

Formation of the Social Revolutionary Organizations in the Far East and Their Activities Until February, 1917

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Abstract. The article discusses the history of formation Far East organizations of the Party of Socialist-revolutionaries. The influence of the salient features of region and its social structure on the popularity of the party among the local population is studied. The authors examine the activity of the Far East organizations of Socialist-revolutionaries from the beginning of the 20 th century till February, 1917.

1. Introduction

The first units of political parties were formed in the Russian Far East soon after they had come into existence in central Russia. The Far East had been a place of political exile for a long time. Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats who were engaged in political propaganda among the local population served their term here. Thus, a well-known Socialist Revolutionary terrorist Maria Spiridonova (the future leader of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party) had been serving penal servitude in Transbaikalia until February 1917. Such an early appearance of representatives of these parties in the region and their activity allowed them to acquire supporters with similar political views that led to the emergence of local party organizations.

2. Relevance, scientific significance of the issue, a brief review of the literature

The history of the activities of the Far Eastern organizations of the Party of Socialists-Revolutionaries until 1917 never became an independent object of research. As part of the study of the history of the revolutionary struggle in the Far East, until February 1917, their activities were examined in monographs and articles by such researchers as A.I. Krushanov [1], N.A. Bilim [2], N.A. Vasilenko [3]. Other researchers in their writings dealt with certain issues related to the activities of the Social Revolutionaries. Their participation in cooperation was highlighted in the work of B.V. Ivanov [4]. O.Ya. Yakovleva [5] in her article wrote about the influence of the Socialist Revolutionary views on the positions of Far Eastern deputies in the III State Duma, and A.V. Sokolenko [6] investigated the struggle of security agencies with the revolutionary movement.

3. Formulation of the problem

The objective of the work is to analyze the activities of the Far Eastern organizations of the Party of Socialists of Revolutionaries from their formation until February 1917.

4. Practical relevance, proposals and implementation results, experimental research results

The research materials can be used to develop courses "History of Russia", "History of Political Parties of Russia."

5. Main body

Some specific features of the settlement and development of the Russian Far East explain the uniqueness of the social composition of the local population that affected the alignment of political forces in the region. Most of the region's population consisted of peasants who were much better off than their counterparts in central Russia. It is worth mentioning that even the poor in the Russian Far East hired workers for the period of agricultural work. The difference in the social groups of the Far Eastern peasantry from the ones in central Russia in quantitative terms was also striking. Thus, in 1917, the poor in the Russian Far East accounted for 33 percent of peasants, middle peasants for 45 percent and prosperous peasants for 22 percent while in the central part of Russia the figures were 65 percent, 20 percent, and 15 percent respectively. However, despite these optimistic figures, the Far Eastern peasants were also concerned about the solution of the land issue [7].

A significant part of land in the region belonged to the Royal family (about 68 million hectares in Siberia and the Far East, including mines, forests, arable land and hayfields), church and monasteries (200 thousand dessiatines) and Cossacks (the Amur and the Ussuri Cossacks, who received 30 dessiatines of land per one male while 10 dessiatines went to a Cossack village reserve fund in 1894 by order of the Amur Governor-General S.M.Dukhovskoy, the so-called 'Dukhovskoy's allotment'). Peasants also possessed a lot of land. Peasants in the Russian Far East could be divided into two groups depending on the size of their land allotment: 'stodessiatinniki' (or 'old-timers' who arrived in 1861–1900 and received 100 dessiatines per family), and 'new settlers' (who moved to the region after 1900 and were provided a plot of rather poor land of 15 dessiatines per one male). The lack of land gave rise to discontent among the 'new settlers' and led to the spread of land leasing both among their own class and among Cossacks. Under pressure from the Far Eastern peasantry the government issued a law on April 3, 1910 on the use of the 'Dukhovskoy's allotment' to allocate land to peasants in the Russian Far East, but this decision was sabotaged by Cossacks [8].

Unlike central Russia, the share of the proletariat in the population of the Russian Far East was much lower. This was due primarily to the fact that the region was populated later and due to the development of industry which was concentrated in several centers. Vladivostok was the largest of such centers. As for the other parts of the region, the bulk of wage workers was concentrated on the railway and in mining industries including gold and coal mining. Permanent workforce was formed due to the influx of qualified specialists from cities of European Russia, demobilized sailors and soldiers, poor peasants, political settlers, craftsmen, fishermen and hunters of the Russian Far East. According to modern researchers, the proletariat in the region numbered approximately 21 thousand people (Soviet researchers estimated the number at 125 – 130 thousand permanent workers and 120 thousand seasonal workers) [9].

Representatives of privileged classes made up a small part of the population of the Russian Far East. There were less than 8 thousand nobles, about 760 clergymen, 8.3 thousand people with hereditary and personal titles of honorary citizens and more than 2.4 thousand merchants in the territory of Primorye, Priamurye, Sakhalin and Kamchatka in 1907 [10].

The first party associations in the eastern outskirts of Russia can hardly be called organizations. Rather, they were small conspiratorial groups of representatives of certain parties gradually acquiring like-minded supporters. The Right SR groups in the Russian Far East were formed almost simultaneously with the RSDLP.

The SRs became a socialist-oriented organization with the biggest membership in the Amur Governorate General. They were popular among peasants, Cossacks, democratic intelligentsia, employees, army and navy officers, and some part of workers, especially miners with their adventurism and desire to get an immediate result. The Far Eastern Socialist Revolutionaries often acted in conjunction with the Social Democrats within the framework of the 'Left Bloc' tactics. Illegal and semi-legal May Day rallies were held under their leadership in cities, strikes and demonstrations were organized with the demands to introduce an 8-hour working day and to improve working and living conditions [11]. However, even at that time, the Social Revolutionaries showed their inconsistency. Their actions in 1905 caused a break with the Blagoveshchensk Social Democrats during the State Duma elections when it turned out that the Socialist Revolutionaries supported the Cadet candidates and resorted to slander in their election campaign [12].

The Socialist Revolutionaries took an active part in the Vladivostok uprising in January – February 1906. After its suppression some Socialist Revolutionaries emigrated from the Russian Far East to Japan, where they had founded an overseas Autonomous Committee consisting of 20 people in Nagasaki by the beginning of the fall of 1906 [13]. The committee became the center of the Socialist Revolutionary propaganda. They published the *Volia* newspaper, which was distributed in the Russian Far East [14]. According to the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Finance and Russian military agents as well, the Socialist Revolutionaries carried out extensive work in Japan and from there they tried to support their party units located in the Amur Governorate General. Surveillance for emigrant revolutionaries was organized in Nagasaki, and the Russian consul Z.M. Polyanovsky assisted the head of the Vladivostok Secret Police Department and the local authorities in counteracting local Right SR organizations through secret agents in the local Socialist Revolutionary colony [15]. A prominent party leader Boris Dmitrievich Orzhikh, also known under such pseudonyms as Anatoly Pavlovich, Gleb Vladimirovich, Moiseev, Konstantin Antonovich and Konstantinov came to Nagasaki. In 1900, at the end of his exile in Priamurye, he was allowed to live in Vladivostok, and in May 1902 as well as in September 1903, he got a permission to spend his vacation in Harbin. During the years of the first Russian revolution the press reported that Orzhikh had bought weapons and ammunition in Japan for the Vladivostok Social Revolutionaries [16]. In 1907, he emigrated to Japan where he founded a printing house together with Clark and Podpakh, which published Social Revolutionary leaflets (one hundred issues of the *Volia* newspaper were published) and spread propaganda among Russian prisoners of war [17]. However, the attitude towards B.D. Orzhikh on the part of his own party members was ambiguous. Thus, a well-known whistleblower of police agents V. Burtsev reproached him for the fact that in 1890s he requested a clemency secretly from his party, was released and sent to convict penal settlement [18]. Subsequently B.D. Orzhikh left for South America. According to the Vladivostok Secret Police Department, while leaving Nagasaki for Argentina, Orzhikh left a box with illegal literature addressed to E.S. Batman. She was also expected to receive money from abroad [19].

Despite government repression, the Socialist Revolutionary organizations continued to operate in the Russian Far East. On April 10-14, 1907, a congress of representatives of the Far Eastern Socialist Revolutionary organizations was held in Primorye [20].

The Harbin Socialist Revolutionary Group and its military organization were active during the revolution. Its members carried out a number of terrorist attacks on the territory of the CER as evidenced by the indictments brought against this organization. The revolutionaries organized a rally on May 1, 1907, after which arrests among them began. Fifty-seven people were indicted, seven of them were later released [21]. On December 18 and December 20, 1907, searches were carried out in apartments in Khabarovsk and Vladivostok and some Right SRs and RSDLP members were detained; in January of the following year an attempt was made to steal state treasury gold and a secret SR printing press was discovered and demolished [22]. After these punitive measures, the activity of the Social Revolutionaries temporarily subsided until 1917 [23].

A certain popularity of the SRs in the Russian Far East was due, among other things, to the fact that a significant part of local peasants participated in cooperation. The emergence of cooperation in the

countryside was associated with the break-up of subsistence farming and the development of trade in the countryside, as well as the struggle of the peasantry with usurers and resellers. Siberian cooperation, which had united half of the peasant farms of Siberia by 1917, was a powerful economic and social force. Consumer cooperatives of Siberia and the Russian Far East alone controlled more than half of the region's commodity exchange in 1917. By 1919, they involved 65.2 percent of all peasant farms and 50.6 percent of the total population of the region [24]. As many as 54.3 percent of peasant and Cossack households participated in cooperation in Priamurye and 34.5 percent in Primorye by 1917. Consumer cooperation was growing most rapidly. While there were 230 consumer cooperatives in Transbaikalia, Priamurye and Primorye in 1916, there were already 962 of them by the end of 1917 [25]. In addition to supplying the population with goods, consumer cooperatives were engaged in the procurement and marketing of agricultural produce and raw materials. One of the main organizations of consumer cooperation was Zakupsbyt (the Siberian Union of Consumer Cooperation Unions) founded in 1916. The Union of Priamurye Cooperatives worked efficiently in the Amur Region. The Union supplied 400 local cooperatives and its profit in 1917 amounted to almost 260 thousand rubles.

N. Chilikin and A.I. Shilo, left-wing Far Eastern deputies in the III State Duma, protected the interests of the peasant population of Siberia and the Russian Far East [26]. V.I. Lenin emphasized the rapprochement of the Trudoviks and the Socialist Revolutionaries in the Duma as both of them expressed spontaneous aspirations of the peasantry and powerful revolutionary democracy. Such deputies from the Russian Far East as A.N. Rusanov and I.M. Gamov worked in the Socialist Revolutionary faction of the IV State Duma.

The Socialist Revolutionaries, who acted on the defensive during the First World War, led a semi-legal existence. They almost did not face reprisal and therefore remained intact. Groups of Popular Socialists were formed in the Russian Far East much later than the Socialist Revolutionary and Social Democratic groups. A group of the Popular Socialists was headed by lawyer K.S. Schreiber in Transbaikalia and by N.I. Dmitrash in Primorye. These groups included mainly lawyers, teachers, and doctors. These few organizations were at an early stage of their development and did not play a significant role in the political life of the region.

6. Conclusion

The organizations of neo-Narodnik parties (the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Popular Socialists) had participated in the revolutionary struggle in the Russian Far East until 1917 although they were still relatively weak due to the remoteness of the Amur Governorate General from the center and due to a specific balance of social forces.

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