
Breaking Islam

During the first half of the First Five-Year Plan Islamic social structures and people suffered the most damage. The mass destruction of not only courts, waqfs, and religious schools but also clergy and mosques was deliberately planned, but the plans were executed chaotically. While the Orgburo, Sredazburo, and TsK KP(b)Uz had synchronized their instructions for dealing with Islam by June 1927, they had tremendous difficulty controlling party actions in the field. The party more or less got the results it wanted, but with consequences and costs that were far beyond anticipation.

The picture of harmony among party organs at all levels on which the Commission on the Clergy congratulated itself either was misleading or did not last long, more likely the former. Four days after their meeting, on June 23, 1927, Zelenskii delivered a Sredazburo report to Ikramov that conveyed a contrary image of higher party organizations struggling to keep local cells under control. He sharply warned Ikramov to keep party organizations in line and that substituting "naked administrative [tactics for] authentic work," was unacceptable. Having spent a considerable amount of time hammering out anti-Islamic policies, Zelenskii now wanted to delay implementation of the decisions from the Sredazburo and TsK KP(b)Uz plenums until the fall, which would allow more time to "thoroughly" work out practical details. Nonetheless, aggressive anticlerical tactics should continue: "Create distinct strata of clergy via the spiritual administrations, so that [their] active appearances on the side of the bais may set up [*postavit'*] organs of Soviet power before the necessary application of repression to these strata of clergy."¹ At the same time he also felt it necessary once again to strongly forbid party organizations from working with the clergy in any way, even to further political goals (with the notable exception of persuading them to convert reformed Muslim schools to Soviet schools). He ordered that all work by local party organizations connected with the clergy had to receive prior sanction from the relevant Uzbek

¹PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 322, l. 29. See also RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, l. 72.

Central Committee personnel and organizations.²

Zelenskii's report apparently had little immediate impact—not surprising, given how contradictory its instructions were. A month later he convened a special closed session of Sredazburo's Ispolkom to address problems with anti-Islamic actions again, in stronger terms. The session's protocol also reveals that excessive cooperation with clergy was only one part of what was troubling Sredazburo. The Ispolkom (which included two representatives from the TsK VKP[b]) did "categorically forbid" local Uzbek party organizations from making any kind of contact with clergy without prior permission from the Uzbek Central Committee. The TsK was also to issue a statement from Sredazburo (but in Ikramov's name) that all "administrative measures" in connection with the women's liberation campaign were to be stopped in three days' time. All types of "administrative prohibitions" carried out during and after religious services were to be "unconditionally" (*bezuslovno*) halted. The first mention of attacks on mosques, which had not been discussed earlier, contained equally strict orders: "Do not allow the closure of mosques, the use of mosque and madrasa buildings, [or] the destruction of mosque buildings. All questions related to the use of mosque buildings for non-religious purposes must be decided only by the Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz."³ The use of mosques to house courts or billet soldiers had attracted protest before, but closing mosques outright seemed to be a new problem.

The issue of mosques was closely related to that of waqfs and to the desperate scramble for resources set off by demands to build more Soviet schools. An OGPU report attached to the Ispolkom protocol discussed a case of officials in Andijan ignoring one set of party demands in order to meet another, with results so egregious that the incident was at least partially responsible for the special Sredazburo session.⁴ In March 1927 the Andijan Okrug Education Department decided to build an elementary school (*shkola-deviatiletka*), but the local waqf department would not (more likely, could not) release the necessary resources. In May the head of the waqf department, one Nusrat, went to the okrug Executive Political Committee for permission to tear down unused buildings on the premises of the Divana-bai madrasa in the old city, in order to use the bricks and other materials to build the school. Shortly thereafter officials from the mestkhoz drew up an act establishing that one of the madrasa buildings was unsafe, allowing for its demolition.

However, the mestkhoz inspectors were either sloppy or deliberately negligent as they wrote up their report. Aside from the one building deemed unsafe, a mosque

²The complete memos are PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 322, ll. 26–30 and RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, ll. 66–73. The Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz confirmed the instructions July 6, RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, ll. 64–65.

³RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, l. 27. Protocol No. 115, July 18, 1927.

⁴RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, ll. 37–43. Report by Chief of the Special Section of the Plenipotentiary of the OGPU Diakov, dated July 16, 1927. Also PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 166, ll. 45–48.

appeared on the list of available buildings at the site (which had mysteriously grown larger). In addition, the act did not mention that almost all of the buildings approved for demolition were still partially inhabited or used for prayer. By the time the city soviet approved the work order, it had grown to include the entire madrasa complex.

Work started in early June, causing immediate public protests, although Sredazburo carefully noted that no "excesses" occurred in trying to contain them. On June 23 the okrug ispolkom granted permission to fell trees outside city boundaries belonging to the madrasas—public anger increased when workers illegally cut trees inside the city as well. By mid-July 43 "cells" (*hujra*, student dormitory rooms in a madrasa) in the complex had been destroyed, as well as parts of the Chukur mosque, the Mat Khalik madrasa, a qorikhona, and a maktab, the qorikhona in active use. The mosque's imam and current chair of the spiritual administration, Salikhov, avoided having his cell destroyed only by strong personal intervention with the city soviet.

The real problem here, at least as far as the OGPU was concerned, was that such blatant disregard of public opinion aroused the ire of Sheikh Mavliavi, the influential former head of the Andijan spiritual administration. Mavliavi was one of the most effective reformist organizers in the Farghana Valley. He claimed that "all Andijan" supported him and provoked so much concern in the Uzbek Central Committee that it had specifically discussed arresting him at its 5th Plenum. He exhibited a highly practical and flexible attitude that may have been remarkable even among reformist clergy. Documents from the 5th Plenum of the TsK KP(b)Uz depicted Mavliavi as saying: "I drink a special wine, I am prepared to work with whom I please . . . if Soviet power would offer me cooperation, I could speak out for the cause of the liberation of women; everything is permitted to us, for we are guided first by the laws of God, second by Muhammad, and third by state power."⁵ However, Mavliavi's chief desire was to do whatever was necessary to preserve the essentials of Islam as he saw them, not to bend Islam to meet every wish of the Soviets. While Mavliavi would have spoken out in favor of unveiling, his administration was also engaged in enforcing the fast of Ramadan using threats of fines and arrests.⁶

When the demolition began Mavliavi had already been removed from the spiritual administration, which he and his followers naturally resented. They used this opportunity to declare that without Mavliavi the administration would allow the destruction of religion, which the population would soon be able to see with its own eyes. Government actions amply confirmed these warnings. On July 14 Mavliavi applied to the city soviet for permission to hold new elections to the spiritual administration on the following day, which presented officials with a dilemma. Allowing the election would undoubtedly return their foe to power, which would get them in deep trouble with Ikramov and the Central Committee. Denying

⁵PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 152, l. 8.

⁶PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1192, l. 23.

permission risked inflaming popular anger and increasing Mavliavi's credibility. Similarly, the okrug ispolkom could not decide whether to continue with construction of the school. Some members argued that the school had to be built at all costs, while others maintained that to go ahead would simply strengthen the hands of the clergy and discredit Soviet power. The lack of a clear choice threatened to paralyze the government.

At this point (July 13) OGPU investigator Diakov arrived, word of the scandal having spread to higher party levels. Diakov's solution was to assign blame and arrest the biggest troublemakers. He singled out waqf department head Nusrat as the scapegoat. Nusrat, it turned out, "is known (*izvesten*) as one of the people who stand closest to former chairman of the spiritual administration Mavliavi-Sheikh."⁷ He also maintained close ties to nationalist and Basmachi/Qurbashi groups. Nusrat's obstructionism and collaboration with Mavliavi were clear: in May the waqf department had begun to work out compensation agreements with residents of the damaged madrasa complex, but "[o]nly after persistent applications by the Okrug Department of the GPU" were the agreements completed. The rumors that only Mavliavi could defend religion in Andijan had spread "until just the moment" that the demolition began. Nusrat's efforts to tear down the madrasa coincided with Mavliavi's removal from the spiritual administration, lending proof to the sheikh's followers' faith in him. The waqf department had thus consciously worked toward strengthening the clergy's authority. Nusrat's effectiveness in this matter could be seen in Mavliavi's own confident attitude—when the city soviet invited Mavliavi to the police station to negotiate terms for the new elections, he refused to go on the grounds of poor health. Instead, he offered to let police visit him at his home, something that he would not have done without knowing that he had allies.

Having built his case, Diakov's solutions were simple. Nusrat was the instigator of the whole mess, pursuing anticlerical measures that were secretly intended to strengthen the authority of the clergy. It was the duty of the local OGPU office to investigate and arrest him. Mavliavi was clearly too dangerous to be allowed continued residence in Andijan. He was to be arrested and exiled from the area. Meanwhile, the city soviet should immediately halt all demolition work and stop any cooperation with the clergy that did not have prior sanction from the OGPU. Duty done, Diakov wrote up his report and returned to Tashkent, where Sredazburo recommended him for a commission to study the incident further.⁸

The Andijan incident was an early example of the effects of contradictory party demands on officials and citizens. Presumably some, if not all, members of the okrug ispolkom and city soviet had attended at least one of the party plenums held earlier in the year, where they would have been told of the urgent need to build schools and defeat the counterrevolutionary clerical conspiracy. Raiding a half-abandoned madrasa complex for building materials probably seemed like an easy

decision under the circumstances, especially if inspectors could show that the buildings were structurally unsound. How could the clergy protest effectively when the party had declared waqf property to be state property (although the fate of religious waqfs was still under consideration)?

It is interesting to note here that there was no waiting for orders from above. "Above" (the Uzbek Central Committee in Samarkand, roughly 300 miles distant, or Sredazburo in Tashkent) was too far away and communications were too slow to wait on central permission. Sredazburo's decision to delay implementation of the spring plenum resolutions regarding Islam had no impact on the Andijan incident, because by the time the Uzbek TsK confirmed it (July 6) and sent it to local bodies (at least several days later), it was too late. Even when Diakov ordered the okrug ispolkom to obtain prior approval for all contacts with the clergy, the approving body was the OGPU, which had closer offices than did the TsK KP(b)Uz. Since the TsK was at the same time insisting that *it* had the right of approval, Diakov's directions could only have added to local confusion.

Why did Andijan officials get into trouble then? Because the party was still in a relatively weak position and was trying to undermine the old power structures while retaining popular support. The TsK had targeted Mavliavi because he was an effective mobilizer, but the waqf department's project threatened to increase his influence at the expense of Soviet power. Even though the party wanted schools to be built, it did not want them built regardless of the political cost. As a result, poor Nusrat was assigned the role of secret conspirator, while Mavliavi was exiled from his home. Many more people would soon be caught in the same impossible trap.

If the Andijan case had been an isolated one, Sredazburo might not have reacted so sharply, but, in fact, it was not. Diakov also sent a report from the Khojent Okrug GPU office on the causes of recent "depression and dispiritedness noted" among the clergy there.⁹ Briefly, clergy were harassed by the "resolute and not always tactful" methods of the women's campaign and were being arrested by the criminal investigator's office. In a short period five prominent mullas and sheikhs had been arrested, who together guided close to 5,000 followers, while five clerics had left the area. The arrest of 70-year-old Iusupkhan Said Burkhanov, imam of the largest mosque in Khojent, on charges of agitating against women's liberation had caused a particular public outcry. Others were charged with the same offense or with agitating against Soviet power (specifically, trashing a basic literacy school along with all of its posters and portraits of revolutionary leaders) and withholding arable land from state inventory. Diakov added that tensions in Khojent were further aggravated because one man, Abdu Gani, had just been sentenced to be shot for murdering his wife.¹⁰ The Khojent clergy suffered from other humiliations as well.

⁹RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, ll. 44–46. The report's date was torn off, but the content suggests it was written close to the same time as the Andijan report.

¹⁰Other clerics arrested at this time were Mulla Qori of Kanibad; Usmankhan Tiuria [Tora]-Ishan of Isfarin raion; Ishan Usman Khan Sheikh Kalani, a 70-year-old Tajik; and Ishan Sati Valdi, an Uzbek with 500 murids.

⁷RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, l. 41.

⁸Ibid., l. 27. Also op. 3, d. 208, l. 181. Ispolkom TsK KP(b) Uz protocol No. 104, July 21, 1927, report by Berman.

The local waqf department had arrogated to itself the right to assign imams to mosques (*pravo imamstvovat'*, an interesting neologism), which Diakov called a "crude violation" of the separation of church and state.

As in Andijan, Diakov recommended that local agencies be brought under firmer control, especially the waqf department. He condemned Burkhanov's arrest as improper due to his high status, adding that "it was even more impermissible to conduct him under escort to the okrug court at the same time as the reading of Abdu Gani's sentence," and urged the arrest of the responsible individuals.¹¹ One can only imagine the degree of outrage and fear that unfortunate conjunction of events must have produced. Finally, Diakov suggested that hearings of the other clerics' cases be delayed.

Now fully aware that anti-Islamic actions at the local level had exceeded permissible limits, the Ispolburo TsK discussed the delayed "Implementation of the Decisions of the 6th Plenum of TsK KP(b)Uz on the Struggle against the Clergy," on July 21. The plan was directed at okrug ispolkoms, the Organization for Liberation [of Muslim women] (Orgraskrep), and the Agitprop Department. Its first paragraph revealed quite a change in tone from previous Ispolburo communications—the harshness that had been directed against the clergy was now turned on party workers: "Instruct the okrug ispolkoms that not fulfilling this instruction [will cause] the TsK to turn the guilty [ones] over for the most severe party liability," which most likely meant purge and arrest.¹²

Local party workers were instructed to carry out anticlerical work "for the moment" only through agitation and education. The war scare with Great Britain should be used to "unmask the anglophile, anti-Soviet, Basmachi orientation of the bais and clergy" and to explain the clergy's sinister role in the international situation. Propagandists should appear at all significant gatherings in cities to explain these points. In case okrug ispolkoms had any questions regarding the content and techniques of anti-Islamic propaganda, the Agitprop Department was instructed to write out detailed explanations that were "especially designed" for each local organization.

To prepare for the future implementation (slated for the fall and winter of 1927–1928), okrug ispolkoms should hold special closed sessions to draw up prioritized lists of "problems with the struggle against the clergy on the basis of the resolutions of the 6th Plenum" in order to prepare concrete and locally specific actions. What precisely that meant was left to local officials to figure out, but the limits for correct interpretation were laid out very clearly:

c) all work of the local party organizations must be limited to the two aforementioned points (a and b); all measures which go further than points "a" or "b" absolutely must and in each

¹¹RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 318, l. 46.

¹²RGASPI F. 62, op. 3, d. 208, l. 180. TsK KP(b)Uz protocol No. 104 dated July 21, 1927. Report given by Burnashev. Shootings were relatively rare in this "vegetarian" stage (as Anna Akhmatova put it) of party purges.

separate instance be approved by the TsK KP(b)Uz, moreover, after agreement by the TsK, separate measures, directives against the clergy, must be carried out in reality by the direct leadership of the ispolburo of the okrug ispolkom, with all responsibility resting on them for correctly carrying out in reality the measures approved by the TsK.

The ferocious tone used here suggests that the Ispolburo was under severe pressure to halt the process that it had started in March. While the Orgburo (and ultimately the Politburo) had decided it was time to move against Islam, higher party organizations were evidently not prepared to deal with the political consequences that Ikramov's harsh and open-ended rhetoric had unleashed. At the same time, the leadership in Moscow was applying pressure in other areas—to build schools, to liberate women, to strip the clergy of their last economic resources—that directly conflicted with orders not to inflame popular anger.

Hannah Arendt's model of the totalitarian state machinery operating by a vast and chaotic web of "transmission belts" is useful in understanding how local party workers were trapped in multiple contradictions. As the First Five-Year Plan lurched forward, everything needed to be done quickly and simultaneously. Agencies issued orders in ignorance of what other parts of the state were doing, concerned only that they meet their own goals as quickly as possible. Physical, political, and economic obstacles were brushed aside, until the price for ignoring "objective conditions" became too high and someone had to be blamed. In the center of the web, Stalin could simultaneously be all-powerful and evade responsibility, although I do not believe that the chaos that he generated was deliberately planned. In the summer of 1927 this enormous state machine had not yet reached its full speed, which guaranteed that even in the state's own terms Sredazburo's efforts to limit the destruction and confusion would fail.

SMASHING SOCIAL PILLARS

While Sredazburo was trying to delay measures against the clergy, the process of closing down Muslim social institutions continued. The okrug-level Soviet courts and ispolkoms were responsible for eliminating the Muslim courts. They also had critical help from the GPU, which was ordered to assist the Commissariat of Justice in working up a plan in the shortest time possible.¹³

In late July or early August the Commissariat of Justice presented that plan to the Ispolburo. It was a somewhat curious document, being more of a history of court-related acts than anything else, but that may have been because its authors felt that the best course of action was simply to continue what they had been doing. Kurbanov and deputy prosecutor Itvi commented that, if at one time the government

¹³PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1192, l. 71. "Proekt predlozheniia po dokladu na Ispolbiuro TsK o nastroenii dukhovenstva," by Bikson. The document is undated, but its filing context and a comment about okrug ispolkoms' poor record in interfering with spiritual administrations indicate the summer of 1927.

had been afraid to close religious courts (partly because closing courts in Bukhara and Khorezm had gone badly) now, after the former republics had abolished their courts "without any kind of legislative acts on the part of the government," the time was right to abolish courts throughout Uzbekistan by the same unspoken means.¹⁴

To illustrate what great progress had already been made in this direction, Kurbanov and Itvi produced a chart (see Table 5.1). The table is strikingly incomplete, with statistics available for 7 of the 10 okrugs only by 1925 and complete statistics only for the first half of 1927. Gaps in data were most likely due to the primitive state of the government in its early years. The table shows an increase in the numbers of courts between 1924 and 1925 only because more okrugs were reporting; this suggests that in all cases the numbers presented here are undercounts. Even when statistics are available, they are not always consistent: this table shows 8 courts in Samarkand and 14 in Kashka Daria in 1925, while Table 3.1 shows 6 in Samarkand and 4 in Kashka Daria. This table also lists a grand total of 87 religious courts for 1925, while the earlier one lists 70.

Table 5.1
Numbers of Religious Courts in Uzbekistan

Okrug	1922	1923	1924	1925	1926	1927
Tashkent	27	14	2	1	—	—
Samarkand	71	30	15	8	3	2
Khojent						1
Farghana	122	41	41	30	4	2
Andijan						2
Bukhara				12	—	—
Zerafshan						—
Kashka Daria				14	—	—
Khorezm				18	18	—
TOTALS:	220	85	58	87	27	7

Source: PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 614, l. 46.

Even these incomplete and semireliable numbers, however, indicate the impact of the laws of late 1922 – early 1923; during those years the numbers of courts in the Tashkent, Samarkand, and Farghana Okrugs had dropped by half or more. The laws plus the intervention of the OGPU would explain why Kurbanov felt that no new anticourt measures were really needed.

Shortly after Kurbanov and Itvi's report, on August 28 the Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz instructed the TsIK UzSSR to draft a decision on liquidating the courts, "in view of the fact that they have finally become obsolete."¹⁵ The courts were to be given two weeks after the publication of the decree to finish up current cases, after which time all of their responsibilities and equipment would automatically be turned over to Soviet courts. In September the TsIK SSSR and then the NKIU UzSSR confirmed these decisions, adding a ban on founding new Muslim courts and the stipulation that all Muslim courts must be closed no later than October 28, 1927—the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution.¹⁶

Drafting decrees was not the same as actually closing courts, however, and Commissariat of Justice workers did not receive specific instructions until early October. They were to conduct a two-pronged attack, first by strengthening the fledgling Soviet court system and persuading native peasants and workers to use it and second by discrediting the Muslim court system through any means possible, including publicizing evidence of corruption such as bribe-taking, ruling in favor of the rich, and so on. Methods of "administrative pressure" were expressly ruled out. Soviet okrug courts also kept track of, or at least tried to keep track of, the numbers of Muslim courts in their areas and reported them to A. Mavlianbekov.¹⁷ Still, the Uzbek government had, at best, only partial knowledge of how well its plans were being carried out.

Not surprisingly, it took much longer than two weeks after the publication of the decrees to eliminate the Muslim courts. Some of the delay was caused by lack of resources to build a replacement Soviet system; in January 1928 the Old Tashkent court officials were still complaining about working in mosques, and they were not the only officials doing so. Lack of trustworthy personnel was another problem; the same Tashkent court workers counted on their staff 11 party members, two Komsomol members, and 19 nonparty workers, of whom 25 were European and only 7 Uzbek.¹⁸ The few Uzbek workers tended to be former qadis, because Moscow was applying immense pressure for "uzbekizatsiia" of the bureaucracy, and most of the qualified natives had learned their legal thinking in madrasas.

¹⁵RGASPI F. 17, op. 27, d. 10, l. 221. Ispolburo protocol No. 112.

¹⁶PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 614, ll. 48–48b. Alexander Park, *Bolshevism in Turkestan, 1917–1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), p. 237. Alexander Vishnevskii, "Kak eto delalos' v Srednei Azii," *Nauka i religiiia* No. 2 (February 1990): pp. 50–53. TsGA Uz F. 904, op. 1, d. 108, l. 11, "Ob uprazhnenii v UzSSR kaziev," declaration by TsIK and Sovnarkom UzSSR dated only 1927.

¹⁷TsGA Uz, F. 904, op. 1, d. 96, ll. 108–109. Protocol No. 23, Oct. 5, 1927, session of the Collegium of NKIU UzSSR.

¹⁸TsGA Uz F. 904, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 42, 51. January, 1928, report on courts.

¹⁴PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 614, ll. 45–46. "Ob'iasnitel'naia zapiska" on draft decision of TsIK UzSSR to abolish Muslim courts.

Here was another case of local officials being caught in contradictory demands. On the one hand, they were ordered to hire Uzbek workers but, on the other, to weed out politically unreliable types. At various times one demand would supersede the other, but at no time could officials satisfy both. This dilemma led to cases like the following, in late 1927 in the Garm region of the Pamir Mountains (now Tajikistan). A brother and sister went to court to dispute a land inheritance. At first the court granted the sister one parcel to the brother's three. Still unhappy, the brother asked whether the court was judging according to Soviet law or according to the Sharia. "Under the Sharia," came the reply. The brother asked for a ruling under Soviet law to see if he could get all of the land that way, but Soviet law would have split the land evenly. Finally the court compromised by dividing the land into five parcels and giving the brother three.¹⁹ Note that questions of sacred versus secular law did not matter to this man; he was happiest with the law code that could get him the land that he wanted.

Despite the fact that the Soviet court system was very weak, operated in poor conditions, was run by unreliable officials, and faced with a rival backed by powerful tradition and popular support, it eventually prevailed over the Muslim courts. How this was brought about is not explicitly described in Soviet sources, but it is possible to envision a rough picture of the process.

The government's initial legal assault on the religious courts, where it could be enforced, was very effective in whittling away at the scope of the courts' power. Each new law passed in 1923 limited the courts' jurisdictions a little further, and as time passed the government was able to enforce these laws more effectively and in a wider area. TurkTsIK's move to undercut the courts' financial basis by refusing to subsidize them also limited their power, although some courts apparently were able to circumvent that by using their own official seals for financial transactions.

As the secular court system grew, it began to provide a viable and attractive legal alternative, particularly for the poor. The Commissariat of Justice and the Court-Building Section put a substantial amount of effort into propaganda that emphasized the corrupt nature of the religious courts versus the justice of "revolutionary law." While it is not possible to analyze the effects of propaganda with any sense of certainty, I suggest that the opening of an alternative legal system did make an impact on people, an impact that is perhaps best understood by looking at the analogous situation of the Jewish religious court, the *bet din*, during the Jewish emancipation in Europe.

Until the late eighteenth century European Jews had lived in semiautonomous communities within the larger Christian polity. These communities, called *kehillot*, regulated their own internal affairs, oversaw tax collection, and convened courts when necessary. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries most European Jews were "emancipated," that is, given full rights as citizens of the states in which they lived. Generally the terms of emancipation included the disbanding of the *kehillot*, since the rights of Jews as a corporate body were eliminated in exchange

for the granting of rights to Jews as individuals. The Jewish courts were not directly banned in the way that Central Asian courts were, but their authority was severely undermined because they no longer had any power to enforce their rulings; that power had been given to the larger state. As a result, Jews who were eager to exercise their new rights, who disliked traditional Jewish law, or who wanted to ensure that their suits could be enforced went to the state courts rather than the Jewish ones. Recourse to a *bet din* and abiding by its decisions became a voluntary and private matter.

The same mechanisms were at work on the Muslim courts. Where they no longer had state backing to enforce their decisions, obedience to them was rendered voluntary, and people began to turn to courts whose decisions could be enforced. This process unfolded gradually and very unevenly, depending on how well the people's courts were functioning. As a result, different okrug court organs could honestly send highly contradictory reports to the NKIu UzSSR, saying both that the influence of the Muslim courts was very strong and that it was weak.

The Muslim court system was declared officially "eliminated" on several occasions, mostly in the fall of 1927, although these declarations were followed immediately by paragraphs on how to eliminate the courts that still remained. "Soviet" courts that still judged according to Muslim law continued to be a problem. A Soviet judge in 1929 had been a former *mudarris*. A case came before him wherein a mulla had divorced his wife but did not wish to pay her alimony, and she sued for her economic rights. The judge found in her favor and gave the mulla a stiff lecture on the Quranic injunctions to support one's wife and children even after divorce!²⁰

One of the latest references to operational Muslim courts dates from a congress of NKIu UzSSR workers held in 1929, where Mavlianbekov reported: "The Sharia court, which was a sharp weapon of the clergy and bais . . . has been eliminated," and in the next breath continued "We need to uncover those kazi courts which still exist in secret form."²¹ It is quite possible that "unmasking secret kazis" was a rhetorical tool used for the dekulakization campaign and party purges that were happening at that time, but it is also likely that underground courts were still in existence. There were complaints of active Muslim courts in 1930, and in 1934 one of several Uzbeks convicted of sabotage and not fulfilling the cotton plan was listed as a qadi by profession.²² These scattered exceptions aside, however, the religious courts had ceased to be an effective social force by early 1928.

²⁰M. Mitrofanov, "Sovetskoe stroitel'stvo v Iangi-Iul'skom raione Uzbekskoi SSR," *Revoliutsionnyi Vostok* No. 6 (1929): pp. 229–230.

²¹TsGA Uz F. 904, op. 1, d. 96, l. 89, Protocol No. 21, Collegium of NKIu September 4, 1927. d. 108, l. 11, decision of TsIK and Sovnarkom UzSSR 1927, "Ob uprazhdenii v UzSSR kaziev"; d. 226, l. 2, "Rezoliutsiia—Doklad A. Mavlianbekova o rabote NKIu."

²²V. Karych, "O teoriticheskikh problemakh sovetskogo vostoka i postanovke ikh izucheniia," *Revoliutsiia i natsional'nost'* No. 1 (May 1930): p. 102. TsGA Uz F. 86, op. 10, d. 1114, l. 316.

¹⁹*Za partiiu* No. 4 (December 1927): pp. 123–124.

The Uzbek TsIK Sovetov and Sovnarkom published their "thoughts" on the final transfer of waqf property September 2, 1927, in the "Collection of Statutes and Regulations of the UzSSR." The decision stated that all waqf property that had already been taken over for inventory by the GVU prior to that date would be transferred to the jurisdiction and administration of Narkompros, effective October 1. All profits from the waqfs would go to fund education.²³ In good order, the local newspapers *langi farghona*, *Zarafshan* (Samarkand region) and *Ozod bukhoro* (but not Khiva's *Inqilob qo'iashi*) all ran prominent announcements that their waqfs had been liquidated.²⁴

This law still left open the question of what to do with the remaining waqfs that supported mosques, madrasas, and religious schools. Their confiscation had been under discussion since March 1927, but the party had taken little action. An article on Khojent Okrug reported some redistribution of rural religious waqf lands to sharecroppers but also expressed doubt that the process could continue smoothly because of opposition from clergy and their followers, the sharecroppers themselves.²⁵ The complete elimination of the waqf system, as opposed to simply requisitioning it for the state, was also delayed by the continued dependence of schools on waqf funds. In May 1928, for example, the Khojent Okrug education department cautioned that it might have trouble building the planned number of schools because too much waqf income was being leached off into "unauthorized" expenditures, and no substitute source of income was in place.²⁶ The government began to move a little more aggressively on the issue in mid-1928, as suggested by this report of an Andijan imam, Agzam Khan Tiuria [Tora], lamenting:

Not having an income for existence, I went to the village of Khanabad (Kanibad) not long ago and wished to work there as an imam, but when I found out that the government had seized the mosque's waqf land and garden, I returned home. We have begun to live badly, everywhere you look; everywhere they oppress us and press on us, and everything has become tighter.²⁷

The collectivization campaign provided the final impetus for eliminating waqfs

²³TsGA Uz F. 94, op. 1, d. 319a, l. 19. Decision No. 99 of TsIK Sovetov and Sovnarkom, originally passed August 15, 1927.

²⁴Boxed announcements of waqf liquidation in Andijan by October 12, Margelan by October 15, Namangan by October 25, Kokand by October 27. *langi farghona* Nos. 116, 120, 121 (October 21, November 1, November 7, 1927): pp. 3, 4, 10. In Samarkand Okrug by October 15. *Zarafshan* No. 98 (Nov. 15, 1927): p. 4. In Bukhara Okrug by October 20. *Ozod bukhoro* No. 115 (Oct. 24, 1927): p. 4.

²⁵A. R., "Zhizn' kishlachnaia," *Za partiiu* No. 2 (February 1928): p. 92.

²⁶RGASPI F. 62, op. 3, d. 359, ll. 95–96. Ispolburo Khojent Okrug protocol No. 19, May 18. Yet in June 1927 the party had decided that Khojent would be an easy place to eliminate Muslim schools!

²⁷RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, l. 4. July 24, 1928, report "O Musdukhovenstve," by APO Sredazburo.

entirely. An August 1, 1928, resolution of the Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz declared that the Commissariat of Land (Narkomzem) should prepare within two months to liquidate religious waqfs and the orchards and vineyards attached to them, "on the territories of okrugs [where] the land-water reform has been carried out," indicating that there were still areas untouched by earlier land reform campaigns. These lands were to be redistributed "to the toiling peasant according to the principle of actual use"—peasants who worked rented waqf land could claim ownership. Instead of requisitioning waqfs for the use of local education departments, these lands were to go directly to collective farms, unless conditions prevented it:

5) Free waqf lands, and lands of the same designated category which are found in rental use by non-working or part-time working owners, are to be used as additional pieces [to be added to] existing kolkhozes and for the organization of new kolkhozes, and where kolkhozes are absent and there is no possibility to organize new ones, grant [the land] as an additional piece to an individual poor owner.

This transfer was to be completed by the beginning of 1929. The regions that had not yet undergone land reform (Surkhan Daria, Kashka Daria, and, as always, Khorezm) were to be subjected to land reform and the confiscation of waqfs simultaneously, certainly a recipe for serious upheaval. Aware of that danger, the Ispolburo also recommended that the project be accompanied by "an explanatory campaign in the periodical literature,"²⁸ to convince the peasants that everything was being done in their interest.

Poor organization and corruption remained formidable obstacles to successfully eliminating waqfs. The same month that the Ispolburo adopted its resolution, a report on land redistribution in Uzbekistan commented that some poor peasants were, in fact, receiving land, but haphazardly at best.²⁹ The waqf system officially ceased to exist by January 1929, but in reality hung on until at least 1930, when "responsible workers" were still being arrested for the crime of distributing uninventoried waqf lands to friends in return for half the harvest.³⁰ Most likely, legal and illegal waqfs were not completely eliminated until collectivization was completed, and even then, kolkhoz members found ways to fund mosques from the land. Certainly, though, religious institutions of all kinds were badly damaged by the confiscation of their property, by whatever means that it occurred.

Muslim schools began to be seriously affected by the increased competition for waqf income in 1927, as the aforementioned Andijan incident illustrated. The madrasas in settled areas were hit the hardest, because their graduates were perceived to pose the greatest danger to the regime. A detailed Sredazburo report on the clergy, written in July 1928, noted declines in the numbers of students and

²⁸RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d.446, ll. 108–110. Protocol No. 51, session of the Ispolburo August 1, 1928. The decision was confirmed by Sredazburo on September 3.

²⁹An. Anishev, "Zadachi zemleustroistva v Uzbekistane," *Za partiiu* No. 8 (August 1928): p. 49.

³⁰"Khvosty ismailovshchiny," *Uzbekistanskaia pravda*, No. 62 (March 20, 1930): p. 3.

schools in several areas:

In Kokand in 1926–1927 18 madrasas functioned, with 1098 students [*mulla-bachei*]. At the beginning of 1928 only three madrasas continued to function with 145 students, [although] from the beginning of the school year at the aforementioned three madrasas there were up to 400 students. . . .

In the cities of Andijan and Namangan last year there were 23 madrasas with up to 1600 students; in 1928 the number of madrasas has not declined, but the number of students declined to approximately 862 (these figures are not quite exact) . . .

In the past Samarkand had the most famous madrasas in Central Asia. Now it has not one. Most of them have been exploited by the Mestkhoz, since they were suitable for housing. Individual teachers conduct classes at home; these may number five . . .

There is a slightly different situation with the madrasas in the Old City of Bukhara. Last year there were four madrasas here with 120 students; in 1928 there are two madrasas, but with a significant rise in the number of students—176 in all.³¹

The report continued that no madrasas had officially existed in Tashkent since 1926 (indicating that the Old City Ispolkom's decree had never actually been repealed), but a few teachers still conducted classes in their homes. In general, the number of makhtabs and qorikhonas also declined in urban areas, but not in the countryside.

The declines correlated, to some degree, with the condition of the Soviet school system. Where secular schools were stronger, religious ones tended to be weaker, and viceversa, following the same pattern that the secular and religious court systems did. The condition of the courts and schools together could be used as one indicator of general Soviet strength in an area; Andijan had both religious courts and schools operating openly in 1929, while Communist officials were continually dissatisfied with conditions there.³²

Pressure to establish Soviet schools that taught Central Asians technical skills in their native languages increased sharply as the Great Break progressed, from both the industrialization drive and the continued "uzbekizatsiia" campaign to bring as many natives into responsible positions as possible. Zelenskii passionately urged that the "scissors crisis" between the demand for skilled natives and the actual supply of such workers be resolved quickly.³³ Demand by Uzbeks themselves for secular education increased as people saw technical certificates as keys to economic and social betterment. Even Muslim schools tried to meet the new demands by

adding more science to their curricula.³⁴ In spite of the increasing need, however, the resources were simply not there to build enough schools. As late as November 1928 Khorezm Okrug, admittedly a perennial problem, had 47 Soviet schools to over 400 Muslim ones for its rural population.³⁵ This imbalance in educational supply and demand would remain for many years to come, even though the massive Soviet campaign for universal primary education that was launched in 1931 partially corrected the problem.

ANTI-ISLAMIC PROPAGANDA

The approach of fall meant that it was time to plan the implementation of the anticlerical campaign. The 14th Sredazburo Plenum, which met October 8–10, had surprisingly little to say on the issue, however. The plenum was dominated by discussions of how to rationalize the apparat, correct endemic incompetence in the judiciary ("the lowest people, many of whom have been expelled from the party")³⁶ and continue the women's campaign. Only Ibragimov mentioned the clergy directly, and that was to reiterate his opposition to attacking the Turkmen clerical establishment too hastily—the party was still not ready to take over the social role the clergy played.³⁷

Outside of the plenum, however, plans for energetic antireligious propaganda developed rapidly. The agitprop section of Sredazburo and the Antireligious Commission of the Uzbek Central Committee's Agitprop Department had set up cells of the Union of Godless in Khojent, Bukhara, and Samarkand over the spring and summer of 1927. None of them reported much success, however.³⁸ The Komsomol had also begun to conduct propaganda in Soviet schools, with equally poor results. The Komsomol's failure is interesting, though, because it was due not so much to youthful zealotry as to continued ethnic mistrust and misunderstanding.

There were effectively two Komsomols in Uzbekistan, for Europeans and for Turkestanis. The Europeans did not know native languages or customs, and few Uzbek Komsomol members had learned Russian. Komsomol members in the Old City of Tashkent had virtually no contact with the Europeans who ran the Okrug Committee. The rural situation was, of course, worse; Komsomol cells had terrible trouble recruiting girls and were too weak to resist pressure from local elites. In the

³⁴A. Arsharuni, "Antireligioznaia propaganda na Sovetskom Vostoke," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia*, No. 1 (January 1929): p. 73. Gali Ibragimov, "O religioznykh shkolakh, zhurnalakh i antireligioznoi propagande," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 17–18 (September 1928): pp. 147–149.

³⁵Gikalo, "Osnovnye zadachi partii i sovlasti v Khorezmskom i Tashauzskom okrugakh," *Za partiiu* No. 11 (November 1928): p. 90. Gikalo was a deputy secretary of Sredazburo.

³⁶RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 217, l. 116. Stenogram, 14th Sredazburo Plenum, Nodel speaking.

³⁷RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 227, ll. 268–269.

³⁸RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1146, ll. 30–36, 49, 57, 63. Memos from local organizations.

³¹RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, ll. 5–6. "Doklad o musul' manskom dukhovenstve," by the Agitation-Propaganda Department of Sredazburo, July 24, 1928.

³²PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 5, d. 613, l. 11. February 13, 1929, memo from Andijan agitation-propaganda worker Rakhima Aiubov to the Andijan Okrug and city party committees.

³³I. Zelenskii, "V bor'be za kulturu," *Za partiiu* No. 7 (July 1928): p. 10. When the supply and demand lines were too far apart on an economic graph, it looked like a scissors with open blades—a "scissors crisis."

region of Chust, near Namangan, a religious youth organization called Din (religion) was itself recruiting komsomols, who were still religiously observant anyway.

Given the immense language barriers, it was likely that rural komsomols did not know that they were supposed to be atheists. It was still often the case that party instructions were completely ineffective because they could not be read. Ten years after the October Revolution, a rural cell in Turkmenistan explained that they ignored most party memos that came their way because they could not read Russian. If a document looked important enough to warrant understanding, they had to send 30 *versts* on horseback for a translator and pay him 100 rubles, which they could seldom afford to do. This certainly explains Ibragimov's reluctance to push things too quickly in the Turkmen SSR. Uzbek rural cells had similar problems. Alcoholism, laziness, and general bad behavior also plagued local cells.³⁹ Nonetheless, some propagandists were optimistic that education could overcome religion—even though children learned Muslim customs at home they could be taught proper behavior by example at school. Teaching the basics of evolution and technology, particularly on religious holidays, would do the rest.⁴⁰

Party directives always stipulated that propaganda developed in Russia had to be tailored to fit local and non-Russian situations, although they were never precise on how this was to be done.⁴¹ The real work was assigned to native antireligious propagandists, who presumably knew best how to convince their compatriots of the truth of Soviet scientific atheism. Emilian Iaroslavskii, taking a page from Sultan Galiev, instructed that caution was especially required with the Turkic peoples because they considered themselves oppressed as *Muslims*:

A careless approach to the matter of antireligious propaganda among these peoples [Tatars, Uzbeks, etc.] can call up memories of this oppression and be interpreted by the most backward and the most fanatic part of the Muslim population as a repeat of the past, when Christian missionaries reviled the Mohammedan faith. Therefore as a rule, it is necessary to arrange that antireligious propaganda among Muslims must absolutely be carried out by those comrades who have themselves come from among the Muslims.⁴²

In Uzbekistan, it fell to Narkompros chairman Mannan Ramzi to take directives from Moscow and craft them into a set of practical instructions for antireligious propagandists in the field. Ramzi (born Abdullaev in 1898; died ca. 1939) was an

³⁹A. Glukhovskii, "O slabykh uchastkakh komsomolskoi rabote," *Za partiiu* No. 1 (September 1927): pp. 57–65. RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 227, l. 170. Speech by Manzhara at the 14th Sredazburo Plenum.

⁴⁰N. Rajabzade, "Ish maktablarida dinsizliq tarbiyasi," *Maorif va o'qituvchi* No. 9–10 (1927): pp. 28–30.

⁴¹"Ob antireligioznoi propogande sredi natsional'nostei SSSR," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 12 (June 1926): pp. 62–68.

⁴²E. Iaroslavskii, "Antireligioznaia propoganda sredi musul'man," *Bezbozhnik* (newspaper) No. 7 (1925): p. 2.

author and playwright who joined the party in 1920, worked as the director of the Uzbek Commissariat of Enlightenment from roughly 1926 to 1930, and in 1929 was elected to the Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz. He was arrested in 1930 on charges of poisoning a fellow writer and harboring Pan-Turkist and/or nationalist sympathies and died in prison in approximately 1939.⁴³

Ramzi's program for conducting anti-Islamic propaganda was first presented at a party conference held in Tashkent in November 25–26, 1927.⁴⁴ His instructions were later printed in a pamphlet entitled *Khayoldan haqiqatga* (*From Illusion to the Truth*, written in Uzbek, although he spoke to the conference in Russian).⁴⁵ Ramzi's program followed the line advocated at the 12th Party Congress in 1923, with a few modifications to adapt to local conditions. Its cornerstone was scientific, materialist education. The foundation of religion, according to Ramzi, was the ignorance and fear of natural forces, which were then used by the ruling class to exploit the masses.⁴⁶ Education could wash away crippling ignorance, but Ramzi cautioned that "antireligious agitation" must be approached gently and without force:

When starting agitation among the peasants do not begin directly by saying "there is no god" or "the prophets are liars," rather you must explain the foundations of Marxism to the peasants easily, understandably, with simple words; you need to begin by explaining natural events based on scientific proof, you need to teach the scientific basis of production in the village economy.⁴⁷

Ramzi spelled out in some detail where and how materialist education was to take place. The formation of antireligious circles and cells of the Union of Godless was particularly important. These groups were the primary forum for lectures, discussions, and Marxist analyses of Muslim law and customs. However, any public gathering of people was a potential audience for antireligious views. Ramzi suggested holding discussions in workers' clubs, "red" teahouses (*chaykhonalar*),

⁴³James Critchlow, "Religious-Nationalist Dissent in the Turkestan Communist Party: An Old Document Surfaces," *Report on the USSR* Vol. 2, No. 3 (January 19, 1990): pp. 19–21; *Istoriia Uzbekskoi SSR*, vol. 3 (Tashkent: 1967), p. 572; Edward Allworth, ed. *Central Asia: 120 Years of Russian Rule* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1989), p. 372. D. I. Manzhara, "O chistke partii," *Partrabotnik* No. 4–5 (1933): pp. 57–61. RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 2471, l. 92. September 23, 1930, protocol of the Central Asian Regional Bureau of the Godless.

⁴⁴PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1168, ll. 1–150. Delo 1169 concerns day 2 of the conference, on Christians and Jews. It was presided over by a committee that included Ramzi, Khansuvarov, Sredazburo Jewish worker Amitin-Shapiro, Savlin, and Vaskhikh-Mukhamedov.

⁴⁵The Russian stenogram of Ramzi's presentation is in PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1168, ll. 45–59.

⁴⁶Mannan Ramzi, *Khayoldan haqiqatga* (Tashkent: 1928), pp. 7–8.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 64.

and red corners or any place where people gathered in the evening.⁴⁸

The first place to organize antireligious circles was within the Uzbek Communist Party and Komsomol themselves, as party officials had stated repeatedly. Ramzi sharply criticized party members for adhering to religion and emphasized that "there is no place in our party for religious Communists."⁴⁹ He lamented the fact that "Communists and workers" were attending circumcision ceremonies and other such events and demanded that these "sick people" cease their activities.⁵⁰

Ramzi's proposal for ridding Communists of religious belief included setting aside one day each week for party members to discuss antireligious agitation, and organizing a special cadre devoted solely to antireligious work among party members. The activists were to set up and lead antireligious circles and cells of the Union of Godless (in Uzbek *Khudosizlar*) and help develop atheist training courses for potential antireligious workers.⁵¹

Movies, radio, and theater were also important for the party's program. Ramzi urged broadcasting lectures and scientific presentations on the radio, particularly just before and during Muslim holidays. He himself made several of these broadcasts.⁵² Movies could be used to "defame the origins of religion and the clergy" and were a major tool for reaching women, most of whom were illiterate. Two of the titles that Ramzi mentioned specifically were *Ikkinchi khotin* (*The Second Wife*) and *Chachvon* (*The Veil*), which had only recently come out.

The women's magazine *Yer iuzi* (*Face of the Earth*) ran an article on the making of *Chachvon*, illustrating its militant atheist uses. The piece featured stills from the movie, showing a young woman fending off the advances of a lurid older male, then being comforted by her mother. Having been liberated by Communism, the heroine not only unveils, but holds a pen to her lips while wearing a rather fetching shirt and tie! This heavy-handed coding (Communism brings literacy and power, which are masculine) was quite typical of antireligious propaganda across the USSR.⁵³ Like the Jadids before him, Ramzi was also a champion of theater as

a teaching tool and wanted anti-Islamic plays to be written as soon as possible. He lamented the lack of print material and demanded that more antireligious stories be written and published.⁵⁴

Ramzi modified one of Sultan Galiev's ideas (whether consciously or not is unknown) and suggested that the party rely on workers themselves to discuss and criticize religion in their own workshops and neighborhoods, rather than bringing in non-proletarian Communists. Select workers would have to be trained for this task, but Ramzi confidently asserted, "This work is easy for them because they know the worker's life since they themselves are workers. They understand this very well."⁵⁵

When it came to agitation in the village, however, Ramzi showed no such confidence. He portrayed the Uzbek *dehqon* as beset by ignorance and fear of the forces of nature, plagued by a variety of diseases, forced to rely solely upon "imams, ishans, fortune-tellers (*folbinlar*), itinerate preachers (*qalandarlar*), and prayer-leaders, healing sickness by conjuring or blowing [air]."⁵⁶ Such peasants could not be trusted to carry out antireligious work themselves, so Ramzi enlisted outsiders (Communists, doctors and other medical workers, agronomists) to help. Communist agitators and agronomists were to give lectures and lead discussions on basic science: the causes of wind, rain, thunderstorms, various plant diseases, and the changing of the seasons, how crops grow, and how to get a better yield. If these phenomena were successfully explained, Ramzi said, "Then the *dehqon* will not say 'the crops grow by the will and kindness of God.'"⁵⁷

Antireligious lecturers were instructed to discuss traditional *dostons* (epic poetry) and myths about Sufi saints, devils, jinns, devs, and similar creatures from a scientific point of view, provoke argument from the peasants, and defeat them with science and logic. Medical workers were to explain the scientific bases of disease to their patients, assure them that sickness does not come from the divine, and destroy their faith in traditional healers.⁵⁸ Ramzi showed a tendency to relish exploiting the peasants' ignorance and lack of sophistication in debate, despite his own instructions to respect the peasants and speak on their level. In a section of the pamphlet called "Catching the *Murid*" (*Murid ovlash*), he wrote: "It is necessary to publish and tell to the peasants the interesting and amusing events that happen in catching the *murid*, to explain that the ishans are parasites and spongers, to make use of and generalize the peasants' own ideas in order to criticize them, [and] use their own arguments as proof."⁵⁹ City-bred Communists often showed great

⁴⁸The "teahouse," or *chaykhona* is usually not a building, but a set of small raised platforms where men sit on cushions, drink tea, eat *plov* (pilaf), and talk for hours. *Chaykhonas* were considered prime locations for all kinds of propaganda, since men spent most of their leisure hours there. L. Kirsanov, "Krasnaia chaikhana, kak tsentr politprosvet-raboty v kishlakakh Uzbekistana," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 5 (September-October 1925): pp. 168-170. Another traditional avenue used for propaganda was the men's *gap* or talk: nightly gatherings for debate, philosophizing and gossip. F. Meden, "Besprizornnye uchastki massovoi raboty v Sredne Azii," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 10 (May 1927): pp. 75-78.

⁴⁹Ramzi, p. 55.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

⁵²PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1201, l. 34. Protocol No. 3, session of the Antireligious Commission of APO TsK KP(b)Uz, December 5, 1927.

⁵³"Chachvon," *Yer iuzi* No. 28-29 (October 27, 1927): pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴Ramzi, pp. 58-59, 68.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, p. 44. Ramzi used the term *haram tomoq*, which I have rendered "spongers." In a religious sense the term means "forbidden food," such as pork. However, it can also mean parasite, extortioner, or sponger.

contempt for peasants (Marx and Lenin were somewhat notorious for their hatred of rural life), and Ramzi displayed a similar attitude throughout his pamphlet.

In order to assure the stability and growth of antireligious organizations in the villages, Ramzi suggested using the established system of urban-rural cultural patronage (*shefstvo* in Russian, *otolik* in Uzbek), whereby large organizations in the cities would sponsor rural antireligious groups or projects and send resources to them.⁶⁰ He finished his pamphlet by emphasizing the importance of Soviet education in antireligious work and pleaded for a new school system to be built.

These tactics seemed sensible in theory, but the conference where Ramzi presented them illustrated a host of practical problems that confronted anti-Islamic activists in the field. Whipping militant atheist cadres into shape was going to be a long and difficult task for party instructors. Khansuvarov complained that no action had yet been taken on orders from the 13th Sredazburo Plenum and said that the Union of Godless had to revise its thinking to match the work of the progressive clergy and that it was necessary to improve the party's "low cultural level," compared with that of the clergy.

He then engaged in a fascinating dialogue with the audience, as rank-and-file members tried to convey their side of the story. Khansuvarov stated the obvious, that propagandists did not like to do antireligious work. According to the stenogram, a voice from the audience called out:

And sometimes they are afraid of it.

Khansuvarov: Yes, sometimes they are afraid of it.

Party influence in the old city mahallas and rural villages was very weak. Khansuvarov explained: "There are many of these mahallas in which there is not a single Communist, but there are 10 ishans. Neither the GPU nor the police can help."⁶¹ Khansuvarov fully understood why antireligious propagandists would be afraid to do their jobs. The average native Communist, he said, was afraid of both the old and the new worlds, and so he tried to hedge his bets as much as possible by going to party meetings and then praying at home. Someone said: "Between two fires!" and Khansuvarov answered, "Yes, sitting between two fires."⁶² With

propagandists such as these, afraid and receiving little support from the government, it is no wonder that anti-Islamic work was all but nonexistent. Khansuvarov could not offer them much help or inspiration, either. His proposals for improving the situation were the usual vague generalizations about the need to organize cells, distribute literature, and recruit the intelligentsia to the atheist side with no guidance as to how these goals should be accomplished.⁶³

The Uzbek Union of Militant Godless (*Soiuz Kurashchan Khudosizlar*) was not yet in a position to fulfill its prescribed duties. Although cells of the Godless had been around for a while, the organization held its first congress only in March 1928 in Andijan. The Godless claimed to have approximately 500 members at the time, but since they did not conduct systematic surveys of their organization, this was a broad guess at best.⁶⁴ The Tashkent Okrug Bureau of the Godless reported that by May, a mere two months later, it supervised 58 cells with 1,812 members. The following August, however, Stupochenko informed the Central Soviet of the USSR Godless that there were 1812 cells in the Tashkent Okrug Bureau, with an "unsatisfactory," but unspecified, number of workers.⁶⁵ The situation in Bukhara was worse. The organization existed largely on paper, kept only scant records, and was not aware of the existence of other Godless cells in the area.⁶⁶ A 1931 survey of the Godless' membership across the USSR estimated that there were 60,000 members in Uzbekistan. However, given the organization's propensity to count "paper" members or invent their figures out of whole cloth, that number is highly suspect.⁶⁷

The Godless organization was riddled with problems at all levels. The Russians who directed propaganda knew very little about Islam or Central Asia and, for the most part, did not care to learn. Their ignorance caused them to make fundamental mistakes in the formulation and aims of their product, which were then compounded by the fact that they faced an unwilling audience. It was highly disorganized—like the Komsomol cells, the Russian Tashkent group and the Uzbek groups had very little to do with each other and devoted more energy to internal intrigue than to their ostensible jobs. In Andijan in 1928 the Godless and Komsomol cells organized an anti-Qurbon Bayram "carnival," which they claimed attracted 5,000 people to

they and their tribute were passed between two fires before being given to the khan.

⁶⁰PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1168, ll. 40–42.

⁶¹*Khudosizlar* No. 1 (1928): p. 55.

⁶²RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1615, l. 22. "Otchet o rabote Okruzhnoe Biuro Soiuza Khudasizlar za vremia s 1 ianvaria 1928 po 1 maia 1928." GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 14, l. 132. "Doklad o rabote Tashkentskogo Okruzhnogo Biuro SB," by Stupochenko and Kobetskii, delivered August 20, 1928.

⁶³RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1978, l. 23. "Dokladnaia zapiska v APPO SAB" (Sredazburo), an account of an investigatory trip to Bukhara in April 1929.

⁶⁴GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 42, l. 40. "Kontrol' nye tsifry rosta sostava SVB na vtoruiu polovinu 1931 g." Daniel Peris, *Storming the Heavens: The Soviet League of the Militant Godless* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 175–176.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 69. *Shefstvo/otolik* was one of the government's primary means of bridging the chasm between urban and rural populations in the 1920s. Party cells within factories or other organizations would adopt villages and conduct "political-cultural enlightenment" projects aimed at their clients. The program was not terribly successful, due to the mutual ignorance and suspicion between sponsors and clients, and seems to have been dropped in the 1930s. G. Shibailo, "Osnovnye voprosy shefskoi raboty," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia*, No. 10 (May 1926): pp. 12–14. *Shefstvo rabochikh Tashkenta nad kishlakom 1924–1929. Sbornik dokumentov* (Tashkent: 1962).

⁶¹PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1168, ll. 23, 27.

⁶²Ibid., l. 35. This astonishing exchange is an echo of the ancient Eurasian steppe custom of passing goods or people between two fires to purify them. When Alexander Nevskii and other thirteenth century Russian princes presented tribute to the Golden Horde,

demonstrations and question-and-answer sessions designed to mock the clergy.⁶⁸ This was entirely ignored by the Tashkent Bureau. The Uzbek group lost its leadership after the arrests of Batu and Ramzi and had trouble replacing them.⁶⁹ The central Godless organization in Moscow had tremendous difficulty keeping track of its Uzbek branches and often pleaded in vain for information from them.⁷⁰ In a bureaucratic system obsessed with documentation, the Uzbek Union of Militant Godless did not manage to organize or preserve its records, an indication of both the poor state they that were in and the low esteem that they were granted by the rest of the party apparat.

The problem of Russian ignorance of Islam was a continual plague. Time after time Godless officials begged, cajoled, and demanded that propagandists study Islam thoroughly, saying that they knew “murderously little” about the religion, but their exhortations apparently went unheeded.⁷¹ Ignorance of Islam seriously diluted the impact of propaganda. The most egregious mistakes that propagandists made stemmed from assumptions that Islam functioned similarly to Christianity. This, plus the logic of Soviet nationality policy, led the Godless to try to separate religious from national identities. It was permissible to criticize the former, but not the latter. However, most Central Asians did not differentiate between national identity and religion, making this a ludicrous idea.⁷²

The all-union and local branches of the Godless, such as they were, used every outlet available to them to spread propaganda, including newspapers and journals, movies, public demonstrations, radio broadcasts, and posters. The propaganda expressed three essential themes: (1) mullas, ishans, and other “cult servants” worked for the oppressing classes to help exploit workers and peasants, (2) religion developed as a way for primitive man to understand and control the incomprehen-

⁶⁸“Andijon hayitga qarshi qattiq qo’zghaldi,” *Khudosizlar* No. 4 (1928): pp. 40–41. Given that Andijan was a clerical stronghold, the high crowd estimate seems extremely doubtful.

⁶⁹RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 2471, l. 92. September 23, 1930 protocol of the Central Asian Regional Bureau of the Godless.

⁷⁰GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 31, l. 77 September 30, 1929 circular note from Oleshchuk demanding more reports from all local cells; RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 2471, l. 33, 1930 complaint from Kobetskii that he was not receiving protocols in a timely fashion. F. 62, op. 2, d. 2928, ll. 7, 15, April 17, 1932, central SVB request for information on local activities.

⁷¹I. Kiselev, “Protiv boga i religii,” *Za partiiu* No. 1 (January 1928): p. 86; V. Mokeev, “Nashi zadachi v antireligioznoi propagande,” *Za partiiu* No. 1–2 (February 1929): pp. 73–79; RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 221, ll. 98–99; F. 62, op. 2, d. 739, l. 61, “Tezisy. Po dokladu tov. Ramzi ob antireligioznoi propagande sredi osnovnykh natsional’nostei Uzbekistana.”

⁷²M. Kobetskii, “Antireligioznoe vospitanie v sovetskoi shkole natsional’nykh raionov.” *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 6 (March 1928), pp. 61–65. The Estonian, Latvian, and Polish clergies were also creating problems by equating religious and national persecution. Kobetskii’s emphasis on the need to study Islam was unintentionally underlined by a typesetter’s error at the end of his article, where an Arabic-script emblem of the USSR was printed upside down.

ble forces of nature and could be eliminated with basic scientific knowledge, and (3) Islam brutally oppressed and exploited women. As the collectivization and industrialization campaigns developed, Islam as a barrier to higher production became the dominant theme.

The USSR Union of Militant Godless exerted its influence primarily through the newspaper *Bezbozhnik* and the journals *Bezbozhnik* and *Antireligioznik*. In fact, promoting subscriptions to these publications seems to have consumed the bulk of the union’s energy. In order to extend the reach of antireligious propaganda in Uzbekistan, the APO TsK KP(b)Uz funded an Uzbek-language journal, *Khudosizlar*, which ran for about five years. Ramzi was named editor and put in charge of the committee to produce the journal, promising that it would be available in time for Ramadan, no later than March 10, 1928.⁷³

The low literacy rate in Uzbekistan meant that print propaganda was used as a secondary tactic by the Uzbek Godless—for most of its run *Khudosizlar* had a circulation of 2,000–3,000, which increased to 7,200 during its last year of publication. Because the journal was being produced in the middle of the chaotic shift from Arabic script to a Latin alphabet, it was difficult for even an educated person to read.⁷⁴ *Khudosizlar* ran a mélange of articles, most of them on how to conduct oral propaganda, such as “Methods of Organization against Religion,” or “The Task of Antireligious Propaganda for the Village Teacher.” It also carried news of Godless organizations’ activities and meetings and examples of propaganda, such as “Parasites: Against the Spongers’ Holiday,” a diatribe by Ramzi against clerical exploitation at Qurbon Bayram, or “Counterrevolution and the Clergy,” about how the clergy were disrupting cotton production in the Farghana Valley.⁷⁵ The fickleness and counterrevolutionary character of the Muslim clergy was a favorite theme of the journal throughout its existence, as was the class nature of Islam. Articles on basic science were another regular feature, part of the theory that scientific education would dispel religious superstition. These ranged from “The Appearance of Life and the Human Species on Earth,” which featured pictures of dinosaurs, single-celled animals, and a boy with a tail, to “Could there be Life on Mars?” a more speculative import from a European writer. Anti-Islamic fiction and

⁷³TsGA Uz, F. 94, op. 2, d. 41, ll. 8, 31. Protocol of the APO TsK KP(b)Uz for the original January 29, 1928, decision; follow-up at a session of the Collegium of the Printing Department of TsK KP(b)Uz, February 7, 1928.

⁷⁴The first issue of *Khudosizlar* was written mostly in the modified Arabic script of 1923–1927, but also used an early version of the United Turkic Latin Alphabet, which contained a combination of Latin, Cyrillic, and a few invented characters. Over time the journal used fewer Arabic and more Latin fonts, becoming entirely Latin by 1931. The Latin system gradually regularized and became more readable, until it was replaced by a Cyrillic-based alphabet in 1941. On latinization, see William Fierman, *Language Planning and National Development: The Uzbek Experience* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1991), pp. 98–110.

⁷⁵Qurbon Bayram/Hayt (Feast of the Sacrifice), marks the end of the pilgrimage season and Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son Ismail (in the Muslim tradition).

poetry by Uzbek writers such as former Jadid Abdalrauf Fitrat and N. Rahimi were also standard.⁷⁶ The Uzbek Godless also produced a newspaper called *Khudosizlar*, but no copies of it seem to have survived.

The Russian-language antireligious serials circulated in Uzbekistan, but few Muslims could have read and been influenced by them. Certainly, leaders such as Hamza, Ramzi, and Ikramov drew on them for propaganda ideas, but it is doubtful that ordinary Uzbeks would have bothered with them.⁷⁷ Kobetskii made some effort at developing an "antireligious reader" in Uzbek, probably for use as a sourcebook by propagandists. However, since his proposal was to translate a textbook written for Russian peasants into Uzbek, the project most likely failed.⁷⁸ Nine years later the Orgburo of the Uzbek Godless was still calling for a native-language antireligious reader.⁷⁹ In 1928 Ipatkhojaev, an Uzbek member of the Tashkent Okrug Bureau, suggested translating the Quran into Uzbek, on the intriguing theory that greater knowledge of what the Quran actually said would be helpful for antireligious propaganda. However, the group decided that it did not have the funds to pursue this project.⁸⁰

Plans for the antiholiday campaigns always called for the mass printing of posters, pamphlets, wall newspapers, and banners, with the texts provided by the central Godless and translated into local languages. Posters were to be designed so that the illiterate person would get the point as well as the literate. They showed evil-looking caricatures of ishans and bays attempting to block elections to the soviets, for example, only to be shooed out by handsome, well-muscled peasants.⁸¹ Pamphlets and small booklets like *Protiv Qurbon Bairam/Qurbon bayramga qarshi* (*Against the Feast of the Sacrifice*) were to be sold as fund raisers for local Godless organizations.⁸²

The intellectual level of anti-Islamic propaganda was generally quite low,

relying on crude humor and extreme stereotypes. For example, the story "Allah Can Do Everything," concerned a poor peasant couple who lost their son to disease and then their only cow to a greedy and heartless mulla, and an article on "Ishans and Murids (Turkestan)," depicted the Sufis as fraudulent, food-grubbing parasites.⁸³ Posters done up in Moscow regularly depicted Allah (seriously offensive in itself) as a thick-lipped, stupid character. *Khudosizlar* did not have the budget to use many illustrations, and the few cover drawings that it did run in 1931 were obviously boilerplate from Moscow, although at least one cartoon appeared of a turbaned mulla carousing with wine and half-naked women.⁸⁴

The Godless organizations in Uzbekistan struggled to develop and maintain their cadres, with little success. Stupochenko and especially her successor Solovev spent a great deal of energy on training courses for antireligious activists. Nevertheless, there were endless complaints about the shortage of cadres or of native members for those cadres, the deep ignorance of cadre members (not only of Islam but of the principles of antireligious propaganda), or the general reluctance of cadres to do their jobs.⁸⁵

The job performance of the Tashkent Godless was additionally hurt when it became embroiled in such intense personal/sexual conflict that it almost tore itself apart. This conflict, which had been brewing for some months, erupted in a tumultuous meeting on June 8, 1928. The organization's major problems were overwork (*peregruzhenost'*) and poor discipline, according to Stupochenko's opening address. She said that the group had 41 active members, all of whom were burdened with so many tasks from other organizations that they had trouble attending to their antireligious work.⁸⁶ Solovev (then her subordinate) stood up and publicly accused Stupochenko of arrogance, ignorance, and rude language. She, in turn, accused him of inviting her to his apartment late at night with improper motives. An additional soap opera quality was added to the dispute by the presence of a younger man, a nonparty member and by insinuation Stupochenko's lover, who was evidently widely disliked. That sexism was an important factor in all this was clear from the fact that even Stupochenko's defenders accused her of having "a real woman's screech" and otherwise indicated that they disliked working for a

⁷⁶Z. Alim, "Dinga qarshi tashviqot usullari," *Khudosizlar* No. 4 (1928): pp. 27–35; F. Rahman, "Dinga qarshi targhibotda qishloq muallimining vazifasi," *Khudosizlar* No. 2 (1929): pp. 54–56; Ramzi, "Tekin khur, harom tomoqlarning haitiga qarshi," *Khudosizlar* No. 3 (1928): pp. 3–5; "Iqtisodi aksilinqilobi va ruhonilar," *Khudosizlar* No. 6 (1931): pp. 3–5; "Yerda tiriklik va odamzodining paydo bo'lishi," *Khudosizlar* No. 11–12 (1929): pp. 62–70; S. Bok, "Marsda hayot qanday bo'luvi mumkin?" *Khudosizlar* No. 7–8 (1930): pp. 46–47.

⁷⁷For a useful digest of anti-Islamic articles in the journal *Bezbozhnik*, see Fanny Bryan, "Anti-Islamic Propaganda: *Bezbozhnik*, 1925–1935," *Central Asian Survey* Vol. 5, No. 1 (1986): pp. 39–47.

⁷⁸GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 14, l. 138. December 14, 1927, protocol of the Working Presidium of the Union of Militant Godless.

⁷⁹PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 12, d. 614, l. 90. March 5, 1936, session of the Presidium of the Orgburo of TsS SVBUz.

⁸⁰RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1196, l. 107. Protocol No. 6, February 11, 1928.

⁸¹P. Zaitsev, "Provedenie izbiratel'noi kampanii v Uzbekistane," *Vlast' sovetov* No. 9 (February 27, 1927): p. 13.

⁸²GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 17, l. 36.

⁸³"Allah vse mozhet," *Bezbozhnik* (journal) No. 18 (October 1928): pp. 6–7. A. A., "Ishany i miuridy (Turkestan)," *Bezbozhnik* (newspaper) No. 11 (March 15, 1925): p. 7.

⁸⁴N. Rahimi, "Muroqobo," *Khudosizlar* No. 11–12 (1929): p. 60.

⁸⁵RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1196, l. 103. Protocol No. 5, Tashkent Okrug Bureau Union of Godless, February 7, 1928, on organizing classes. F. 62, op. 2, d. 1614, l. 10. F. 62, op. 2, d. 2471, l. 34, 1930 statement that there were no native instructors available, only Europeans. "Materialy soveshchaniia po postonovke partiinogo prosveshcheniia v vostochnykh natsional'nykh oblastiakh i respublikakh," *Kommunisticheskaia revoliutsiia* No. 2 (January 1928): p. 92. "Bezbozhniki gotoviat novye kadry," *Uzbekistanskaia pravda* No. 194 (October 10, 1929): p. 3.

⁸⁶RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1614, l. 12. Protocol No. 2, June 8, 1928, "Zasedanie fraktsii KP(b)Uz Tashkentskogo Okruzhnogo Biuro Soiuzu Khudosizlar." Only a few people did antireligious work full-time, and the problem of overwork plagued the Godless at all levels.

woman.⁸⁷ With the leadership embroiled in such drama, it is little wonder that they couldn't produce effective propaganda.

The infighting attracted attention from the center, bringing Kobetskii from Moscow to observe the situation first-hand. It took him only one meeting to decide that there were "abnormal interrelations" in the Tashkent Okrug Bureau. However, in his report to Moscow Kobetskii paid much more attention to the group's shortcomings than to the rivalry between Stupochenko and Solovev. The bureau had too few members and did not assign useful work to those whom it had. Instead it was prone to "mistakes," such as sending "antireligious discussion leaders to a mosque for Shakhsei-Vakhsei."⁸⁸

Kobetskii's locating the root of the problem in low membership was odd, given the obvious personality and power conflicts involved. His proposed solutions were vague and unhelpful: increase membership, especially of Uzbeks, by large amounts; organize Godless cells in the villages; begin campaigns around the anniversary of the October Revolution, Women's Day, and the Red Army; get the Komsomol more involved in antireligious work; improve the quality of propaganda; strengthen work among women; and do not send anti-Islamic speakers into mosques for Shakhsei-Vakhsei. None of these instructions touched on the rivalry between Stupochenko and Solovev. Instead, they reflected the goals and preoccupations of the Moscow center.

CRUSHING THE CLERGY

Anti-Islamic propaganda was the public face of the party's campaign, but clearly it was ineffective. The real work against the clergy was carried out by the OGPU and higher party personnel, as local bodies had proven unsatisfactory:

[Since] there have been cases where local organs of power (ispolkoms and their departments) spontaneously interfered in the affairs of a spiritual administration (*nazorat-i diniia*), not coordinating with the political organs, [we] consider it necessary in the future to put all work among the clergy without exception upon the latter, which in their work are guided by directives from party organs.⁸⁹

This shift of responsibility to the secret police causes great frustration for the historian, because it means that many of the relevant documents were put in

⁸⁷Ibid., I. 13.

⁸⁸GARF F. 5407, op. 1, d. 14, I. 132. Protocol No. 3, "Doklad o rabote Tashkentskogo Okruzhnogo Biuro SVB," August 20, 1928. One would give a great deal to know the story behind this comment. Since Shakhsei-Vakhsei (Shii mourning in honor of Hussein's martyrdom) is an emotionally intense ritual, the presence of Godless speakers may well have provoked violence. In 1910 Sunni students in Bukhara mocked Shiis during this ritual, provoking a riot and then massacre of Shiis in the Old City.

⁸⁹PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1192, I. 71. "Proekt predlozheniia po dokladu na Ispolbiuro TsK o nastroenii dukhovenstva," by Bikson. Summer 1927.

currently inaccessible archives. Already on June 5, 1927, the Ispolburo TsK KP(b)Uz had voted to put all records from the Commission on the Clergy in the "Special Decisions of the Ispolburo TsK" category, which meant that they were to be filed separately. The records of the commission's very next meeting are actually in the folder, but after that no more.⁹⁰ The Ispolburo declared the work of the Commission on the Clergy finished on November 4–5, 1928 and all of its remaining tasks were transferred to Agitprop TsK.⁹¹ Fortunately, other departments continued to write about the clergy, leaving less direct, but still informative, material.

Sredazburo continued its intensive surveys of the economic and demographic conditions of the clergy as the anticlerical campaign unfolded, providing a rich source of detailed information. In particular the secret "Report on the Muslim Clergy," compiled by the Agitprop section of Sredazburo in July 1928, is worth examining at length.⁹²

The report's authors were primarily concerned with the clerical population of Uzbekistan and its economic base. They split the clergy into four major divisions, city, rural, ishans (Sufis), and "sects," and analyzed the demographics and economics of each group in turn. They began with a straightforward population estimate, then divided the clergy by age and economic condition. Finally, the report gave ratios of clergy to population served in some of the major cities, as shown in Table 5.2. Not surprisingly, the table shows that the densest clerical population was in the Farghana Valley, while the least dense was in the Russified cities.

Aside from the obvious problem of poor arithmetic, notes by the authors identify other holes in the data. The city of Khiva and the *muezzins* were not included, although the authors estimated the latter population at up to 1,000 individuals. They also included only those clergy for whom religious service was the primary or only source of income, leaving out an unknown number of part-time mullas. In other words, these numbers were low estimates.

This report and a similar one delivered at the 13th Sredazburo Plenum both noted that the urban clergy were migrating to the countryside in significant numbers. The primary reasons given for this were that the village clergy were paid better than urban clergy and that it was much easier to avoid the Communists in rural areas. In Samarkand in 1926 an imam could have made 400–500 rubles per year, but by 1927 average income had fallen to 150–200 rubles. As the authors explained:

Scanty earnings, and losing a base for their activities, have forced the clergy to abandon the city and go to the village. They are dispersing not only within their own okrugs, but to other okrugs. The Bukharan clergy are even fumbling for a foothold in Kazakhstan. The departure

⁹⁰RGASPI F. 62, op. 3, d. 208, I. 152. TsK KP(b)Uz protocol No. 94, June 5, 1927.

⁹¹PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1192, I. 1.

⁹²RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, II. 1–36. "Doklad o Musdukhovenstve," APO Sredazburo, July 24, 1928.

Table 5.2
Living Conditions of the Urban Clergy, 1928

General Breakdown by Occupation				
<u>Imams</u>	<u>Oori</u>	<u>Mudarris</u>	<u>Judicial</u>	<u>Total</u>
1,463	156	68	83	1,780 [sic: 1,770]
Ages of Urban Clergy				
<u>Under 30</u>	<u>30-55</u>	<u>55 and over</u>	<u>Total</u>	
159	920	701	1,780	
Property Status				
<u>Owning house, garden, and land</u>	<u>House only</u>	<u>Engaged in trade</u>	<u>Total</u>	
658	538	40	1,226*	
Urban Clergy to Population Ratios				
<u>City</u>	<u>No. of clergy</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Ratio</u>	
Samarkand	105	77,201	1:735	
Tashkent	390	178,228	1:455	
Kokand	174	37,148	1:398 [sic: 213]	
Andijan	205	73,465	1:368 [sic: 358]	
Khojent	112	37,143	1:332	
Old Bukhara	160	46,706	1:292	
Margelan	159	44,327	1:278	
Namangan	331	76,000	1:200 [sic: 230]	
TOTAL:	1,636	570,218		

Source: RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, ll. 1-2

* The correct total is 1,236. This may imply that the remaining 544 or 554 owned no property at all.

to the villages has been noted in a number of cities: 20 cases of out-migrating imams in Old Bukhara, in Margelan—10, in Khojent—up to 12, in Samarkand—10. The tendency toward leaving for the village among the urban clergy is growing larger.⁹³

In the cities listed, 6-12% of the clergy had left—hardly a Communist rout, but certainly a significant number.

Section II of the report concerned the rural clergy of Uzbekistan and began with a parallel statistical breakdown, except that here the authors were less sure of their numbers: "According to the incomplete figures given (they are most incomplete for Khorezm), the number of clergy in Uzbek villages is 6,147" not including *muezzins*.⁹⁴ Of these, only 264 were credited with having any kind of special or higher education. Table 5.3 provides data on the ages and property status of the rural clergy. Overall clerical income was higher in the village than in the city. According to the study, a village imam could earn up to 1,000 rubles per year.⁹⁵ The village clergy as a group also tended to be a little younger than their urban colleagues. On the average, though, both urban and rural clergy seemed to be reasonably well-off, in that most clerics owned homes and some land. The ratio of clergy to population was much lower for rural areas than for urban ones, probably due to the much higher population in the countryside.

It is essential to keep in mind that the authors themselves claimed that these statistics were too low, especially since Khorezm Okrug was completely excluded. Even at this early stage of the anticlerical campaign, however, there were indications that the number of active clergy was declining. In 1925 E. Fedorov estimated that before the revolution there had been "no less than" 11,680 imams and 8,000 mullas in Samarkand, Farghana, and Syr Daria Oblasts alone; these tables yield 3,065 clergy of all kinds for roughly the same regions. Even if one doubles the figure to allow for undercounting (and assumes that Fedorov's numbers are also inaccurate), it is still a significant decline. A June 1927 survey of religious schools and clergy in Farghana Okrug had shown a total of 956 clergy, plus approximately 156 sufis and ishans, higher than the figure of 891 clergy given for Farghana Okrug in this study.⁹⁶

The statistics became even less certain in Section III of the study, which dealt with Sufis. The authors could not provide statistical tables for this section, only estimates:

In Uzbekistan (excluding Bukhara, Zerafshan, and Khorezm okrugs), there are 533 ishans (neither urban nor village clerical ishans are considered in this figure). Of those, 502

⁹³RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, l. 5.

⁹⁴Ibid., l. 11.

⁹⁵Ibid., l. 14.

⁹⁶E. Fedorov, "Religioznye perezhitki v Srednei Azii," *Krasnyi rubezh* No. 2 (June 1925): p. 52. PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 2, d. 955, l. 62 "Dokladnaia zapiska," signed by the Plenipotentiary Special Section, 2nd group, Shaganshaev.

Table 5.3
Living Conditions of the Rural Clergy, 1928

Ages of Rural Clergy			
<u>Under 35</u>	<u>35-55</u>	<u>55 and over</u>	<u>Total</u>
1,228	2,955	1,682	5,865
Property Status			
<u>Owning house, garden, and land</u>	<u>House only</u>	<u>Engaged in trade</u>	<u>Total</u>
3,190	2,489	66	5,645 [sic: 5,745]
Rural Clergy to Population Ratios			
<u>Okrug</u>	<u>No. of clergy</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Ratio</u>
Surkhan Daria	252	186,433	1:740
Zerafshan	238	218,112	1:665*
Andijan	960	611,732	1:637
Farghana	891	514,000	1:576**
Kashka Daria	550	304,363	1:553
Khojent	278	139,679	1:503
Samarkand	948	393,673	1:415
Tashkent	855	333,369	1:390
TOTAL:	4972	2,701,361	

Source: RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, l. 12

* correct ratio is 1:916; not counting Nur-Atyn raion

** not counting the "strip from the foreign railroad."

inherited their calling and only 31 [received it] by special training. The age of the ishans is: up to 45—216; over 45—317. . . . up to 400 ishans have a house, garden, and land, [while] 133 have only a house. These figures show that two thirds of the ishans are prosperous at the present time, meaning that the land reform has hit only the most economically powerful among them. Almost half of the ishans (270) in the surveyed okrugs are migrating to the backward okrugs of Surkhan-Daria and Kashka-Daria.⁹⁷

The reference to "clerical ishans" (*dukhovnye ishany*), meant those who were both "regular" mullas, teachers, and so on, and mystical guides. Excluding this group further depressed the estimated total of Sufis, which was already far too low because the surveyors excluded so many. The report additionally observed that approximately 314 ishans were still able to collect tribute from their followers, an indication of the weakness (or complicity) of the local government bodies.⁹⁸

Sredazburo's APO also noted a distinct decline in morale, "a final disappointment in the possibility of the clergy's existence with Soviet power," and a decline in the activities and influence of the spiritual administrations. Remember that the year before, June 1927, the administrations were depicted as a serious threat to the Soviet regime. By July 1928 the OGPU had been able to inflict serious damage on them. Administrations in Namangan, Bukhara, and Margelan had either "self-liquidated" or were discussing the idea, and the report quoted Mulla Akhmed Zaki Akhtiamov of Tashkent as saying that the administrations in Tashkent, Samarkand, and Bukhara were so ineffective that it would be better if they did not exist at all.⁹⁹ Some clergy were said to be so frustrated in their efforts to thwart the unveiling campaign that they were giving up the struggle.

In spite of the harsh conditions, Sufi groups in some areas were still doing well:

[W]e have noticed that in the okrugs where the land reform was carried out ishanism is once again strengthening. In Andijan okrug the following is noticeable: the famous Namangan ishan Mukhitdin Kary [Qori] Nigmatullaev, at the end of 1927 and the beginning of 1928, has developed his influence in recruiting followers, exerting it mainly among the poor who were allotted land in the reform.

However, conditions were getting more difficult:

⁹⁷RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, l. 17

⁹⁸These impressions are strengthened by a report from Karshi, that from 1925 until the 1930s the local Naqshbandi tariqa held a regular Friday zikr (*o'tirish*, "evening"). Attendance was high, and people would sometimes donate money or food. However, "already before 1930" the last descendant of founder Khalifa Abdarrahman, Salim Dahbit (Dahbidi) had fled to destination unknown. Baxtiyor M. Babajanov, "On the History of the Naqshbandiya Mughaddidiya in Central Mawara'annahr in the Late 18th and Early 19th Centuries," in Michael Kemper, Anke von Kügelegen, and Dmitriy Yermakov, eds. *Muslim Culture in Russia and Central Asia from the 18th to the Early 20th Centuries*, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Klaus Schwartz Verlag, 1996), p. 411.

⁹⁹RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, ll. 2-3.

But the ishans are not everywhere completely successful in subordinating those whom they exercise their influence upon. A significant portion of the poor has broken with the ishans, and their break shows "tangibly." For example, in the same Andijan okrug, the followers of ishan Mukhitdin Kary arrived in the village of Shur-Kurgan and arranged a large-scale zikr. Four poor peasants, in the guise of ritual participants, took advantage of the darkness and began to inflict blows on the followers who were carrying out the rites. The followers began to disperse one by one, and the zikr was broken up.¹⁰⁰

These peasants may have been sincerely hostile, or they may have been OGPU hirelings. In either case the Sufis were under severe pressure. Despite this, the report warned that the movement and its rituals were dangerous to the regime and should be suppressed as much as possible.

In a separate report to Sredazburo the same month, party propagandist S. Pismennyi offered a further explanation of why the clergy were feeling so disappointed:

The general fall in religiosity of the urban population of Uzbekistan is caused by the strengthening of our economic and social-cultural position, [which has] brought the weakening of the urban Muslim clergy of Uzbekistan, expressed [as follows]:

- a) in the narrowing of the spiritual administration's activities, and in particular their isolation from the village clergy;
- b) in the paralysis, so to speak, of the progressive reforming wing of the clergy;
- c) in the complete cutting off of the Central Spiritual Administration (in Ufa) from the Uzbek clergy;
- d) in the narrowing of activities in the group of religious schools, which is explained by the absolute, great influence of the Soviet school.

This could be a checkoff list of the goals outlined at the 1927 plenums, which had evidently been met. However, Pismennyi added, "ALL THESE SUCCESSES ARE NOT A RESULT OF THE ANTIRELIGIOUS WORK OF THE PARTY ORGANIZATIONS, BUT A RESULT OF THE WORK OF THE APPROPRIATE SOVIET ORGANS."¹⁰¹ Local party organizations were still failing to live up to central expectations; fortunately the OGPU could take up the slack.

According to Pismennyi, the situation of the Sufis was a little better than that of the regular imams. He reported that there was a resurgence of Sufi activity, especially in those villages where antireligious and party work were weak.¹⁰²

Taken together, these reports show that the Muslim clergy experienced a sharp deterioration of conditions in late 1927–1928, because their economic base and their school systems had been undercut and their leaders were subject to arrest and exile. The evidence also suggests a shifting of power among them, with the conservatives in a stronger position than the progressives earlier in the decade, the

progressives gaining some preeminence in the mid-1920s, and both groups losing power considerably in 1928. It is difficult even to make a generalization about the condition of the Sufis because information about them was so sketchy, but they, too, had evidently begun to feel the bite of Soviet oppression.

Simultaneously with the removal of the clergy, the Soviets tried to suppress holiday observances, particularly that of Ramadan (*Uraza* in Uzbek) and Qurbon Bayram. Ramadan, the month of sunrise-to-sunset fasting in remembrance of Muhammad's receiving the Quran, was opposed by the Soviets on several grounds, primarily because it interfered with worker production. In Uzbekistan the beginning of Ramadan and the time of sunrise each day were announced with the loud beating of kettledrums (*noghora*). Austrian adventurer Gustav Krist described the Ramadan observance in 1922 this way:

Communist teaching has been powerless to abolish it. The authorities even close the government offices during the fast, and only the military can afford to ignore it. . . .

During the month of the fast the true Muslim must neither eat nor drink from sunrise to sunset. . . .

No sooner has the sun set, however, than eating and drinking begin with a vengeance and the quantities of food consumed seem almost incredible. Singing, dancing, and music continue all night through, and fireworks are let off. Towards dawn, when the Ramazan drum sounds through the streets, the orgy reaches its height, for everyone hastily stuffs himself with as much as he can possibly hold, the better to endure the coming day.¹⁰³

In 1928 the Soviets banned this drumming, ordering local soviets and militia to enforce the ban. This action, of course, sparked resistance and was used by Muslims to fulminate against the regime. Uzbek Soviet officials were accused of betraying their people in order to look good in front of the Russians. Clerics and others "openly said in the *chaykhona* that Soviet power will soon ban religious rituals [altogether]."¹⁰⁴

The ban on drumming was successful, because it was a noisy public ritual that was easy to target. Eliminating fasting and private prayer was much more difficult. The Kashka Daria Okrug Committee banned drumming and instituted a 25-ruble fine for anyone caught observing the fast. At the same time in parts of the Farghana Valley, imams were fining those who did *not* observe the fast.¹⁰⁵ One feels sorry for the ordinary people caught in the middle. Ramadan was not the only ritual observance that the Soviets tried to ban. They also campaigned strenuously against circumcision and against the Shii performance of Shakhsei-Vakhsei.¹⁰⁶ Again, the public ritual was far easier to tame than the private one.

¹⁰³Gustav Krist, *Alone through the Forbidden Land: Journeys in Disguise through Soviet Central Asia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), p. 182.

¹⁰⁴RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, ll. 10–11. January 1928 OGPU report to Sredazburo.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 3, d. 1192, l. 25.

¹⁰⁶PATsS-NDPUz F. 58, op. 6, d. 206, l. 26. Memo from Akhunbabaev, probably sent in early 1930, on banning Shakhsei-Vakhsei.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., ll. 17, 19.

¹⁰¹RGASPI F. 62, op. 1, d. 442, l. 8. Report delivered July 2, confirmed July 24, 1928, by Ispolkom Sredazburo. Capital letters in the original.

¹⁰²Ibid., l. 9.

All available propaganda organs were mobilized to agitate against Ramadan during the cotton-sowing campaigns of the First Five-Year Plan, and in at least one village it was reported that 700 Uzbek children were pressed into publicly demonstrating against fasting.¹⁰⁷ Uzbek party officials, however, were not always inclined to cooperate, and in 1928 the OGPU complained:

A resident of the village Mazar in Zerafshan okrug, Marza Kasym Akhmedov, a party member since 1920, has not unveiled his wife despite the example of individual non-party peasants. Akhmedov observes all of the religious statutes and says: "I keep Uraza, perform my prayers, and if this is not suitable then expel me from the party—I will become a merchant."¹⁰⁸

Party policy in the late 1920s regarding religious holidays was inconsistent. In the spring of 1927 the Uzbek Commissariat of Labor (Narkomtrud) passed a resolution declaring Christmas, Easter, the beginning of Ramadan, and Qurbon Bayram to be "special days of rest."¹⁰⁹ In 1928–1929 Narkomtrud and TsIK Uzbekistan affirmed this resolution, giving workers two days off each for Ramadan and Qurbon Bayram and one day for Christmas (on December 25, although the Orthodox Church still observed the old calendar date of January 7) and Easter. At the same time they announced a series of "Revolutionary holidays," such as Lenin's death (January 22), Paris Commune Day (March 22), and Constitution Day (the first Friday of July).¹¹⁰ The published decisions gave no reason for continuing to observe these holidays, but most likely it was a compromise measure to keep the peace. Such a bald contradiction in policy, however, cannot have helped in the effort to eliminate religious holiday observance.

The anti-Islamic campaign reached peak intensity in mid-1927 and continued at that level until early 1929. What is perhaps most striking about this phase is the high level of incompetence and noncooperation that dogged every sector. The possible exception to this was the sweeping away of Muslim clergy, but that was conducted outside of legal bounds by the secret police. Even so, as we shall see, it was not complete.

¹⁰⁷RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 2471, l. 106. February 23, 1930, Protocol No. 7 of the Tashkent Okrug soviet of the Union of Militant Godless.

¹⁰⁸RGASPI F. 62, op. 2, d. 1593, l. 13. In 1929 NKIU officials also complained of local judges who could not work because they were fasting. TsGA Uz F. 904, op. 1, d. 64, ll. 186–87. See also M. Mitrofanov, "Partiinoe i obshchestvennoe stroitel'stvo v kishlake," *Revoliutsionyi vostok* No. 7 (1929): p. 299.

¹⁰⁹TsGA Uz F. 86, op. 1, d. 5820, l. 282. February 16, 1927.

¹¹⁰*Uzbekistanskaia pravda*, No. 13 (March 8, 1929): p. 4. The original decisions were announced by TsIK Uzbekistan October 20, 1928, and by Narkomtrud February 18, 1929.

6

Retrenchment

I have not discussed the fate of the mosques much to this point, although they were targeted along with the clergy in late 1927. This is for the simple reason that the process was initially so chaotic that very little documentation was compiled until 1929. When organized accounts did appear, once again they showed events that were well outside the government's legal boundaries—but that also achieved the party's goals. By the time the Law on Religious Organizations appeared in April 1929, many of the groups or processes that it was supposed to regulate had substantially "been taken care of" by events in the previous two years. The bureaucratic retrenchment that dominated the early 1930s was, in effect, cleaning and repairing the barn after the horses had been slaughtered.

Mosques served many important functions, aside from being places for prayer. Men (women were generally not allowed) gathered there to study, to gossip, and to discuss politics and business. The imam's Friday sermon could be used for moral or political exhortations. The Soviet government could not tolerate the existence of such independent venues for discussion and religious expression, particularly when they also formed an important political and economic base for the clergy. How to eliminate the mosques was not a simple question, however. They posed an enormous problem for the government, for two reasons. The first was the intractable contradictions that pervaded the Soviet system. Communist rhetoric (resolutions from the 12th Party Congress and propaganda since then) required that mosques be closed by a willing population that had renounced the fanatical ways of Islam. Internal party imperatives required that the mosques be closed quickly, both so that the buildings could be used for other purposes and so that propaganda would appear to have foundation in fact. No mechanism was provided to deal with the possibility that both requirements could not be fulfilled at once, leading to scandals such as the Andijan incident discussed in the previous chapter. This was the same problem that faced the Communists with collectivization (which also peaked in late 1929–early 1930), and they solved it in the same way, by using force to obtain the desired results, rhetoric be damned. This collectivization "bacchanalia," as Sheila Fitzpatrick called it, created not only a cataclysm for the peasants but an agricultural disaster for the state, forcing Stalin to retreat. The mosque closings were not so