

Anarcho-syndicalist Rubinchik commemorated in Moscow

The Last Address (Posledny Adres) is the name of a project started by the Russian “Memorial” Society in 2014 to commemorate victims of state repressions in the Soviet Union. The project, which has now spread to other countries, installs small commemorative plaques on the buildings known as the last residential address of those arrested. One victim recently honoured in this way was the anarcho-syndicalist Efrem Rubinchik (1892–1938). At a small ceremony on March 25, 2018, a plaque was installed at 20 Smolensky Boulevard, Moscow. In attendance was Andrey Dolginov, a great-grandson of Efrem Rubinchik, who applied for the plaque. The following is a translation of the press release issued by “Memorial” in connection with this event as well as some other materials relating to his case. Notes have been added by the translator.

The two-story brick house at 20 Smolensky Boulevard [Moscow], was built in 1917. In the 1930s, the family of Efrem Borisovich Rubinchik lived in this house. On March 25, 2018, a memorial plaque in memory of him was mounted on the building.

Efrem Rubinchik (Rubinchik-Meyer) was born in 1892 in Minsk into the large family of a tailor. Besides him, his parents had three daughters and four sons. Efrem completed studies at a four-class public school^[1] and also received schooling at home; he was evidently a versatile and gifted person, enterprising and bright.

Among his many occupations, in each of which he achieved a certain degree of success, were jeweller, chauffeur, machinist, publisher, and bookseller. Not to mention the fact that in the 1910s and 1920s, Efrem Rubinchik was a well known activist of the labour movement.

As a 13-year-old, in 1905, Efrem was drawn to politics, taking part in demonstrations. This led to his arrest by the tsarist police and five days in jail. In the same year, he joined the “Little Bund,” remaining a member until 1908.

In due course, Rubinchik began to take an interest in anarchism, attracted by the concept of workers organizing themselves, and attended meetings of anarchists. Sometimes he helped them in their activities; in particular, he made rubber stamps, which got him into trouble with the secret police. In 1911 he was forced to travel abroad illegally to France. There, in 1912, he joined an anarcho-syndicalist organization.

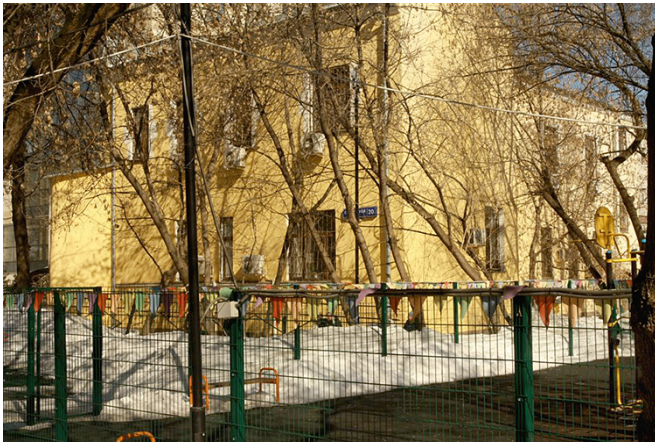
¹ A four-class school had four classrooms, and students spent two years in each classroom, so eight years of study.



HERE LIVED EFREM BORISOVICH RUBINCHIK
MACHINIST BORN IN 1892 ARRESTED 28.02.1938
SHOT 27.08.1938 REHABILITATED IN 1957

In Paris Efrem Borisovich married Sophia Solomonovna Dolginova. A son was born in 1919 in Moscow, but the couple broke up soon after that. Efrem lived in Paris for five years. After the February Revolution, political emigrants were able to return to Russia. Efrem returned in August, 1917, was one of the founders of the “Golos Truda” [Voice of Labour] book-publishing cooperative in Petrograd. Simultaneously, immediately after his return from France, he served in the 1st Detachment of Anarcho-syndicalists, fighting with the Germans at the front close to Petrograd. In February, 1922, he moved the publishing house together with the print shop to Moscow. By that time he was already in charge of two more book stores.

Efrem was arrested for the first time in 1922 by the OGPU. He spent seven months in prisons in Moscow and Petrograd before being released. However, in the autumn of 1923 he was arrested again—for collaborating with an underground anarchist



20 Smolensky Boulevard, Moscow

organization and on suspicion of taking part in an “action bureau” of anarchists. Efrem was not a member, although his wife, Tatyana Arsentievna Polozova, had some connection with the bureau. Nevertheless, he was sentenced to three years in the Suzdal “isolator” [for political prisoners].

The police believed that the bureau had set as its goals the renewal of anarcho-syndicalist activity in the USSR, the unification of anarchists, and the convening of an underground congress. The charge against Rubinchik was that, as the owner of a publishing house and book stores, he received a substantial income that he spent on organizing the escapes of anarchists from concentration camps, helping underground activists, and moving them across the border. A document in his police file suggests that it was even planned to create a regular access point on the frontier through which literature could enter the country and anarchists, who were being persecuted by Soviet power, could exit. During his interrogations, however, Rubinchik denied all the charges against him.

After his first incarceration, Rubinchik developed Graves’ disease,^[2] and after his second arrest, he applied several times to be expelled abroad, where he could receive normal medical treatment. Kropotkin’s widow Sophia Grigorievna even petitioned Lev Kamenev to release Rubinchik, explaining that he was needed to publish her husband’s writings. At this time there was a campaign abroad among revolutionary emigrants against the inhuman conditions in Soviet prisons and camps. The chairman of the OGPU Felix

² Autoimmune disorder that affects the thyroid

Dzerzhinsky informed his deputy Genrikh Yagoda about this in a note, attaching a telegram he had received protesting the arrest of Rubinchik. Dzerzhinsky wrote to the Control Commission of the Russian Communist Party and Hercllet, the representative of the French CGTU on the executive of the Profintern,^[3] explaining that Rubinchik’s arrest was an error which would quickly be rectified. But nothing happened: Rubinchik was not released. Nevertheless, within a year, by a resolution of a Special Meeting of the Collegium of the OGPU, Rubinchik’s term in a camp was replaced by exile in Tomsk.

Efrem returned to Moscow in 1927. He was allowed to live in the capital because he had published in “Pravda” an official declaration about his withdrawal from the anarchist movement.^[4] He worked for a while in a publishing house, then took a job at the “Hammer and Sickle” plant. The first year he worked as a machinist, and after that served as chair of the shop committee for six months. Then he transferred to the calibration shop, as assistant to the foreman, becoming a shift foreman himself in 1932.

By 1938, when Rubinchik was arrested the third time, there were almost no real anarchists in the USSR: all of them had either left, retired, been physically annihilated, or were rotting in camps. Thus most of the “anarchist” trials of the late 1930s were fake. Barely known is the case of the “Anarchist Centre.” On February 14, 1938, the NKVD issued a directive about clamping down on

³ See Appendix 1 for Hercllet’s intervention.

⁴ See Appendix 2.



Installing the plaque at the ceremony on March 25, 2018.

Mensheviks and anarchists. The order stipulated that “the investigation of these cases is tasked with establishing the organizational connections . . . with the Right, with Trotskyists, and with foreign intelligence services.”

Efrem Rubinchik was arrested on February 28 “for illegal counterrevolutionary activity.” Note was made of the discovery in his home of six books edited by Nikolai Bukharin (the “Bukharin trial” was due to start in a few days).

He was placed in Taganskaya Prison. At his first interrogation, Rubinchik tried to defend himself, explaining that upon returning from exile in 1927, he “severed ties once and for all with former anarchists and since that time had never and nowhere engaged in counterrevolutionary activity.” However, all was in vain. One of Rubinchik’s fellow-defendants, Efim Yarchuk, subsequently recanted his testimony and declared that he had been beaten during his interrogation, and not allowed to sleep for 10 days. It’s quite possible that similar treatment forced Rubinchik to decide



Mug shot of Efrem Rubinchik at the time of his arrest in 1938.

“not to fight the investigation” and to acknowledge that “upon return from exile in 1927 I retained my anarchist convictions and nourished within myself hatred for the Party and the Soviet government.”

To the Soviet authorities, this was tantamount to “counter-revolutionary anarchist agitation,” undermining the “measures introduced by the Party and the Soviet government, for example, raising norms of production, the Stakanovite movement, etc.,” and resurrecting an anarchist organization in 1935, the goal of which was “the overthrow of Soviet power and the restoration of capitalism.” According to the investigation, this was to be accomplished by means of terrorist acts directed against the leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet government and by staying in contact with foreign governments for the purpose of transmitting intelligence.

Following the NKVD’s directive, the interrogators diligently came up with the following charge: “He was an active participant in an illegal terrorist-espionage organization. He engaged in espionage on behalf of France, and prepared to commit terrorist acts against the leaders of the Communist Party and the Soviet government.” However, this was in excess of what the NKVD Commission and the USSR Procurator needed — for them “espionage on behalf of France was sufficient.” Efrem Borisovich Rubinchik was sentenced to the highest measure of punishment on May 27, 1938,



Rubinchik’s descendant Andrey Dolginov speaks at the ceremony.

and was shot on August 28, 1938. He was 46 years old, and left his wife Zinaida Moiseyevna and two sons—aged 13 and 18. . .⁵

When his wife applied for a review of his case in 1956, the investigator found that there was no concrete evidence in the materials of Rubinchik's file. "There is nothing in the file that could be used as a basis for arresting Rubinchik."

In the review of the case filed with the Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, it was noted that "there was no evidence in the file proving Rubinchik's guilt other than his confession. Witnesses in the case were not questioned, nor were

⁵ As mentioned in the article, Efrem Rubinchik had three wives: Sophia Solomonovna Dolginova (1889–1971), Tatyana Arsentievna Polozova (1894–?), and Zinaida Moiseyevna Karasuk-Rubinchik (1898–?). His son by his first wife was Ilya Dolgunov (1919–2006); his son by his third wife was Alexander Karasuk (1925–1944), who was killed fighting the Nazis in WWII. [Thanks to Andrey Dolginov for this information about his family.]

Appendix 1

A letter of support found in Rubinchik's police file was written Auguste Hercllet (1898–1842), a permanent delegate of the Confédération générale du travail unitaire (CGTU) to the Profintern (Red International of Labour Unions) in Moscow. Hercllet had been an anarcho-syndicalist until 1921, but joined the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1925 before drifting out of left-wing activity by the early 1930s. This fragment of the letter is supplied by "Memorial."

I'm writing about Comrade Rubinchik, one of the directors of the library of "Golos Truda," arrested on September 5, 1923, in connection with the Krasnoshchekov case that is in the courts now. From the time of his arrest, it was clear that he had no connection with the Krasnoshchekov case,¹ and yet he continues to be held in prison. This comrade, although an anarchist, has never taken part in the slightest activity against Soviet power.

¹ Alexander Mikhailovich Krasnoshchekov (1880–1937) was head of the National Industrial Bank (Prombank) when he was arrested in October, 1923, and charged with financial irregularities. In a previous life, so to speak, he was a movement lawyer in the USA and once represented Aron and Fanny Baron when they were arrested during a police riot in Chicago in 1915. There is no obvious link between Rubinchik and the "Krasnoshchekov case," which involved graft by bank employees. Krasnoshchekov was sentenced to six years in prison, but was amnestied in 1925.

compromising materials found."

The Collegium issued its own verdict: "Bearing in mind that Rubinchik was convicted of anarchist activity in 1923, and served his sentence; and that the charge of counterrevolutionary activity in 1938 was not corroborated, the prosecutor general believes that Rubinchik was repressed a second time without any basis and therefore proposes to dismiss the case."

And so the case was dismissed "for lack of evidence for the charges brought." Rubinchik's wife was informed of the results and in August, 1957, a certificate of rehabilitation was issued.

Therefore I feel justified in asking you to look into this matter, since I'm personally convinced of Rubinchik's integrity. As a matter of fact, this comrade lived in France for a dozen years under the name Meyer. He returned to Russia in 1917. During the first years of the War, Meyer-Rubinchik was very active in opposing the War, and some of his articles signed by him and his comrades were posted on walls in the main cities of France and especially in the region of Lyon, where I was on military service at the time.

I met Comrade Meyer in Lyon, where we worked together and I also took part in distributing proclamations against the imperialist War.

This was a time when revolutionaries of all schools, syndicalist-revolutionaries, extreme left-wing socialists, and anarchists worked together against the War based on the principles laid down by the Kienthal and Zimmerwald conferences.

I've learned from Meyer-Rubinchik's partner, who approached me, that he is seriously ill, and that his condition requires a surgical operation and rest, naturally outside of prison.

I hope, dear comrades, that this appeal will not remain without results and that within the briefest period of time you will review this case and

arrive at the appropriate decision.

Delegate of the United General Confederation of Labour to the Executive Committee of the Comintern

HERCLET

March 3, 1924

Appendix 2

As a former prominent opponent of the regime, Rubinchik could gain his freedom only by having a ritual mea culpa published in the Soviet press. The following letter was reprinted in V. V. Krivenky, ed., Anarchists: Documents and Materials, Vol 2: 1917-1935, p. 496.]

Letter to the Editor

MOSCOW, January 28, 1927

Dear comrade editor!

I was active in the anarcho-syndicalist movement starting in 1912. The last few years have convinced me that anarcho-syndicalism is not capable of solving the basic problems of the revolutionary movement. Therefore I no longer find it possible to take part in it and consider it necessary to go hand in hand with Soviet power in the matter of socialist construction.

E. B. Rubinchik-Meyer

[Published in Pravda (Moscow), February 11, 1927]

Appendix 3

On December 30, 1956, the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR, specializing in cases involving "counterrevolutionary activity," issued its "objection" to Rubinchik's 1938 conviction. This fragment of the document is provided by "Memorial."

Secret

In the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR:

OBJECTION (submitted within the supervisory review procedure) in the case of E. V. RUBINCHIK

By a resolution of the NKVD USSR and the Procurator of the Union SSR of May 22 1938 there was

sentenced to the VMN:^[1]

Efrem (Efraim) Borisovich RUBINCHIK, born 1892, a native the city of Minsk, Jewish, citizen of the USSR, non-party, foreman of a shift in the calibration shop of the "Hammer and Sickle" plant.

RUBINCHIK was accused of being an active participant of a terrorist-espionage anarchist organization; that he was spying for France.

Upon being interrogated by organs of the preliminary investigation, RUBINCHIK indicated that in 1905 he was arrested by the tsarist secret police for taking part in a demonstration and was under arrest for 5 days.

From 1912 to 1917 he belonged to an organization of anarcho-syndicalists. In 1922 he was arrested by the OGPU for anarchist activity and sentenced to 7 months in prison. In 1923 he arrested again by the OGPU and sentenced to 3 years in exile.

RUBINCHIK further testified that after returning from exile in 1927, he retained his anarchist convictions, and nourished hatred for the Communist Party and the Soviet government. In 1935, in response to the proposal of the former active anarchist Ya. A. KAMENETSKY,^[2] who was residing in Leⁿingrad, he created an illegal anarchist organization in Moscow.

The participants of this illegal organization were named by RUBINCHIK as: ZILBERMAN, V. NOVOZHILOV, T. A. POLOZKOVA, SHVARTS, N. OSTROVSKY, V. STOYANOV, PETROSOV AND A. MIKHALEV.^[3]

¹ VMN = Vysshaya Mera Nakazaniya, the highest measure of punishment, i.e. shooting.

² Yakov Abelevich Kamenetsky (?-?) was an anarcho-syndicalist active in Petrograd during the 1917 revolution. During the Civil War, he joined the Bolshevik Party, and later held managerial jobs in economic institutions. (Thanks to A. V. Dubovik for this information.)

³ Most of these people can not be definitely identified, partly due to careless drafting of the document, but there is a noticeable tendency to have been anarcho-syndicalists at some point.

Vladimir Dmitrievich Novozhilov (1897-1937) became an anarcho-syndicalist in 1916, worked for the Golos Truda publishing house in the 1920s, and was frequently arrested by the Soviet authorities.

"T. A. Polozkova" is surely Tatiana Arsentievna Polozova (1896-?), who did clerical work for the Golos Truda pub-

RUBINCHIK admitted also that, while working at the “Sickle & Hammer” plant since 1927, he obstructed fulfillment of the plan in his own shop and frequently passed on information to French intelligence about the output of the plant, in particular, about the production of steel. Informa-

tion for French intelligence was transmitted by KAMENETSKY.

Besides this testimony of RUBINCHIK, there is no other evidence of his guilt in the file. No witnesses were questioned. . . .

lishing house in Petrograd. An anarcho-syndicalist, she was arrested in 1922 and sentenced the following year to three years in a northern “special purpose” camp. She was Rubinchik’s ex-wife.

Nikolai Konstantinovich Ostrovsky (1887-1938) was an anarcho-communist from 1905. In the early Soviet period was one of the leading members of the Petrograd Federation of Anarcho-Communists. He was frequently arrested by both the tsarist and Soviet authorities.

“Stoyanov” is probably Boris Semenovich Stoyanov (1892–1938), an ideologue of the anarcho-syndicalist movement at the time of the Civil War. An anarchist from 1912, he was active in the Petersburg Federation of Anarcho-Syndicalist Groups and edited the journal “Volny Trud” [Free Labour] in 1918–1919. Frequently arrested by the Cheka, he left the anarchist movement in 1922 and held managerial jobs in the paper industry. [Thanks to A. V. Dubovik for much of the information in this footnote.]

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<https://www.poslednyadres.ru/news/news638.htm>