Regional Cohorts and Political Mobility in the USSR:
The Case of Dnepropetrovsk*

On April 7, 1973, Radians’ka Ukraina, the Soviet Ukrainian newspaper, reported on a plenum of the Odessa regional Party organization in the Ukrainian republic held the previous day. The most significant decision reviewed at the plenum had been the removal of the regional Party second secretary, N. A. Neizvestnyi, for unspecified “shortcomings in his work.” To outside observers of Odessa politics in the Soviet Union during the preceding three years, Neizvestnyi’s departure under criticism would not have been entirely unexpected. This final change appeared to climax a sweeping and, perhaps, not unrelated replacement of the Odessa regional leadership which, since 1970, had already seen the replacement of the regional Party committee (obkom) first secretary, industry secretary, ideology secretary, the head of the Party agitprop department, and the chairman of the regional state executive committee (oblpolkom). In a period when stability had become the rule in the leadership hierarchy of most Ukrainian regional parties,1 the Odessa leadership not only had undergone extensive turnover between 1970 and 1973, but all of those removed were either retired, demoted, or reassigned to positions so insignificant as to preclude any further reference to them in any official capacity through the end of 1974. In a plenary report to the Ukrainian Central Committee only eleven days after Neizvestnyi’s dismissal, V. V. Shcherbitskii, the Ukrainian First Party Secretary, singled out the Odessa regional party as one in which in the past “collective leadership had been ignored in the selection of cadres,” “some former executives . . . had stifled criticism,” and an atmosphere had evolved in which “certain sectors of the region were taken over by unqualified

---

*This article is a revised version of a paper presented at the Central Slavic Conference, November 7-8, 1975, at the University of Kansas. The study was supported by a grant from the Science and Humanities Research Institute at Iowa State University. Names of all Ukrainian geographical locales and officials have been spelled in their standard Russian transliteration to be consistent with the transliteration of Russian geographical locales and officials’ names. The only exceptions are periodicals and books actually written in Ukrainian, which have been rendered in their standard Ukrainian transliterated form.

1. For a detailed quantitative analysis of leadership stability after 1964 in twenty-five different regional Party committees of the Russian and Ukrainian republics, see Joel C. Moses, Regional Party Leadership and Policy-Making in the USSR (New York, 1974), pp. 159-246. Since 1973, however, regional parties in the Ukraine have experienced extensive leadership turnover and personnel change, apparently related to Shelest’s ouster as the Ukrainian First Party Secretary.
drifters and money-grubbers."²

Whatever motives may have prompted the direct attacks on the Odessa leadership since 1970, the irony of Neizvestnyi's removal was that it coincided with a second political trend in the Ukraine—one for which it seems less difficult to ferret out an ulterior motive and one to which Shcherbitskii in particular would have been unlikely to refer. For Neizvestnyi was replaced as regional second secretary by V. A. Artamanov, who immediately prior to this time had been first secretary of the Krivoy Rog urban committee (gorkom) in the Ukrainian region of Dnepropetrovsk.³ As such, Artamanov was the twenty-fourth official who had served in the Dnepropetrovsk region since 1954 who had been promoted to an equivalent or even higher political position outside the region.

The opportunities for political advancement among Dnepropetrovsk officials had significantly improved since a native and former regional committee first secretary, L. I. Brezhnev, had assumed leadership of the Communist Party in October, 1964, and another native and former regional committee first secretary, the same V. V. Shcherbitskii, had politically rebounded in late 1965 again to become Chairman of the Ukrainian Council of Ministers and, after 1970, Ukrainian First Party Secretary and full member of the All-Union Politburo. Excluding Shcherbitskii (who formally had returned as first secretary of the region until November, 1965), ten individuals could be cited who had served in Dnepropetrovsk at least through 1964 and had only subsequently been promoted to major Union-republic or All-Union positions. Among these very recent regional cohorts with whom Artamanov could closely identify were: 1) L. K. Shpakovskii, Ukrainian Minister of Everyday Services (1966- );² 2) N. F. Vasil'ev, first secretary of the Belgorod regional committee (May, 1964-71) and First Deputy Chairman of the Russian Council of Ministers (1971- );⁵ 3) N. I. Kovalev, Chairman of the All-Union Railroad Transport Workers Union (1969- );⁶ 4) V. F. Dobrik, first secretary of the Ivano-Frankovsk (1969-73) and L'vov (1973- ) regional commit-

³. Radiants'ka Ukraina [hereafter RU], April 7, 1973. For previous references to Artamanov, see Partiinaia zhizn' [hereafter Pzh], 1 (January 1968), p. 62; Dneprovskaja pravda (Dnepropetrovsk) [hereafter Dp], January 14, June 20, and September 29, 1970; and PU, October 2, 1971.
⁵. See biographies of Vasil'ev in Ezhegodnik bol'shoi Sovetskoi entsiklopedii [hereafter Ezhegodnik] (Moscow, 1971); Deputaty Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR [hereafter Deputaty] (Moscow, 1974); and Belgorodskia pravda (Belgorod), May 26, 1970.
⁶. For references to Kovalev, see elections to the Ukrainian Trade-Union Council Central Committee in PU, May 17, 1958, and the All-Union Trade-Union Council Central Committee in Trud, March 5, 1968; specific references as regional trade-union chairman are from Trud, November 7, 1959, and PU, November 26, 1967; and the current position is from references in the 1970 Ezhegodnik, p. 34, and the 1974 Ezhegodnik, p. 23.