eventually the case reached a Uruguayan court, which was leaning toward arresting the leader of “New Israel.” Lubkov then distributed the bulk of the property amounting to \$110,000 (about 220,000 rubles as of the late 1920s) [3, p. 39] among his closest associates and devised a plan to flee to the USSR.

In 1925, Lubkov sent “delegates” T.E. Zhidkov, E.I. Kravtsov, and I.V. Fadeev to Moscow, who succeeded in concluding an agreement with the People’s Commissariat of Agriculture of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to lease a plot of 40,000 hectares of land for a horse breeding farm in the Salsky District of the North Caucasus Territory. After that, Lubkov “by deceitful means” loaded agricultural equipment onto a steamship and, in May 1925, urgently left Uruguay with a group of loyal colonists [3, p. 42].

The first group of “New Israelites,” consisting of 52 households (218 people), arrived in the Salsky District in the spring of 1926. This group was joined by Lubkov’s followers from various regions of the USSR, and in 1927, new settlers, 41 households (170 people), arrived from America. By the fall of 1928, there were about 240 “New Israel households” (up to 1,040 people) in the Salsky District [9, p. 60].

Lubkov clearly understood what kind of country he was moving to and sought to win the trust of the Soviet authorities by demonstrating how closely his religious teachings aligned with communist ideas. Soviet authors noted with bitter irony that “before his departure, Lubkov hastily repainted himself pink, donning a revolutionary mask” [3, p. 42]. He was far from alone in employing this strategy. According to well-established observations in Soviet literature, in the 1920s, sectarians widely used the “mask of loyalty to Soviet power and communism”: “at every opportunity”, their leaders

declared that “they, and they alone, were the true communists” [10, p. 45], and hung revolutionary slogans, portraits of Marx and Lenin, and the like in their homes and public buildings.

In fact, in quite a few cases, the cult members did not need to pretend, since many such organizations, like “New Israel,” promoted the ideals of equality, brotherhood, social justice, and collective labor.

Since the “organization of labor communes” played a “major role” in the strategies sectarians employed to adapt to Soviet reality [ibid.], Lubkov also proclaimed the settlement he had founded in the Salsky District to be the cooperative association “New Israel Community” [9, p. 60]. The board of directors included Lubkov himself as chairman and his closest associates: E.I. Kravtsov (Lubkov’s deputy), T.E. Zhidkov (Lubkov’s father-in-law), M.I. Zabelin (accountant), and E.Ya. Sofronov (treasurer) [1, p. 186]. At the same time, Lubkov was the undisputed spiritual leader of the sectarian community. It should not be forgotten that for the “New Israelites,” he was not merely a “leader” or a father (he was often called “Dad” or even “Dad-Mom”), but a “god-man.” In addition to his closest supporters, he was surrounded by a “rather large” staff of various “preachers,” “prophets” [1, p. 184], and “apostles” (the treasurer Sofronov, for example, was among the latter) [11, p. 399].

The partnership officially began operations on April 1, 1926 [11, p. 400]. The main focus of its economic activity was animal husbandry, primarily horse breeding. According to the agreement concluded between “New Israel” and the People’s Commissariat for Agriculture of the RSFSR, the members of the cooperative undertook to organize “the scientific management of a horse-breeding enterprise for the supply, under specified conditions, of high-quality horses both to the army and for agriculture” [9, p. 61]. An analysis of the sources suggests that the sect members possessed significant economic potential to carry out these tasks. The first group of settlers from Uruguay alone brought with them property worth up to 40,000 rubles [9, p. 60], and thanks to their like-minded followers who arrived later, by April 1927 the sect had “many vehicles” and “extensive” agricultural equipment worth over 100,000 rubles [6, p. 139]. In particular, the sect owned 4 trucks and 4 tractors [11, p. 403], which represented a very high level of mechanization for collective farms during the NEP (New Economic Policy) period. By September 1928, the “New Israelites” owned property totaling approximately 152,800 rubles [9, p. 60].

It seemed that the community had every opportunity to demonstrate the merits of collectivism based on religious ideas. Indeed, over the course of two and a half years, the sect members established “collective community mills, threshing machines, and cheese factories” [1, p. 184], established a thriving livestock operation (more than 200 thoroughbred horses, 1,000 Merino sheep), built a steam mill, and delivered 100,000 rubles’ worth of produce to the North Caucasus Regional Dairy Union [6, p. 140]. However, the partnership’s impressive economic achievements were accompanied by a number of problems that hindered the consolidation of “New Israel” and ultimately led to its collapse.

When discussing the reasons for the collapse of “New Israel,” some researchers highlight economic difficulties and the hostile attitude toward the sectarians on the part of the Soviet party leadership, which was not fooled by Lubkov’s claims regarding the ideological affinity between his teachings and the tenets of Marxism-Leninism. For example, N.V. Antonova believes that “New Israel” was severely affected by the harsh natural and climatic conditions of the Salsky District (which led to poor harvests during the community’s early years), the delayed re-emigration of subsequent groups of sectarians from Uruguay due to financial difficulties, and the “crackdown on sects” that unfolded in the USSR in the second half of the 1920s [ibid.].

Undoubtedly, the factors listed above had a significant negative impact on the sect’s activities. At the same time, the approach described above, which treats political and economic circumstances as the sole determining factors, does not reflect the full complexity of “New Israel’s” situation. An analysis of the available documents allows us to state with confidence that the abuses committed by the “God-Man” Lubkov and his “prophets,” as well as the growing antagonism between two groups of sect members: the “Uruguayans” who had arrived from America and the local “Russians.”

The Central State Archive of the History of the Jewish People holds six letters sent in 1927 to the editorial office of the newspaper “Soviet Plowman” by an anonymous member of “New Israel.” The letters harshly criticized the activities of Lubkov and the partnership’s board of directors and highlighted the tense relations between the “Uruguayans” and the “Russians.” These sources are supplemented by the findings of investigations conducted in “New Israel” by government officials and journalists. A comparative analysis of these documents and materials reveals similarities between the judgments and conclusions of the anonymous author of the letters and those of the individuals who investigated the situation in “New Israel,” and helps to identify flaws in the sect’s internal structure.

First and foremost, the sect violated the principle of social justice, which played an important role in the worldview of the “New Israelites.” As already noted, formally, “New Israel” was a “shareholding partnership” in which “everyone was equal” [1, p. 186]. In reality, according to reports by Soviet journalists, not everyone was equal by any means. A full share amounted to [ibid.] 510 rubles. Not all sect members could afford this amount, and many (according to available data, at least 30% of the total number of households [9, p. 62]) contributed only half of it. At the same time, 15% of the sect members contributed more than 1,300 rubles in share payments; another 5–6% contributed more than 5,000

rubles; and Lubkov's own share amounted to 10,000 rubles. Food was distributed among the members of the cooperative based on the size of their shares. Members of "New Israel" who paid their full share received flour, sugar, tea, and other foodstuffs, while those who were unable to do so were given only flour. At the same time, it was claimed that poor sect members, having spent their last money on membership contributions, were "living on a half-starved ration" [1, p. 186]. Furthermore, Lubkov and his associates insisted that members of the association who had not paid their full share should be granted only an advisory, not a decisive vote at general meetings of the community [9, p. 62].

A visible manifestation of the wealth inequality among the sect members in "New Israel" was their housing. The wealthy elite of the sect settled "in spacious, warm houses" with iron roofs, while the poor, who made up "a large percentage of those without full shares," were crammed "several families into a single small dugout house," which were "nothing more than real burrows with a single chimney visible above ground" [1, p. 184].

Relations between the "Uruguayans" and the "Russians" who made up "New Israel" became quite strained. The former looked down on the Russians, claiming that they had shared all the hardships of life in Uruguay with Lubkov for a full 13 years [11, p. 399]. Citing a certain member of the USSR Council of Labor and Defense, Lubkov's old comrades-in-arms claimed that the Soviet government placed its trust only in those members of the community who had come from Uruguay, while they referred to the "Russians" as "greedy" and "unfit" [11, p. 406]. Lubkov himself and his inner circle treated the "Russians" with contempt and showed their favor toward the "Uruguayans." Zhidkov's statements are telling: he claimed that the land cultivated by "New Israel" in the Salsky District was "given to the Americans" and that the partnership's board should consist of "two Americans and one Russian" [11, p. 398].

The "Russian" faction of "New Israel" members, which outnumbered the others in the community, was outraged by the "Uruguayans." For example, an anonymous letter writer to the editorial board of "Soviet Plowman" claimed that the "Americans" whom Lubkov had appointed to key positions in the sect were incompetent, and gave the following example. When the cooperative purchased an "International" tractor on credit, Lubkov put his nephew, I.I. Lubkov, and P. Bardakov (E.I. Kravtsov's son-in-law), neither of whom knew anything about machinery, in charge of the tractor operators. During plowing operations, they nearly broke the "International" tractor's engine, the repair of which, according to the anonymous source, would have cost no less than 1,000 rubles [11, p. 401].

For their part, the "Uruguayans" did everything in their power to defend the sect's leadership against attacks by dissidents, telling the latter that all members of the community must unquestioningly obey the leader's orders and even comparing their "god-man" to Lenin [11, p. 399]. Relying on "Uruguayan" support, Lubkov sought to establish unlimited, unchecked power, transforming "New Israel" from a self-governing community into an authoritarian sect. He achieved considerable success in this endeavor, and not only because of the support of the "Uruguayans." It must be acknowledged that Lubkov was indeed an extraordinary and charismatic figure. Even Soviet journalists critical of the "Papa" described him as a man aged 55–60, "with a proud bearing and a large, energetic face" [1, p. 191]. To a certain extent, one must also take into account the fact that "New Israel" was located "in the middle of nowhere" and was 55–56 km away from the nearest railway station, "Tselina" [1, p. 183], where Soviet party and government institutions were located; their employees, if the opportunity arose, could have provided assistance to the "New Israelites" who were dissatisfied with Lubkov's actions.

As a result, the cult leaders became "not accountable to rank-and-file members" [1, p. 187]. They ran affairs in "New Israel" without oversight and did not report to the rank-and-file members of the community, justifying this by saying, "We are creators, and you are creatures" [9, p. 61]. According to an anonymous source, Lubkov had not held general meetings of the commune's members for a long time. The first such meeting, attended by about 50 percent of the "New Israelites," took place only on June 5, 1927. However, even at this meeting, the board members did not read aloud the agreement concluded between the sect and the People's Commissariat of Agriculture of the Russian SFSR, refusing to inform the rank-and-file sect members of the terms of this agreement [11, p. 400]. Attempts by dissatisfied "Russian" sect members to invoke Soviet law were countered by Lubkov's associates, who argued that the community was "Israel", that is, effectively a separate state [11, p. 399].

The lack of oversight over the leadership of "New Israel" by its rank-and-file members naturally led to abuses by the administrators. Lubkov and his inner circle had complete control over the partnership's financial affairs. Without consulting the members of the partnership, Lubkov took out loans, sold cattle and sheep's wool to outside parties, launched an alcohol business in the cafeteria he had opened at the "Tselina" station, and so on. [11, p. 401]

The "New Israel" board redistributed funds in favor of the "Uruguayans" (that is, themselves) and infringed upon the interests of the "Russian" members of the sect. According to an anonymous source, the members of the association did not even have membership cards; they did not receive receipts or acknowledgments from the board regarding "money received," and had no idea what amounts constituted "New Israel's" profits [11, p. 402]. The board showed no concern for the needs of ordinary "Russian" sect members. A typical example was when, to prepare lunch for sect members who were mowing grass, the board issued them dead sheep, and the food was cooked in a cauldron in which "arsenic had previously

been dissolved”; the inevitable result was food poisoning among some of the workers. A number of sect members suffered from malaria (which was quite widespread across the vast expanses of the Lower Don and Kuban regions) but did not receive adequate medical care. There were paramedics in the community, but the board did not provide them with funds to purchase the necessary medications [11, p. 403]. Auditors who examined the state of affairs in “New Israel” in 1928 also discovered “very clear signs of criminal activity involving the exploitation of Russian community members by the American settlers...” [9, p. 61].

Instead of using loans and funds earned by the community to improve the circumstances of the vast majority of ordinary sect members, the “god-man” Lubkov, his “apostles,” and “prophets” spent them on personal needs [9, p. 61]. For example, Lubkov acquired a car [1, p. 191] and used it not only for business trips but also for leisure. The sources contain a number of accounts indicating that Lubkov and his inner circle led a “debauched lifestyle” [11, p. 398]. The leader of “New Israel,” if the accounts of his detractors are to be believed, was quite fond of women. There are reports of the “man of God” committing acts of violence against women and of his frequent marriages and divorces.

Contemporaries claimed that even before leaving for Uruguay, Lubkov had been successively married to four women (he called his wives “mamas”), from whom he also successively divorced. In Uruguay, Lubkov married three times; he returned to the USSR with his third wife, only to divorce her as well. After that, the tireless “dad” began looking for a new wife, settling on nineteen-year-old Raisa Novokreshchenova (the niece of his close associate T.E. Zhidkov) and a certain Nadezhda, who, as one can gather, was no older than the first of the aforementioned “moms.” He took his chosen ones on car rides (even traveling as far as Rostov-on-Don) and gave them gifts. For some reason, Lubkov became disillusioned with Nadezhda and turned his adoration toward Raisa. However, the young woman was planning to marry a young member of the sect, F. Kramarenko, and despite her relatives’ attempts to persuade her otherwise, she rejected Lubkov. Apparently, the leader of “New Israel” took this bitter defeat in the love competition very hard. He appeared “upset” and “not quite well” and pointedly ignored the wedding of Kramarenko and Novokreshchenova [11, pp. 398–400].

The marked wealth disparity within the community and the oppression of the “Russian” poor by the more affluent “Uruguayans” could not have met with the approval of the Party and Soviet leadership of the Salsky District, or indeed of the entire North Caucasus region. But an even greater source of irritation for the representatives of the Soviet authorities was the fact that the commitment to communist ideals, loudly proclaimed by the leaders of “New Israel,” stood in stark contrast to their actions.

In an effort to secure preferential treatment from the authorities, Lubkov did not hesitate to declare that the cooperative he had founded was “building socialism” [11, p. 406]. He told journalists who visited “New Israel” in 1927 that the sect members “organize revolutionary holidays well”: for example, May 1 “went off splendidly, with red banners and the singing of revolutionary songs” (though he added that he did not approve of singing “The Internationale” [1, p. 191]). The brother of the “God-man,” I.S. Lubkov, assured Soviet officials: “We are in complete agreement with the Communists; we are moving together toward a single goal: brotherhood, equality, and socialism” [1, p. 193].

However, even outside observers, not to mention pro-Soviet sect members, noted that Lubkov’s rhetoric was merely a cover and in no way undermined the doctrine he preached. Attempts by some “New Israelites” to establish Soviet social organizations within the sect (“cells of the MOPR, the Lenin Corner, the ‘Atheist’ cell, the Young Pioneers, etc.” [9, p. 62]) were regarded by the “Father” and his inner circle as apostasy and met with resolute opposition.

A striking example is the opposition by the leaders of “New Israel” to initiatives by young members of the community to establish a Komsomol organization. According to anonymous accounts, young members of the community used their own funds to establish a cultural and educational club and staged two plays: “At Dawn” and “The Lights Came On.” Afterward, the youth intended to form a Komsomol cell, but the board members opposed this, deeming such intentions “godless” [11, p. 406]. When a small Komsomol cell was eventually established in “New Israel,” the sect leaders formed their own youth group, headed by board member Zabelin, to counterbalance it. Those who were for Zabelin sought to establish control over the young sectarians and opposed the Komsomol members. At the same time, however, Zabelin feared provoking the wrath of the Party and Soviet authorities and acted in a very Jesuitical manner, criticizing not the Komsomol as such, but only the Komsomol members who were sectarians. Thus, at one of the meetings in 1927, Zabelin proposed adopting the following resolution: “To welcome the economic and cultural work of the Komsomol, but not that of our cell, and not to welcome the godless work of the Komsomol” [1, p. 193].

It must be said that, despite all the internal turmoil, Lubkov’s authority remained quite high not only among the “Uruguayans,” but also among a certain segment of the “Russian” “New Israelites.” The words of an elderly sect member, who was huddled in a dugout and barely making ends meet but spoke reverently of the community’s leader, are telling: “He, my dear, doesn’t see how we live; if he did, he would help” [1, p. 187].

Nevertheless, the situation within “New Israel” was steadily deteriorating. The sect members, who were living in dire material and living conditions and saw no help from the leadership, began to view Lubkov, the “God-man,” and his inner circle with increasing skepticism. At first, the discontented sought to leave the sect, especially since Lubkov himself was

showing them the door [11, p. 399]. According to available data, in just two weeks of October 1927, 18 households left the community, and another 40 households expressed their intention to relocate to the Don District [1, p. 187].

A sharp conflict erupted in the community in the summer of 1927 because Lubkov was delaying the re-election of the board. Outraged by this, the “Russian” sectarians, citing Soviet legislation, demanded that the board provide an account of its activities and then hold new elections. Lubkov’s allies attempted to suppress the revolt: declaring that the association’s board was “Soviet authority,” they confiscated calves from the most active critics. At the same time, in an effort not to exacerbate relations with the majority of the sectarians, the association’s accountant, M.I. Zabelin, promised to provide a report [11, p. 401] by October 1, 1927.

The promises, however, did not appease the dissatisfied members, and they turned to the party and Soviet authorities for help. The authorities responded by having the Salsk District Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) send an audit commission to the cooperative to investigate the situation on the ground. The commission confirmed that actual control of the cooperative lay with Lubkov and his close associates, the “apostles” Kravtsov and Zabelin, and that the board “had never once reported to its constituents, the shareholders” [9, p. 61]. Evidence was uncovered of the expenditure of large sums of money (more than 13,300 rubles) in the absence of “supporting documents” [9, p. 63]. At the same time, it became clear that a significant portion of “New Israel’s” property (a tractor, bulls, sheep, and seed) had been acquired on credit, and the partnership’s debts amounted to 40,000 rubles. A significant portion of the membership contributions had disappeared: according to rumors, this money was held in one of the banks in Rostov-on-Don and, as a result, was at the complete disposal of Lubkov and his entourage [11, p. 404].

Finally, the regional leadership also took an interest in “New Israel.” In December 1927, the secretariat of the North Caucasus Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) reviewed the findings of a survey of the “New Israel Community in the Salsky District.” The document, presented to the leadership of the North Caucasus Region, contained very harsh language stating that the community was “under the control of shadowy figures (Christ and the prophets), who had concentrated control of the cooperative in their own hands.” These “shadowy figures,” hiding behind phrases such as “On the Commune” “On the collective,” were in fact opposing “any influence of the Party and the Komsomol.” The final conclusion was devastating for Lubkov and his associates: “In essence, this association is an anti-communist organization” [12, p. 12].

Despite these harsh conclusions, the secretariat of the North Caucasus Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) limited itself, for the most part, to agitation and propaganda measures aimed at “New Israel.” It was decided to send a “Komsomol traveling school” and a traveling movie theater to the community, to “request” that the Salsk District Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) “assign a special paid employee for anti-religious propaganda,” to organize propaganda work among the women of “New Israel,” and so on.

Perhaps the most severe measure envisaged by the North Caucasus Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was its order to the police and the Public Policy Administration “to ensure the complete elimination of the initiative group of religious youth in this community,” which was obstructing the organization and activities of the Komsomol cell [12, p. 25].

However, at the same time, the prosecutor’s office and the court became involved in the case. Following the audit, Zabelin, a member of the “New Israel” board close to Lubkov, was arrested and brought to trial. At the same time, “Leader Lubkov and his prophets were removed from positions of power”: the board was reshuffled and headed by Samsonov, a member of the Communist Party. Representatives of the regional leadership noted with satisfaction that, as a result of the measures taken, “socio-political life began to develop within the cooperative, the influence of the poor and middle-class elements increased, and the Komsomol was granted the right to legal existence” [9, p. 63].

However, as early as 1928, Lubkov had his revenge, aided by a number of circumstances. First of all, “Papa,” although he had lost his position as chairman of the board of “New Israel,” had not been removed from that body. Furthermore, Lubkov had not lost the support of the “Uruguayans,” who rightly attributed their financial well-being to him and sought to restore him to power. The new chairman of the association, Samsonov, proved unequal to the task and was unable to ensure competent management of the community’s affairs. As a result, the “sectarian activists” succeeded in ousting Samsonov and restoring Lubkov to the position of chairman of the board [ibid.]. For some time, Lubkov remained the leader of the “New Israelites”: for example, in 1931, contemporaries noted that he was “once again engaging in anti-Soviet activities” [3, p. 42].

The situation changed in the 1930s, amid a sharp tightening of the domestic political regime and the launch of large-scale repressive campaigns in the USSR. The available documents do not allow us to determine in detail what became of Lubkov and his followers during the “Great Turn.” However, given the severity of the punishments meted out in the 1930s to those who opposed the Bolshevik regime, it is quite likely that the leader of “New Israel” and many other sect members fell victim to these repressions.

Discussion and Conclusion. The establishment by V.S. Lubkov, leader of the “New Israel” sect, of a collective farm in the Salsky District of the North Caucasus Region in the 1920s is a striking example of the sectarians’ attempts to use communist rhetoric in order to successfully adapt to the realities of Soviet life. Despite the outward similarity between the ideas of freedom, equality, and brotherhood promoted by the sectarians and by Bolshevik ideologues, the two groups envisioned different paths and methods for realizing these ideas. While for the sectarians the embodiment of these slogans was conceived as the triumph of their religious teachings, the Soviet government prioritized class principles and sought to build a socialist society. Furthermore, the fact that atheism was one of the cornerstones of the Bolsheviks’ political doctrine did nothing to foster good neighborly relations between the sectarians and the Bolsheviks.

It is also worth noting that many sects were authoritarian communities in which declarations of equality and brotherhood clashed with the rigid hierarchy established by an authoritarian leader. “New Israel” was precisely such a sect, as far as can be judged from numerous sources. An analysis of the content of a wide array of documents and materials does not support the biased assertions of some contemporary researchers that Lubkov “managed to create a community focused not only on the spiritual improvement of the individual, but rather on the gradual improvement, through labor, of the quality of life for the community members,” and that the collapse of “New Israel” was the result of the “inconsistency” [6, p. 142] of Soviet authorities. Documents show that the leader of the “New Israelites” and his inner circle exploited their monopoly on power for personal enrichment, that there was marked material inequality within the sect, and, most importantly, that the assurances of the “god-man” Lubkov regarding his devotion to the ideals of communism did not correspond to reality. Under these circumstances, it would have been entirely unreasonable to expect the Soviet Party leadership to take any stance toward “New Israel” and Lubkov other than negative ones. The collapse of the sect and of Lubkov’s career in the USSR was predetermined not only by the discrepancies between the sect’s teachings and Bolshevik ideology, but also by the abuses committed by Lubkov and his supporters.

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About the Authors:

Aganov Andrey Anatolyevich, Cand. Sci. (History), Associate Professor, Institute of Creative Industries, Don State Technical University (1, Gagarin Sq., Rostov-on-Don, 344003, Russian Federation), [ORCID](#), [SPIN-code](#), aganoff.a@yandex.ru

Usenko Aleksandr Nikolaevich, Cand. Sci. (History), Associate Professor, Institute of Creative Industries, Don State Technical University (1, Gagarin Sq., Rostov-on-Don, 344003, Russian Federation), [ORCID](#), [SPIN-code](#), allexsandr@bk.ru

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Об авторах:

Аганов Андрей Анатольевич, кандидат исторических наук, доцент Института креативных индустрий, Донской государственной технической университет (344003, Российская Федерация, г. Ростов-на-Дону, пл. Гагарина, 1), [ORCID](#), [SPIN-код](#), aganoff.a@yandex.ru

Усенко Александр Николаевич, кандидат исторических наук, доцент кафедры «История и культурология», Донской государственной технической университет (344003, Российская Федерация, г. Ростов-на-Дону, пл. Гагарина, 1), [ORCID](#), [SPIN-код](#), allexsandr@bk.ru

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