

POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE RUSSIAN CIVIL WAR

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The importance of the research topic is determined by the lack of the single point of view and diversity of researches' opinions on political history of the Russian Civil War. The paper is aimed at shaping a common viewpoint on key aspects of the Civil War. The basic approach to the research problem is the objective analysis of events under consideration. The main findings comprise theories about the events of 1919-1920s in Russia, the analysis of the achievements of modern historiography of the Civil War and the conclusion about the dates of its end. The article submissions may be useful for researchers dealing with the Civil War, while running lectures or writing papers on history and historiography.

Keywords: history, political history, civil war, Soviet historiography, Constituent Assembly, anti-Bolshevik movements.

INTRODUCTION

For many years, Soviet historiography has portrayed the Russian Civil War (1918-1920) as a heroic and romantic period in the history of the country rather than a national tragedy. Therefore, many books and articles were written about victorious battles of the Red Army, glorifying the only legitimate policy of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) and justifying violence of the revolution.

It has been estimated that the average monthly population losses of those years amounted to 184.1 thousand and the population of Russia had decreased by ten million by the beginning of 1921 (Polyakov, 1986).

According to Soviet historiography, among causes of the civil war were the activity of counter-revolutionary parties and movements, officers and generals of the old army, former landowners and bourgeoisie, the interference of interventionists. It was not until the mid-80s when they claimed all warring parties to be responsible for the outbreak of the fratricidal war. In the 1990s it was suggested that the Bolsheviks are primarily to blame for initiating and fueling the civil war, which in turn should be regarded as a crisis of Russian statehood (Pipes, 1994). Once again researchers were confronted with questions on whether or not the civil war in Russia was inevitable and when the war began.

In order to answer the first question it is necessary to determine which civil war or its manifestations is being referred to, given that the February Revolution of 1917 was also an act of the civil war, which ended with a relatively easy victory over tsarist regime in Russia. Modern historians still argue about the day when the Civil War broke out. Some believe that it began on October 25, 1917 after the

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Bolsheviks seized power in the country. Others state that the Civil War was launched after dispersal of the Russian Constituent Assembly when the democratic alternative to the development of Russia was violently interrupted by the Bolsheviks. Some people also speak of the “long war” of 1914-1922, in which Russia was involved. Soviet and Russian historian Tyutyukin points out, “If there hadn’t been the First World War, the collapse of the Russian Empire and the establishment of Soviet Dictatorship would never have taken place... As to the civil war, it represents the respond of Russian society to the disasters of 1917 and the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk” (Wade, 2000). Today, former views on the causes of the Russian Civil War have been supplemented with reflections on the role of the Brest-Litovsk peace treaty with Germany signed on March 3, 1918, as well as with the conclusion that maximalist economic Bolshevik policy was among the factors that contributed to the aggravation of the bloody confrontation between different social classes existing in Russia at that time, which struggled to maintain their rights and property.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Research objectives

The purpose of the article is to possibly create a common understanding of the key issues of the Russian Civil War.

Methods of study

The method of study is based on the principle of historicism, which means considering all events in their historical contingency. The general principles of historiographic analysis have been applied including determination of research objectives and analysis of theoretical and methodological views of the authors. The authors applied comparative historical method, which allowed us to study all the views available in the scientific literature on causes and start date of the Russian Civil War, and on this basis specific conclusion can be drawn.

RESULTS

On July 10, 1918, the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets adopted the first Soviet Constitution, which was of a purely class-based character and excluded representatives of entire classes of Russian society from the electoral rolls for elections to the Council. The opinion that there were the Communist “Reds” fighting the Tsarist “Whites” in the civil war with internationalists on the side with the “Reds” and interventionists on the side with the “Whites” is oversimplified, primarily because millions of civilians were victims in that war. It is worth mentioning, that according to a rough estimate, irrecoverable losses of the Red and White armies numbered 800,000 people; considering those who died of diseases and the so-called indirect victims (white and red terror, and

other causes) the losses amounted to approximately 5 million people (Litvin, 2004).

When running lectures at American universities in the early 1920s, professor Milyukov emphasized the fact that “anti-Bolshevik movement” is a broader term than “the Whites” because, in his opinion, “the entirety of Russia was and remained anti-Bolshevik except for the Communist Party”. Perhaps, he was referring to the political system that had established during the civil war years on the Soviet Republic territory, when neither a single peasant uprising nor even Kronstadt in 1921 raised anti-Soviet slogans; instead, they demanded Soviets without Communists.

Actually, the Constitution of the Soviet Republic adopted at the Fifth All-Russian Congress of Soviets proclaimed, “Russia is declared to be a republic of the Soviets of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants Deputies. All the central and local power belongs to these Soviets.” However, as it often happened in the history of our country, this constitutional statement was largely declarative, since not the Soviets but the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks (RCP(b)) single-handedly ruled the country.

The resolution on the organizational issues of the VIII Party Congress (March, 1919) stated that the Russian Communist Party holds the power and the entire Soviet administrative bodies in its hands. Lenin declared, “Our party is the government party and every resolution that the party congress enacts will be mandatory for the entire republic” (Lenin, 1967; Eighth Congress of the RCP (b), 1959). Therefore, it would be closer to the truth to suggest that the Soviet political system had evolved during the years of the civil war; thus it was not the Constitution of the RSFSR that defined its existence but the military communist system with militarized regulation, the creation of a powerful centralized bureaucracy, industry nationalization, requisition, the elimination of democratic freedoms, and the state policy of terror and intimidation. It was a system able to withstand extreme conditions, though it has brought innumerable hardships to the population. This system was designed to protect power, not people.

Comprehending what was happening and thinking of the future, Maxim Gorky in his book “Untimely Thoughts” warned that mutual extermination of democracies during the civil war will only lead to the mischievous delight of their enemies. Bitterly he states, “When sailor Zheleznyakov was interpreting his leaders’ speeches full of rage into ordinary folk’s language, he said that it’s worth killing a million people for the good of Russian people... There are many people in Russia - enough murderers as well ... Mass extermination of dissidents is a true and time-tested practice in Russian domestic policy” (Gorky, 1918).

On September 8, 1918, the State Conference opened in Ufa and was attended by representatives of all the anti-Bolshevik parties and organizations of the country (Argunov, 1919; Zenzinov, 1919; Utgoff 1921; Shishkin, 2008; and others). They attempted to form a single all-Russian democratic government and even adopted

the “Act Establishing All-Russian Supreme Authority”. The Meeting announced the establishment of this government (The Directory) headed by the Right-Social revolutionary Avksentiev. In early October, the Directory relocated to Omsk, where, on November 18, 1918, it was dissolved after supporters of Admiral Kolchak seized the power. Similar events were taking place in the north of the country, where the government of national-socialist N.V. Chaikovsky first announced its submission to the Directory, but later handed over the reins of power to General Miller. Thus, the democratic government was replaced by military dictatorship with Kolchak and Denikin as its most prominent representatives. They had much in common, according to Milyukov: success at first and later defeat (Milyukov, 1927). His apologetic biographer Melgunov claimed, that “the tragedy of Kolchak was not just a personal drama, it was the drama of falling out of conceit with others, the drama of frustration and shattered illusions. It was the tragedy of the whole civil war. The tragedy of Russia and its people” (Melgunov, 1930). How relevant were the claims of Melgunov?

In the fall of 1918, World War I ended with the defeat of Germany and its satellites. It was then that the oppressive Brest-Litovsk peace treaty signed between Soviet Russia and Germany lost force. Among the Bolsheviks, expectations of coming world revolution increased. In Soviet Russia, nomenklatura-based one-party system of management was growing stronger and became the omnipotent instrument of violence. Hence, terror was a component of the ideology and practical activities both of the Bolsheviks and of military regimes headed by generals, who replaced democratic establishments. Neither those nor others wanted to share the power and were aggressive to all their opponents. Terror and violence became ordinary rules of actions of warring parties at that time (Buldakov, 2010; and others).

On September 5, 1918, after the assassination of the Petrograd Extraordinary Commission (Cheka) leader and attempted assassination of Lenin (30 August, 1918), the Bolshevik decree has officially announced the Red Terror. According to the well-known Chekist Latsis, only the Petrograd Cheka killed 800 people by shooting in September, 1918. Actually the number of the victims was much higher. (Ratkovsky, 2006; etc.). A wartime campaign was established in the country. Lenin considered that “Cheka is directly fulfilling the dictatorship of the proletariat and in this regard their role is invaluable” (Lenin, 1967). The Red Terror definitely frightened and weakened but didn’t destroy the armed or the political opposition to the ruling regime.

In the fall of 1918, the number of workers’ and peasants’ uprisings against Bolshevik authorities rapidly increased. The largest was the Izhevsk-Votkinsk armed revolt of workers and numerous peasant rebels took place all over the country Izhevsk-Votkinsk revolt: history, problems of studying and perception, 2008; Telitsyn, 2001; and others). The country was facing food crisis and economic devastation.

Beginning in January 1919, the system of War Communism, adopted by the Bolshevik government, started to be used. Its primary goal was centralized management. War Communism followed the policy of obligatory fulfillment of all government orders under the threat of repressions and unrelenting pressure on the population. War Communism included the introduction of “*prodrazvyorstka*”, i.e. mandated requisition of agricultural surplus from peasants, along with the creation of a 5-million-man army through forced mobilization of the peasant population, charging the same peasants with numerous fiscal duties, the nationalization of industries, the introduction of labor armies, etc. (Pavlyuchenko, 1997; and others). The near future revealed that this was not the best way out of the political and economic crisis for the country at that time. In March 1921, War Communism was replaced by the New Economic Policy (NEP), the food requisitioning policy was replaced by a tax and there appeared private property in consumer goods industry. However, these measures taken by the authorities proved to be merely a temporary retreat from War Communism. By the end of the 1920s, the Bolshevik government dismissed the NEP, continued building an extremely centralized state, and banned ownership of any kind of private property. The futility of War communism carried out by the Bolsheviks during the civil war demonstrated that utopian desires cannot be turned into reality by command, even enforced by incredible and brutal violence. Standards of living went into dramatic decline. It is well known that the number of residents of Petrograd (St. Petersburg) declined by three times in those years. Between 1914-1920, in Moscow the price of salt increased by 125 thousand times, sugar - 28 thousand times, potatoes - 21 thousand times, and millet by 15 thousand times. In cities, they used a class-based ration stamp system which allowed the holder to obtain food and other commodities. Soviet officials received special rations. Two million deserters were on the loose throughout the country and so were the horrible diseases typhoid and cholera (Izmozik, Starkov, Pavlov, Rudnik, 2010).

DISCUSSION

The policy of War communism caused hardship for the population of the country which the Soviet historiography described like virtue. The policy based on direct use of force came to nothing. For example, the annual requirement of grain of the country's population was estimated to be approximately 744 million poods. In 1918-1919 by draconian methods there were collected 107, 9 million poods of grain and fodder, in 1919-1920 – 212, 5 million poods, in 1920-1921 – 367 million poods. Food requisition policy failed to procure sufficient amounts of grain for the population of the Soviet republic. Similarly, nationalized industries failed to meet even defense needs of the Red Army. In the summer of 1919, 862 thousand out of 1,4 million workers were occupied in the defense industries of Soviet Russia, while the Red Army faced shortage of 35% rifles, 65% machine guns and 60% weapons.

(Kovalenko, 1970) The policy of War communism included incredible bureaucratization of management systems. The leading personnel in Soviet Russia kept expanding within the civil war years. In 1920, the number of non-manual workers in Moscow and Petrograd made 40% of men in employment.

According to the census of 1920, in Moscow more than 30 thousand people worked only in major people's commissariats, 70 thousand in Moscow Council and services subordinated to it. In total, at least 230 thousand Soviet employees occupied the capital nomenklatura positions. About 198 thousand employees worked in different departments of 53 gubernia executive committees; moreover, there remained nearly 78 thousand vacancies. The maintenance of the numerous public administration personnel required large expenses, but the attempts to reduce them didn't bring to any notable results (Gimpelson, 1987). Inefficiency of War communism policy first of all affected national economy. Prodravzyorstka led to the reduction of croplands, naturalization of peasant households; introduction of obligatory labor duty and militarization of labour had an adverse effect on the performance of workers as well as of peasants who didn't care its growth. Indeed, there were alternatives to military communistic policy of the Bolsheviks. One was offered by the Mensheviks, another faction of the labour party, who supported the development of the commodity-money relations in the country and adopting the new economic policy in contrast to War Communism (Tyutyukin, 2002). The Bolsheviks responded to their proposals with repressions. It was then when the Soviet nomenklatura began its development.

At the end of 1918 mismanaged democratic opponents of Bolshevism were replaced by the armies with generals on top who recognized Kolchak as the Supreme Ruler of the country (Zyryanov, 2006; Kozlov, 2004; Zimina, 2006; and others). Thus, centralized control of the White movement didn't happen. Despite military experience of the administration of armies, they were territorially disconnected and were guided by interventions of other countries. They had no clear vision of the future state system of Russia, and the slogan about the united and indivisible country caused the rejection of the former Russian Empire by many national regions. The basic program principle, pushed by white generals, was probably better stated by Denikin, who called himself the supporter of national dictatorship. His main aim was "to overthrow the Bolsheviks, to recover the bases of statehood and social peace in order to create necessary conditions for building the world by the will of Orthodox people" (Tsvetkov, 2004). Considering the ideology of the White movement, American historian Kenes, came to the conclusion that "All public statements of White leaders were filled with the national sense of patriotism and nationalism, the latter becoming the cornerstone of the Whites' program and it was not surprising. Probably, they instinctively aimed at nationalism as they didn't have any other uniting idea" (Kenes, 1980). Multinational population of the former Russian Empire didn't accept this program. According to Denikin, leaders of the

White movement were then under the influence of monarchists, Kadets and the Right socialists. Admittedly, Denikin wanted to occupy a certain position between extreme reaction and liberals, which he determined as “nepredreshenchestvo” (non-predetermination). He thought it will give an opportunity to all the people against Bolshevism “to preserve bad peace and take one way and go in rivalry, suspiciously looking back at each other, being at feud and melting in heart – ones will preserve republic, others – monarchy” (Denikin, 1925).

Special propaganda bodies thought their duty to show that they represented not the bourgeoisie, but the people who after the victory over Bolsheviks would determine their future themselves. It should be noted that propaganda of military organizations was directed against Bolsheviks and commissars, but avoided the Councils as the most popular form of governance.

In the Civil war years appeared a sharp, ruthless, label-attaching terminology for exposing the opponents of one another. The writer emigrant Osorgin (1878-1942) tried to offer an explanation for this phenomenon when he described that period in the novel “Sivtsev Vrazhek”: “The two brotherly armies stood firmly opposite each other, and each had their own truth and their own honor. True were those who thought that both homeland and revolution had been insulted by new despotism and it was new only because it was differently colored violence; so were true those who had another understanding of homeland and another assessment of revolution, who considered insulting not the obscene peace with Germans, but the deception of national hopes ... There were heroes on both sides as well as pure hearts, victims and victories, exasperation and unwritten in books great human feelings, animal atrocity and fear, strength and weakness, disappointment and stupid despair. It would be too simple for living people and history if there was only one truth that fought with falsehood; but there were two truths and two honors that fought with each other, - and they covered the battlefield with bodies of the best and the most fair”. Thus, nowadays historians can't adopt the position either of the supporter or of the opponent. It is necessary to study former experience to understand and make everything for the prevention of fratricidal war in the country; so that the political regimes could peacefully replace each other without being violently forced.

CONCLUSION

1919 became the most significant in the history of the Russian Civil War battles. In the spring of 1919, the Bolsheviks faced a critical military situation when Kolchak's troops reached the Volga, whose army was presently defeated. In May-June and September-October Yudenich's troops tried to capture Petrograd, but the attacks resulted in failure. By the summer of 1919 Commander-in-chief Denikin's Armed Forces of South Russia, having taken Tsaritsyn, Belgorod and Herson, advanced forward Moscow and by June had captured Kursk and Orel. In October,

Denikin's troops were defeated and had to retreat. In March 1920, the remains of Denikin's army withdrew to the Crimea and came under General Wrangel's command. The main battles of 1920 were the Polish-Soviet War (April-October) and the struggle with Wrangel's army (April-November). On March 18, 1921, the Peace of Riga was signed with Poland, under which Western Ukrainian and Western Belarusian lands were given up to Poland. In November 1920, the Red Army stepped down to the Crimea. The majority of Wrangel's army and civilians were evacuated abroad.

The battles of the Russian Civil War, the history of the Red Army have been widely discussed in Soviet historiography. Researches of Soviet historians were full of admiration with the Bolsheviks' victories and their leaders, whose fate and activity were determined by the political environment. At that time, the Chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council Trotsky, the army chiefs Vatsetis, Tukhachevsky and many others turned out to be enemies of the people. It was natural that the attitude to opponents of the Bolshevik power was essentially negative at that time. In the 1990s, Russian historiography has undergone peculiar changes. Now, political parties aimed against the Bolsheviks and the anti-Bolshevik movement became the focus of many researches. Scientific studies of the role of ruling party in the country of that time - RCP(b) – has practically stopped. Most modern researches can be considered as the opposite reflection of Soviet works which praised the Bolsheviks, and now this glory has passed to their opponents. Therefore, unbiased study of the civil war history is to be carried out as well as purifying it from various myths and legends connected with that time.

Among historians there are still debates about the end year of the Civil war in Russia: in 1920 or in 1922. It is beyond doubt, that by the beginning of 1921 the military victory of the Bolsheviks on the main fronts of the civil war has been recorded. That's when the Far Eastern Republic (FER) was established in Zabaykalye in the Constituent assembly of which, along with communists, were representatives of the Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and other democratic parties. By the fall of 1922, the Japanese had left Primorye and, in November 1922, FER became a part of RSFSR.

As a rule, modern historiographies of the Russian civil war assess tendencies of studying this phenomenon of the Russian history from the point of view of political bias of the author. Historiographic works of I.V. Mikhaylov seem to express the desire of the author to produce an impression and criticize everybody without any sufficient argumentation. So, he critically speaks of those researchers who think that the responsibility for the outbreak of the civil war lies on all its participants. Mikhaylov considers it as "cowardly neglect of the problem of revolutionary violence". The author of the article "Civil war: the new approach" Posadsky sees it in "the sharp division of historians into "the reds" and "the whites". In general, the article is more like a review of his favorite works close to "the red" historians, thus it doesn't acquire any scientific significance.

It is known that any historical analogy is relatively conventional; hence, nowadays it isn't necessary to threaten anybody with a civil war. The one, which was in Russia in 1918-1920, is unlikely to break out for many reasons: though, the flames of its ethnic riots can be expected and it is necessary to do everything to avoid them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The practical importance of the given research is that the paper findings may be useful for students, those doing the Master's and PhD degrees in Russian History of the 20th century.

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