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REVIEW

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The Most Influential Scientists in the Development of Public Health (3): Nikolai Aleksandrovich Semashko (1874-1949)

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Nikolai Aleksandrovich Semashko (1874 - 1949), was a Russian statesman who became People's Commissar of Public Health in 1918 and served in that role until 1930 (1-4).

He was one of the organizers of the Health care system in the Soviet Union. Semashko was academician of the Academy of Medical Sciences since 1944 and of the RSFSR since 1945. In the year 1891, after graduating from the Yelets gymnasium (where he studied with Mikhail Prishvin), Semashko entered the Medical faculty of Moscow University.

In 1893, he became a member of a Marxist group. In 1895, for his participation in the revolutionary movement, he was arrested and exiled to his home in Livenskoe, under strict police surveillance. In 1901 he graduated from the medical faculty of Kazan University, after which he worked as a doctor in Oryol and Samara. In 1906 he emigrated to Switzerland and lived in Geneva, where he met with Vladimir Lenin.

In August 1907, Semashko was a delegate from the Geneva Bolshevik organization at the International Socialist Congress of the Second International. He was arrested by the Swiss police after Olga (Sarra) Ravich, convicted in the case of the Tiflis expropriation, sent him a letter from prison. In 1908, together with the Bolshevik foreign center, he moved to Paris, where until 1910 he worked as secretary of the Foreign Bureau of the Central Committee of the RSDLP and participated in the Party School in Longjumeau (1911). At the Sixth (Prague) All-Russia Conference of the RSDLP (1912), Semashko delivered a report on the insurance business, consisting of a draft resolution that



had been edited by Lenin and was adopted by the Conference. In 1913, Semashko participated in the social-democratic movement in Serbia and Bulgaria; at the beginning of World War I he was interned.

Returning to Moscow in September 1917, he was elected chairman of the Bolshevik faction of the Pyatnitskaya district council. He was a delegate of the Sixth Party Congress, participated in the preparation of the armed insurrection in Moscow, and organized medical care for its participants.

After the October Revolution, Semashko was head of the Health Department of the Moscow City Council, and from July 1918 to 1930 he held the post of Commissar of Health of the RSFSR (1). He directed the opening of Lenin's body. Under Semashko's leadership, work was carried out to combat epidemics, the foundations of Soviet public health were laid, and a system of protection of motherhood and childhood and the health of children and adolescents and a network of medical research institutes were created (e.g. State Central Institute of Public Nutrition - now the Scientific Research Institute of Nutrition).

In the period of 1921-1949 Semashko was a professor with the Chair of Social Hygiene in the Medical faculty of Moscow State University (from 1931 the Moscow Medical Academy). From 1930 to 1936, Semashko worked in the Central Executive Committee, where he served as a member of the Presidium and the chairman of the Commission for the Improvement of Children's Lives (formerly the Detkomis-siya), which was entrusted with the fight against homelessness and the management of therapeutic and preventive work in children's health facilities.

In the period of 1945-1949 he was Director of the Institute for School Health of the RSFSR, and at the same time (1947-1949) of the Institute for Health and History of Medicine of the Academy of Medical Sciences (since 1965 the Research Institute of the Semashko Social Hygiene and Public Health Organization) (1, 2, 5).

He was a founder of the Central Medical Library in the

year 1918, and of the House of Scientists in 1922 in Moscow. From the year 1927 to 1936 he was Editor-in-Chief of the Great Medical Encyclopedia. Also, he was the first chairman of the Supreme Council for Physical Education and Sports (from 1923), chairman of the All-Union Hygiene Society (1940-1949), and delegate to the 10th, 12th, and 16th Party Congresses. He was awarded the Order of Lenin, the Order of the Red Banner of Labour, and medals.

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