

## The struggle of the Soviet government against religion and national-spiritual values in Azerbaijan in the 1920s

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### Abstract

The article examines the struggle of the Soviet government against national and moral values in Azerbaijan in the years after the occupation in April 1920. The main focus was on the struggle against religion, especially Islam, and the activities of absurd organizations such as the Society of the Ungodly. At the same time, the struggle against the holidays such as Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, Novruz and repressive measures were investigated on the basis of primary archival documents and historical literature.

**Keywords:** National-moral values, struggle against religion, Muharram ceremonies, society of the ungodly, Union of fighting atheists, Cultural revolution.

The policy pursued by the Soviet government in the 1920s towards Islam and the national traditions of the Azerbaijani people was an integral part of the general Bolshevik policy in terms of content and essence. Every nation's way of life, way of life, culture and traditions are closely connected with religion. Since the way of life, way of life, culture and traditions of the Azerbaijani people are connected with Islam, the Soviet government unjustifiably declared all these traditions religious and fought against them like religious relics, resulting in moral nihilism, distrust of national foundations and traditions. set.

The decrees and measures taken in the first months of the establishment of the Soviet government in Azerbaijan revealed the fact that the policy pursued by the atheist Bolsheviks towards religion was purely tactical and served to strengthen the government.

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Shortly after the April occupation of the Council of People's Commissars of the Azerbaijan SSR and the People's Commissariat of Education, the May 1920 decree "On the Separation of Church from State and School from Church" abolished the Ministry of Religion, separated religion from the state, suspended religious education in schools. the right to choose one's religion or not to worship, as well as the right to propagate for and against religion [ ARDA, p. 410, list 1, work 3 , v. 11] . The decree said: "Religion is separated from the state. It is prohibited to make any local decision within the territory of the Republic that suppresses freedom of conscience or imposes any authority or privilege on citizens on the basis of their religion or religious affiliation. Every citizen may or may not believe in any religion. Deprivation of any right in connection with any religion or non-belief in any religion is abolished ... The school is separated from the church. By the will of the working people of the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic, religious training and the performance of religious rites in the school system are abolished in all state, public and special educational institutions under the People's Commissariat. No church or religious organization has the right to own property, no legal entity" [ARDA, p. 410, list 1, work 3, v. 11 ] .

Although the Land Decree issued by the Revolutionary Committee of Azerbaijan on May 5, 1920 declared the lands of mosques and churches to be nationalized along with the lands of beys and khans, in fact the communist government did not openly fight against religion in the early days. put forward the principle of separation. Recognizing the place of Islam in the minds of the Muslim masses, its important role in the spirituality, life and various spheres of life of the peoples of the East, Narimanov stressed that "the issue of religion in the East is extremely important" [ History of Azerbaijan : 217] .

N.Narimanov opposes any kind of insult to the religious feelings of believers, violation of their rights, calls for loyalty to religion, urges not to allow harmful demands of Sharia, unjustified haste and coercion in the fight against extremism. It was the result of his position that in the first years of Soviet rule the republican government took care of believers, belonged to different religions on religious holidays - "Eid al-Adha", "Eid al-Fitr", "Lent", Catholic and Jewish Easter, "Annunciation Day". fired people. Holidays began in schools during the Novruz holiday, students' holiday demonstrations in the streets, performances and concerts in theaters and clubs. On August 30, 1921, the Central Committee of the AK (b) P decided to give tea and sugar to Muslims in the working-class districts during the days of Muharram. During this period,

there were mosques and churches in Azerbaijan, including the Bibiheybat and Shamsi Asadullayev mosques in Amirjan, the Alexander Nevsky Cathedral in Baku and the Catholic Church of St. Mary, synagogues, and dozens of Muslim shrines and shrines. During these years, mosques also operated freely in other cities and villages. Even in November 1922, the Presidium of the Central Committee of the AK (b) P resolved the issue of citizens visiting Karbala and allowed them to carry up to 300 manats of gold [ History of Azerbaijan : 218] .

In the early years of Soviet rule, the Bolsheviks sought to spread communist ideology among believers with the help of clergy loyal to the government or "captured" clergy, as well as by sending prominent communists to mosques and churches and holding open discussions. In this regard, at the meeting of the Presidium of the Baku Committee of the AK (b) P on March 19, 1922, it was decided to "send steadfast, conscious communists to religious discussions in churches and mosques." [ ARPIİSSA, f. 2, list 22, case 24 , v. 1-3] . In accordance with this decision, the communists sent to meetings with believers gave lectures and organized discussions on "Who needs Muharram", "On religion and personality", "Cultural Revolution" and other topics [ ARPIİSSA, p. 249, list 1, work 1302 , v. 125-126] . However, in the discussions at these meetings, well-known, educated, and well-informed mullahs won over their communist opponents, which the government said did not "justify itself" and were soon rejected.

Along with such measures, the Bolsheviks did not hesitate to severely punish clergymen and clergymen who at first were not loyal to the Soviet government and had ties to the political opposition, especially non-communist parties. An example of this is the arrest and deportation and execution of many clerics in connection with a criminal case against the Union Party.

In the early 1920s, the press and party circles discussed various religious rites, holidays, mourning ceremonies for Muslims on the days of Muharram, and their prohibition. Narimanov strongly opposed the spread of these tendencies. He even opposed the ban on Muharram condolences in August 1922. By a special decree issued on August 1, 1923, the Azerbaijani leadership annulled the decision to ban the "shaxsey-vaxsey" ceremony. Taking into account the consequences of these events, in August 1923, the Presidium of the Baku Committee of the AK (b) P instructed all district committees and officials not to campaign against "individuals" [ History of Azerbaijan: 219] .

However, this policy led by Narimanov did not last long. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the AK (b) P had power over the NKNP-led Azerbaijani ICC, which was dominated

mainly by Armenian and other non-Azerbaijani leaders, who also adhered to Azerbaijan's national and spiritual values and religion. and sought an opportunity to carry out a "moral genocide" against the culture under the banner of Marxism. Such a moment was captured during the campaign to expel Narimanov from the country and persecute nationalist communists in the republic.

Shortly after the adoption of the Constitution of the Azerbaijan SSR in 1921, the Central Executive Committee of Azerbaijan issued a special decision "On the separation of the church from the state and the school from the church." According to the decision, which draws attention to religion, its institutions and believers, the teaching of religious lessons in all state and public schools is prohibited, religious oaths are not allowed, divorce cases under the authority of clergy are prohibited, all citizenship acts are prohibited. it was stated that it would be conducted only by civil authorities [ ARDA, p. 379, list 28, work 29 , v. 9-10] .

On September 5, 1923, the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the AK (b) P decided to establish a special commission to systematically fight against religion. This issue was discussed at the meeting of the Politburo of the AK (b) P on January 8, 1924 as "On the conduct of anti-religious propaganda" and as a result, the "Anti-Religious Commission" was established [1. ARDA, p. 1, list 1, case 136 , v. 20] . The commission included A.H. Garayev, R.Akhundov, S.Afendiyev, Chagin, M.C.Bagirov and others.

The struggle against religion, especially Islam, began in a multifaceted way. Along with the party, Soviet and trade union bodies, employees of the press, cinema and cultural institutions, artists, writers and journalists, and a number of public organizations were involved in anti-religious propaganda.

With the establishment of the "Society of the Ungodly" in Baku in 1924, the struggle against religion was intensified. Branches of the society began to be established in rural areas. The main task of the "Society of the Ungodly" was to unite all conscious workers and peasants under the banner of militant atheism, to distance the working people from religious superstition and to form in them a materialist worldview.

In 1926, in connection with the intensification of the struggle against religion in the USSR, the activities of the "Society of the Ungodly" expanded in Azerbaijan. A three-month evening course on religion in the Azerbaijani language was opened at the Baku bureau of the society. It was also decided to publish the magazine "Godless". In the same year, the first

General Conference of the Society of the Ungodly was convened, where reports on "Socialist Society and the Struggle against Religious Remnants" were heard and discussed. In the end, the society's appeal "To all Baku workers" called on Baku workers and conscious people to defend the "Society of the Ungodly" [ Ibrahimli: 112] .

In the first years of Soviet rule, mahram ceremonies were allowed to be held inside mosques [ ARDA, p. 379, list 3, case 291 , v. In the case of 1-2] , from 1926 onwards, the campaign against the practice of mercy was intensified through the Society of the Ungodly, and the idea of a class struggle against religion was propagated. In this regard, the decision of the Central Election Commission of Azerbaijan in 1926 stated: "Such religious holidays, marches and all kinds of self-torture should be banned in the coming days of mourning in the city of Baku and its working districts." Those guilty of implementing this decision are criminally liable under Article 227 of the Criminal Code of the Azerbaijan SSR, in other words, they are fined up to 300 manat for violating public order ” [ ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 74, work 644 , v. 30-31] . However, in spite of all the efforts of the "Society of the Ungodly" and other authorities, in 1926, mahram ceremonies were held in Azerbaijan.

Although it is common and superstitious for people to injure themselves in various ways during Muharram ceremonies, these actions have already become customary. However, progressive Muslims also opposed superstitions such as torture. The Bolsheviks replaced the slogan of struggle against mahram with the struggle of the whole religion against itself.

In 1929, the name of the "Society of the Ungodly" became the "Union of Fighting Atheists", as in Russia, and was combined with the "class struggle" that began in the countryside. Some aspects of this society and its activities should be noted: First, the insulting name (ungodly word) of the society alienated the peasants and workers from this society. In the early days, even the neighbor did not greet those whose names were on this list. Although the Bolshevik press gave various figures about the members of society , this was far from the truth. In order to avoid responsibility to the center, the center's leaders included the names of the villagers in the list, thus artificially increasing the number of community members. As of the end of 1939, this organization allegedly had 3,320 cores, covering 129,662 people [ Najafov: 90] . Second, most of those who subscribed to the Society of the Ungodly were non-Azerbaijanis, officials, and their close relatives. Not all of them were "godless." Because these people, who voluntarily or involuntarily fell into the vortex of time, had no other choice. It

is impossible to deny that there are real "ungodly" among them. Third, the most active members of society were Komsomol members and unstable, thoughtless young mercenaries. For the sake of position and position, they took the sofas of the mullahs, threw the headscarves of women, tore the Qur'an, and did not even hesitate to tie dogs to mosques. In general, despite all the efforts of the Soviet government, it was not possible to make the Azerbaijani people "godless". On the contrary, the people's communists and komsomols called them "godless" and the collective farm "the center of atheists" [ Ibrahimli: 113] .

Religious schools continued to operate despite the government's decision to close religious schools and madrassas. In 1926, when the struggle against religion was gaining momentum, one of the speeches at the plenum of the Central Committee of the AK (b) P stated that "there are madrassas in some parts of the Jabrayil district. This needs serious attention. We believe that schools should not be allowed to exist as madrassas where the Qur'an is taught. The plenum of the Central Committee should give certain instructions in this regard " [ Rafiyev: 41] . Two years later, the issue did not lose its urgency. In October 1928, at the plenum of the Baku city committee of the AK (b) P, the secretary of the AK (b) P Central Committee, Y. Gasimov, stated that "Baku clergy were so embarrassed that they dared to open a boarding school" [ Rafiyev: 41] .

Resolutions of the AK (b) P of May 21, 1927 "On the Inadmissibility of Religious Secondary Schools" and the AK (b) P Central Committee of July 20, 1927 "On Strengthening the Struggle against Islam" created a new wave of attacks on madrassas. It was clearly stated here that "religious educational institutions operating under Muslim mosques should be strictly prohibited and such cases should be combated by all means" [ ARDA, p. 10, list 74, case 223 , v. 21] .

Apparently, the government was systematically working to close and completely abolish religious schools. On September 4, 1928, the People's Commissariat of Education of the Azerbaijan SSR signed a special instruction "On the closure of religious schools" and sent it to the places [ ARDA, p. 57, list 8, case 26 , v. 4-5] . Another instruction letter dated September 10, 1928 sent to all departments of the People's Commissariat of Education stated: "Recently, religious schools, especially madrassas under mosques, are still operating in some regions of the Azerbaijan SSR, and religious trainings are being conducted. Therefore, you are instructed to take decisive measures to eradicate these abnormalities. If the facts of teaching religion in these

schools are established, apply to the administrative and judicial authorities to close these schools and bring the perpetrators to justice under Article 157 of the Criminal Code ” [ ARDA, p. 57, list 1, work 383 , v. 28-29] .

In parallel with the ban on religious education, repressive measures were taken against religious figures. In the early days, the Bolsheviks in Azerbaijan took the line of creating divisions among Muslims, Sunnis and Shiites, and using it for their own purposes. According to this plan, in order to divide the Muslim clergy, the Azerbaijani leaders of the KKS and AK (b) P were invited to invite some representatives of the mullahs and sheikhs for talks. The outcome of this conversation, based on the policy of the sword and the sweet gogal, was to be published in the press as a statement about the separation of religion from the state, freedom of religion and, most importantly, the non-persecution of clergy in Azerbaijan. If successful, the act would pave the way for two tasks: on the one hand, because the petition would be signed by prominent Muslim Shiite clerics, all or almost all Sunni clerics would oppose it, leading to animosity between the two sects. Would strengthen. On the other hand, this speech would arouse enmity among the Shiite clergy [ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 85, work 340 , v. 6-8; Rafiyev: 42-43] . However, it was not possible to carry out this work as planned and get the desired result. However, the Bolsheviks did not give up their ugly deeds, tried to capture loyal, neutral mullahs, and used them in propaganda against religion and clergy. It is no coincidence that one of the decisions of the AK (b) P Central Committee's anti-religious propaganda commission sent to the ICC for execution stated that "it is necessary to give a set of suits to each of the 45 mullahs in Azerbaijan for assisting in anti-religious propaganda" [ Rafiyev: 43] .

The clergy were forced to praise the Soviet government. Some clerics began to praise the Soviet government in a statement to protect their physical existence. But the Bolsheviks did not care how the clergy behaved. Beginning in 1925, a new wave of struggle against clerics and mullahs began, and repression intensified. All clerics were persecuted under the name of "mullah", which has already become an insulting image. The struggle was waged in all spheres. There was even a poster in one of the cinemas depicting "Molla's flight to heaven to Muhammad", which was met with strong dissatisfaction of the people [ ARDA, p. 410, list 1, case 281 , v. 51] .

The report of the State Political Department of Azerbaijan "On the activities of Muslim clerics in the Azerbaijan SSR" dated March 7, 1927, marked "completely confidential" 4247 / s,



stated that "there are a large number of religious figures in the territory of the Azerbaijan SSR, they played an important role in the Muslim environment and still do. The Soviet government is their common enemy " [ Najafov: 83] . The report then highlighted the anti-Soviet sentiment of the clergy, their impact on the peasantry, and analyzed the differences between Shiites and Sunnis , with particular emphasis on the impact of religion and religious beliefs on young people. It was noted that the children of mullahs, including former mullahs, regularly attended mosques, especially in the Qaryagin, Zagatala, Nukha and Kurdistan regions. It was also stated that the clergy "are fighting hard against the Komsomol organizations" and that "as their method of struggle they have chosen a wide campaign in mosques and in all congregations." The report states that "the main base of Muslim clerics are mosques, the number of which is estimated at 1505, of which only 32 are inactive" [ Najafov: 83] .

The authors of the report conclude that the activities of the clergy are "extremely harmful" and must be stopped. In order to fight the clergy, it was proposed to take 8-point measures to purge all Soviet schools of clergy, expel all foreign clerics (Iranians, Turks) from the territory of the Azerbaijani SSR, close a religious school in Zagatala, and close other schools. Religious leaders living either in accidents or in Baku had to be deported to the Union's internal provinces after the necessary documents had been collected, and the deportation process had to be carried out one by one and at the appropriate time [ Najafov: 83] .

In order to carry out repressive measures against clerics and mullahs, the agency prepared and skillfully used information about their harmful propaganda against the Soviet government. For example, mullahs link the poor living conditions of the population to the fact that the Soviet government is a bad government and propagandize in this direction; Mullahs propagate that communism that does not accept the Qur'an is dangerous and harmful to Islam [ ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 2, work 98 , v. 1-2] and so on. This type of information was collected on the basis of a special scenario and was used as a basis for the arrest, shooting and deportation of clerics.

The Soviet government's crackdown on clerics in Azerbaijan resulted in some clerics being killed by arrest, shooting, and exile, some emigrating, and some ceasing to function as clerics and living under Soviet rule. had to.

The measures taken by the Soviet government to close, demolish and relocate mosques have a special place in the struggle against religion. Although confiscation campaigns against



religious places of worship were carried out in the early years of Soviet rule, unlike churches, mosques did not suffer much from the lack of valuables. Although the Transcaucasian Country Committee of the RK (b) P also welcomed the initiative of the AK (b) P Baku Committee to confiscate the valuables of mosques, the AK (b) P Central Committee Secretariat issued a confidential decision on this issue in 1922. On April 11, he issued a decree: "No confiscation of valuables (gold, silver) in mosques" [ ARPISSA, p. 1, list 74, work 638 , v. 5] .

If the AK (b) P Central Committee passed a resolution in December 1923 "On the provision of mosques for the cultural needs of the peasants," in the first years after this decision there was no systematic struggle against the buildings of worship. However, in the second half of the 1920s, or rather in 1927, a large-scale campaign was launched to demolish mosques and change their purpose by turning them into schools, clubs, libraries and houses of culture. As mentioned above, the report of the State Political Department of Azerbaijan "On the activities of Muslim clerics in the Azerbaijan SSR" dated March 7, 1927 indicated that the number of mosques in Azerbaijan was 1505, of which 1473 were functioning.

In December 1928, at one of the meetings of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the AK (b) P, the issue "On mosques given to the villagers for cultural needs" was considered, where the transfer of a number of mosques to the villagers as cultural and educational institutions was noted as a positive fact [ Rafiyev: 41] . Extensive work was carried out in places related to this position of the ruling supreme body.

The work of members of the Union of Fighting Atheists and Komsomol members was widely used in the implementation of measures to close or change the purpose of mosques.

Information on the closure or demolition of mosques came to the center from different parts of the country as good news. A report from Shamakhi said that 13 mosques were demolished by local authorities and their materials were used in the construction of the theater building. According to the report from Guba district, from December 15, 1928 to January 6, 1929, 18 mosques were turned into warehouses and cultural and educational departments [ Ibrahimli: 116] .

In 1929 alone, 400 mosques were closed in Azerbaijan [ ARPISSA, p. 1, list 74, work 63 , v. 88] , the building of 120 of them was put into operation for the school [ Musaeva : 44-45] , and the rest were either demolished or given for other purposes.

The work of closing mosques, demolishing buildings or changing their purpose was carried out in such a way that it was as if all this was the request of the people, the workers from the government, and the government complied with the demands of the people. According to government reports, by February 1929, 317 mosques, madrassas and churches had been acquired in 13 districts of the republic "taking into account the voluntary wishes of the population" and handed over to cultural and educational institutions [ ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 74, case 287 , v. 161] . During the collectivization period and in the following years, this campaign was further expanded. The documents on the closure of mosques at the "request of the people" stated: July 31, 1931: Nukha City Council decided to transfer the Juma Mosque to cultural and educational institutions; August 29, 1935: By the decision of the Presidium of the Baku Soviet, the request of 300 workers of the Stalin oil field to close the "Bibi" house of worship in the village of Shikhov was fulfilled; September 17, 1935: By the decision of the Presidium of the Baku Soviet, the request of 1023 citizens to close the Juma Mosque in the Old City of Baku was granted; October 3, 1935: By the decision of the Executive Committee of Lankaran region, the use of the mosque, which had long been neglected by the population in the Big Bazaar in Lankaran, was ordered to be used for cultural and educational purposes [ Najafov: 85] and others.

According to the State Political Department of the Azerbaijan SSR, by 1935, 684 of the 1,505 mosques in the country had been demolished, liquidated or reassigned, and 821 remained, although they did not function as mosques [ Najafov: 84] .

In fact, the demolition, closure, or relocation of mosques was met with widespread dissatisfaction, panic, and in some cases armed clashes throughout the country. For example, at the meeting of the Central Committee of the AK (b) P on June 29, 1929, during the hearing of the information of the Party Committee of Aghdam region on the riots that took place on religious grounds in Goychay, Aghdara, Agdash, Zardab, Ujar districts, Lakida and other settlements The riots were caused by the demolition, closure or relocation of mosques. According to the report, during the riots in Goychay and Agdam, "a crowd of mostly women entered the mosque and threw all the cinema equipment into the yard." Similar incidents took place in Ujar, Agdash, and two days later in Sheki and Ardab. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing one and wounding one. According to official information, about 2,500 people took part in the riots, and 11 people were arrested [ Najafov: 85] .

Regarding these and similar events throughout the country, the communist government was of the opinion that the reason for all these events was the lack of purposeful, comprehensive propaganda among the population about government measures related to mosques [ ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 74, work 63 , v. 88] .

The struggle of the Soviet government against the national and moral values of the Azerbaijani people was not limited to mosques, religious rites and religious figures . Holidays such as fasting, Ramadan, Eid al-Adha, and Novruz were also fought.

Articles were published in the press about the harms of fasting, the month of Ramadan was called the "month of the rifle," and the slaughter of sacrificial animals on Eid al-Adha was ridiculed, insulting the sacred feelings of Muslims. Although Novruz was not a religious holiday, it was persecuted as a "remnant of the past" and a "defender of Islam." Unjustified attacks on Novruz, which dates back to pre-Islamic times, led to the holiday being banned until the 1960s.

All these national and religious holidays of the Azerbaijani people were persecuted and insulted, subjected to baseless attacks, and new Bolshevik holidays, which had nothing to do with the national, spiritual and religious history of the people, were invented and crept into the people.

Those who took part in these religious holidays, as well as in Muharram ceremonies, and at the same time fasted, were dismissed from work and party ranks [ ARPIISSA, p. 1, list 2, work 23 , v. 1-3] .

At the same time, a "revolutionary struggle" was carried out against the national dress of Azerbaijanis, especially the hat and headscarf. In April 1929, the Central Committee of the AK (b) P together with the Baku Committee adopted a resolution "On the immediate tasks of the Azerbaijan K (b) P in the field of removing the headscarf, combating religion and other matters" [ Ibrahimli: 122] .

The veil, which for centuries was considered a symbol of Muslim women's dignity, was given a political color by the Bolsheviks, who demanded that the headscarf be abolished as a class. They believed that anyone who wore a headscarf in his family was religious and therefore an enemy of the Soviet government. Komsomol members, who were active in all political processes, also behaved very abnormally in relation to the headscarf. Komsomol members attacked women in headscarves in the streets, took off their headscarves and threw them under their feet [ Ibrahimli: 122] .

Summarizing all this, we can say that the communist government, as in other areas in the 1920s, waged a revolutionary struggle against religion, religious rites, religious figures and other national and spiritual values of the Azerbaijani people. In the struggle waged by the Soviet government, religion, clerics, mosques, and places of worship were insulted and repressed. The main goal of the Bolshevik government in the struggle against religion and the national and spiritual values of the Azerbaijani people was to destroy the national and religious traditions of our people and to introduce their new Soviet traditions into the minds of the people. The national communists also actively assisted the ruling circles in this work. Although great material damage was inflicted on our people, both materially and spiritually, it was not possible to "deify" the Azerbaijani people. In the face of the Soviet machine of punishment, the masses remained faithful to their religion and traditions, and continued to perform their religious and national rites, albeit in secret. The ruthless measures taken against religion, clerics and mosques, as well as other national and spiritual values, in fact, strengthened people's trust and respect for religion and national and spiritual values, and increased their distrust and hatred of the Soviet government. This was, in fact, the defeat of the Bolsheviks.

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