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THE ROLE OF THE YAKUT INTELLIGENTSIA IN THE NATIONAL MOVEMENT

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The national movement in Yakutia experienced the largest growth at the end of the nineteenth, and the beginning of the twentieth century. This growth was connected to the general course of political events in Russia. In the Russian empire at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a sharp increase in the national consciousness of many people. It was not only in reaction to the Russification policy of the government, but also reflected deeper trends in national development. At the beginning of the twentieth century a nationalist mood rose in the outlying districts of the empire among the Russian people who were living in less developed socio-economic, political, and cultural conditions. In many regions of Russia at this time a national intelligentsia was formed, which was revolutionized, and was heavily influenced by the Russian revolutionary-democratic intelligentsia.¹ This influence was intense, constant, and had a powerful impact. This sequence of events also characterized the Yakut community. Communication with the Russian revolutionary intelligentsia sped up the process of political mobilization of the Yakut intelligentsia.

The revolutionary events in the beginning of the twentieth century had a direct influence on the development of nationalism in provinces of the Russian empire. These events advanced the political attitude in the outlying districts in both the west (Poland, Baltic, Finland), and the east of the empire. The first Russian revolution (1905-1907), in the opinion of the authors, gave a powerful push to the national liberation movement in Russia as a whole. It captured almost all the national regions of the country. One must agree with the thesis that "the clear role of non-Russian peoples in the revolution of 1905 was more significant, than is generally believed and is reflected in the historiography. And though the main decisions were made at the center, the peripheral movements of the protest essentially promoted destabilization of the social and political system".² There were a variety of forms of the nationalist movement and their contents in each separate case are different.

The news about revolutionary events in central Russia reached the Yakut province and, undoubtedly, influenced the development of a more active political process. During this period there was a further reconciliation of the Yakut intelligentsia with political exiles. In public circles the introduction of Zemstvo (municipal government) in the territory, the

¹ Nikonov A.V. *Natsionalnyi faktor v sotsio-ekonomicheskom razvitií v granitsakh otechestvennoi gosudarstvennosti*. M., 1995. P. 22.

² Kapeller A. *Russia- multinational empire: Emergence, History, Disintegration*. M. 2000. P. 244.

representation of the Yakuts in the State Duma (Russian Parliament), and a convocation of about the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, where the civil freedoms, including freedom of speech, conscience, assemblies and unions were promised. In addition to the Manifesto provided for the creation of both national organizations and unions. It was the peak of revolutionary events at the center, which sparked active development of the nationalist movement in outlying districts. It is difficult to agree with the thesis, which dominates in Soviet historiography, that the national liberation movement was composed of a liberation struggle for the multinational Russian proletariat. It is quite obvious, that in the analysis of any national movement the concrete - historical approach is required. In this connection it is necessary to note, that till now nationalist processes in Siberia, in specific Yakutia of this period, have not received due attention. In Yakut Soviet historiography send in due time special works devoted to revolutionary events of the years 1905-1907 in Yakutia.³ It was an attempt to minimize and reduce a history of the region to all-Russian, necessarily by including this area in a general revolutionary context. Actually in this period in Yakutia there was not, and could not be, a usual proletariat consciously acting against autocracy. The political exiles that became active could not undertake any serious actions because of their small number and their isolation from the revolutionary centers. On the other hand, creation of various unions began which reflected interests of separate layers of Yakut society. This occurred under the influence of the October Manifest of 1905, and this fact cannot be denied. These events also were interpreted by the Yakut historians as revolutionary actions of the national masses. At the same time almost nothing was spoken about a nationalist movement, which really had a place under the influence of revolution. And if it was written so only in the negative plan. Now it is necessary to estimate again the national aspect of the political process in the years 1905-1907 in Yakutia. This part of the question is the focus of this research. A related research issue is the concept of imperial tradition in Russian history.

The theory offered by the Czech researcher M. Hrokh is helpful in the analysis of nationalist movements in Russia. It is necessary to note, that this theory is successfully used by the researchers in the newest studies (A. Kapeller, B.N. Mironov etc.). M. Hrokh designates three phases of any nationalist movement: the scientific phase (Phase A), it was fed up with educational aspiration to knowledge enlightened by patriotism, love to a native land and to ethnic group, occupying it. A phase of national propaganda (Phase B), when the group of patriots aspires to convince the members of non-dominant ethnic group that they actually are a self-sufficient nation and have the right to all attributes, with which already existing nations own. Inside a phase B it is possible to allocate two sub-phases: on the first propaganda of patriots has not caused yet appreciable interest among those to whom it was addressed; During the second sub-phase the reaction to propaganda becomes more active, and the number of the supporters of national movement grows. The phase of

³ *Revoliutsionnye sobytiia v Yakutii*. Yakutsk. 1956.

mass national movement (Phase C) comes, when the national propaganda reaches such success, that the signals from the patriotic centre can wake reaction in all regions and to mobilize thousands of people. Just in a phase C national movement gets complete social structure.⁴

According to this typology national movements of the peoples of the Russian empire the researchers consider as development of these phases: in a phase of awakening there is an interest of a rather small group of national intelligentsia to language, history and folklore of the people; in a phase of propaganda the national consciousness is distributed in wide layers of it ethnic groups; in a final phase of mass movement the people as a whole is covered by ideas of national self-consciousness and mobilized at first for an autonomy, and then for independence.⁵

It is quite clear, that in each concrete case there could be features by virtue of a difference in levels of development of the peoples. In our case the Yakuts have gone through an initial phase A at the turn of the twentieth century, and under influence of the first Russian revolution come to a propaganda phase B.

The distinction between the “old” and “young” people was significant in the formation of the character of the separate national movements, as the researchers note. The “old” people were considered “noble” with traditions of State organization and high culture, and “young” people - “peasant”, i.e. less advanced in social and cultural attitudes.⁶ The Yakuts were considered last. However because of the weak social structure of the community the young national intelligentsia played a central role. This trend is consistent with other national movements. In all national movements the significant role in propaganda and organizations belonged to the representatives of intelligentsia, i.e. individuals, who provided an ethnic group with an educational level and earning capacity, mainly, by intellectual activity.⁷

From the very beginning the activity of the nationalist intelligentsia stimulated development of a nationalist movement in Yakutia. In spite of active efforts of the Yakut intelligentsia on the development of self-management, education and culture in the end of XIX the nineteenth century, it did not receive support on the part of Russian administration. For example, there were numerous attempts to establish a periodic seal in the Yakut language without attention. In this situation the national intelligentsia legally connected these failures to the politics of the Russian autocracy. Political exiles also persistently carried out the same idea among young Yakut intelligentsia. Gradually, the struggle for expansion of the rights of the Yakut people and equal rights with Russians became the dominant theme of the developing national movement. Thus, the pulses to “national awakening” proceeded from Russian political exiles and the first representatives

⁴ Hroch M. An orientation in typology // *Ab Imperio*. 2000. N. 2. P.15.

⁵ Mironov B.N. *Sotsial'naiia Istoriia Rossii*. Spb. 2000. T. 1. P.39.

⁶ *Ibid.* P.40.

⁷ Hroch M. *Mentioned Work*. P.21.

of the nationalist intelligentsia. As against other communities more “ advanced ” in political attitudes (Tatars, Bashkirs) the majority of the Yakut population remained indifferent to the political relation in Yakutia. There was not a powerful religious factor which played a consolidating role in the national movement. In these conditions the intelligentsia represented itself as the main generator of national ideas and the executor of the political actions. The lack of political and cultural development of the masses was compensated by welfare and political activity of intellectual and top layers of a community. The Yakut intelligentsia aspired to equality with Russians, acted for world-wide development of the Yakut language and culture, for representation in the all-Russian bodies. All these requirements were reflected in the nationalist movement, which had the largest role in the first Russian revolution.

Undoubtedly, the nationalist movement in Yakutia under influence of first Russian revolution received a new pulse. Moreover, it entered in a qualitative new stage and was characterized by occurrence of the first national political organization “ The Union of the Yakuts ” (1906), created by a managing role of intelligentsia. The begun revolution and the concessions of autocracy, connected to it, political activity of the Yakut intelligentsia made active. The Yakut free-of-charge national library - reading room, created on intelligentsia’s initiative, bought the literature of various political parties and directions, which was distributed among the population. With this purpose even a special circle from local Russian and Yakut intelligentsia and learning youth was formed. Under the arrangement with the members of the Yakut Agricultural community the forbidden literature on the address of this society left, and then was distributed in regions.

After the October Manifesto was distributed in Yakutsk there was a “ Society of national readings “ , where the representatives of the Yakut intelligentsia, students and political exiles came together. The members of the society arranged public readings and lectures, and discussed public and political problems. On November 6, 1905 on the next readings the leader of the Yakut intelligentsia V.V. Nikiforov has acted with the comments to the Manifesto from October 17 and this statement received support of present. After the assembly the part of its participants went into the street with demonstration of the antigovernment moods.⁸

These data testify to the active role of the Yakut intelligentsia in new political events. They appealed to the higher power structures with the requirements of a general convocation, straight line equal rights, secret ballots in elections for the of State Duma, the destruction of all “ exclusive ” laws about Inorodtsy (non-Russians) and Inovertsy (non-Christians), and guarantees of all civil freedoms. Among other requirements put forward by the intelligentsia were the introduction to the right of Zemstvo (self-management) in Yakutia, the decision of a land question in favor of the Yakuts, equal rights of Yakuts with Russians, cancellation of the [reference in territory]. The claims of the Yakut intelligentsia

⁸ Documenty o revoliutsionnykh sobytiyakh 1905-1907 godov v Yakutii. Yakutsk. 1957. P. 84.

for civil rights and self-management were political demands. V.V. Nikiforov understood that to gain these rights at the highest state level it was necessary to act on behalf of all people. It was necessary that programs and activities of the organization would reflect national interests. Later on this occasion Nikiforov wrote, that it was necessary to give the nationalist movement those forms and directions, that met a revolutionary situation, i.e. to create organization, by putting in its basic idea of self-determination and self-management.⁹

From the very beginning the organization was national, i.e. it expressed the interests of all people. As stated above, the nationalist intelligentsia was a social movement, and was closely connected to the villages and their culture. For this reason the organization's program was focused above all on the interests of the peasantry. Nikiforov, the founder and the chief of the future union, was familiar with the rules of such organizations as the All-Russia Country Union from prior experience. He also watched the development of the nationalist movement among the Buryats with interest. In this connection it is notable, that the nationalist movement among the non-Russian peoples of Siberia can not be traced back in the comparative plan. Though there was much in common, there were local differences at which occurred at precisely the same time. The Buryat nationalist movement, for example, also demanded self-management, a decision of the land question, and development of a national culture. However among the Buryats there was not the same unanimity on all questions as among the Yakuts. In Yakutia there was no precise differentiation between political forces. In addition, there was not a strong religious factor such as Lamaism, which influenced the development of the nationalist movement. In this period, as was stated above, the nationalist intelligentsia acted to mobilize political forces in Yakutia. Moreover, it even outstripped events in the center, overcoming the political inertness of the society. On the other hand, the " Union of the Yakuts" , founded and managed by the intelligentsia, was a nationalist organization representing the interests of all Yakut people. Even its name testified to the association as an alliance of all Yakuts for mutual political benefit. The leader of the " Union " V.V. Nikiforov acted as a unifying figure for the coalition movement.

V.V. Nikiforov (1866-1928) was one of the outstanding representatives of the first generation of the Yakut intelligentsia. After the October Revolution he became the victim of political repression as did many representatives of the " old " nationalist intelligentsia. His worldview was formed under the influence of political exiles and he began public and political activity early in life. He attached great importance to public education and was one of the first to put forth the idea of opening Yakut classes in schools for Yakut children. He was one of the initiators of publishing a Yakut language edition of the newspaper. Thanks to his efforts, the first Yakut appendix to the newspaper " The voice of Yakut men " was distributed in 1907. Materials published in the newspaper attracted the attention of the public. Nikiforov wrote about the problems of exile, its negative influence on the native

⁹ Klierina I. V.V. Nikiforov: Sobytiia, Sudby, Vospominania. Yakutsk. 1995. P. 145.

people, about the necessity of representation by a Yakut deputy in the State Duma and other acute problems. Undoubtedly, he played the central role in formation of the first political nationalist organization, the " Union of Yakuts ".

The history of this organization received inadequate attention in the historical literature. In the official Soviet historiography the activity of " Union of the Yakuts " was criticized as a bourgeois-nationalistic movement. The historian of the revolutionary movement P.U. Petrov saw the purpose of the creation of the " Union " as sowing national dissension and fomenting animosity among the working Yakuts toward the newly arrived Russian population in the territory.¹⁰ The anti-Russian orientation of the Union was thus emphasized. In conditions of the increased attention to study of the history of a party the activity of the antirevolutionary Yakut " Union " was naturally removed to the periphery of research interests. Nobody was researching the history of this organization specifically. In 1956 a discussion of the second volume " Histories of Yakut ASSR " was held. In this discussion questions were put for the first time which required a more objective analysis of a history of " Union of the Yakuts ". Unfortunately, they did not receive objective treatment then or since.

" The Union of the Yakuts " was unequivocally characterized as a nationalistic organization. Thus, the definition of " Union " in official Soviet historiography remained primary. Almost 35 years after the appearance of the special research by I. Kliorina, new approaches and judgments of the activity of the " Union " were designated.¹¹ This work became the first attempt to make a comprehensive objective analysis of the Yakut organization. I. Kliorina legally departed from the old evaluation of the organization, as bourgeois, but at the same time, exaggerated the revolutionary character of the demands and characterized it as having a revolutionary-democratic direction. In our opinion, this does not correspond to the real contents and forms of activity of the " Union. " The analysis of its ideological - theoretical fields and political practice suggests another interpretation. " The Union of Yakuts " in our opinion was a liberal-democratic organization.

After the question of the necessity of organized registration of opposition was put, V.V. Nikiforov with the assistance of the initiative group of Yakut intelligentsia informed on it the representatives of all regions. On January 4, 1906 the delegates from all regions who were invited to an organizing assembly arrived in the city. On the some data there were 200 men, on other data there were 300 men. The participants represented several layers of the social structure: the regional aristocracy, the intelligentsia, the merchant and urban proprietors, and the political exiles. V.V. Nikiforov opened the assembly and supervised its work himself; by then he was already recognized as the authority and leader of movement. The promotion of Nikiforov among the leaders of the nationalist movement was quite lawful. An educated intellectual, connoisseur of the right, writer, researcher

¹⁰ Documenty o revoliutsionnykh sobytiyakh 1905-1907 godov v Yakutii. Yakutsk. 1957. P. 120.

¹¹ Kliorina I. Epopeya " Soiuza Yakutov ". Yakutsk. 1997.

proficient in two languages, he personified the image of the free Yakut as well as the idea of movement. He compared himself to an image of the legendary Vasily Manchaary, the legendary Yakut rebel, fighting for freedom for the native people. There are many references in history to the leaders of the national-cultural movement and to examples of the traditional culture and folklore created for achievement of unification. Nikiforov's choice of Manchaary as the ideal hero was not incidental. The image of Manchaary lived in the historical memory of the people and was most popular in a number of the historical-cultural characters. From the point of view of a public role and moral icon V. Nikiforov represented the most successful figure for development of this cultural tradition. The active political and cultural - enlightening activity of Nikiforov achieved for him deserved authority and popularity among the most varied layers of the Yakut population. At this time Nikiforov was the most powerful figure for the unifying movement of the Yakuts.

The basic purpose of the Union became the achievement of equality of the Yakuts with Russians within the framework of uniform territorial space. It included such concrete and specific requirements as the recognition of all lands which are in the usage of the Yakuts, their property, establishment of Zemstvo self-management, and the destruction of police warships above local public institutions, representation in the State Duma and a number of other items symbolizing equal rights in Yakut law. To his merit, Nikiforov stated that the most important Yakut demand was the requirement of the land (territory) that has supplied support of the Yakut peasantry. The agrarian problem focused all the contradictions of the socio-economic and political development of the territory in this period. As a result the rising intensity of this social conflict had the nationalist coloring. The motor of the nationalist movement became a combination of ethnic and social antagonisms, that found reflection in the program of "Union of the Yakuts".

The problem of refusal of payment duties and conscription was also included in the program, which should show authorities the gravity of the intentions of the opposition. They decided to select the Central Committee (C.C.) of the organization and to create committees on individual places. The Structure of C.C. led by Nikiforov included such known public figures as P.A. Afanasyev, I.S. Govorov, P.V. Slepsov., I.G. Vasilyev, and I.A. Popov.

On January 5 the second assembly was held, in which a telegram prepared by Nikiforov and addressed to the Chairman of the Council of the Ministers S.U. Vitte was discussed and approved. The program requirements of the Union were formulated. The program and charter of "Union" and the text of the telegram were copied on hectograph to acquaint others with their contents. Soon all materials were dispatched to regions with the special propagandists with the purpose of expeditious registration of local committees. One of the first committees in East-Kangalasskiy region was created by the organizational work of regional clerk I.F. Afanasyev. The Committee included 15 men. The committees were created in Kangalasskiy, Boturussskiy regions and in many villages. In Vilyuiskiy district the Union's program was called the "the law of Nikiforov." It was disseminated

to all areas very quickly. Thus, the organization's program found support in the widest layers of the population, including the Yakut peasantry and town's people. It speaks to its mass appeal and denies the thesis that the people were completely isolated. On the contrary, the Union program was very popular because it expressed national interests and acted for the realization of the sovereign rights of the Yakut people. "The purpose of the formation of the union" - as Nikiforov declared later - "was a desire to prevent an existing arbitrariness and abuse of local administration and police authority, to destroy the deeply implanted evil from bribery, and to establish civil and economic rights".¹² The nationalist movement, thus, was a result of administrative oppression and discontent with the policies of the Russian autocracy. In order to achieve their purposes, the members of the "Union" selected peace methods: the appeal to authority, the submission of the petition, etc. It was an attempt to dialogue with official authority, an aspiration to solve the worsening problems in a civilized way.

"The Union of the Yakuts" was the first large step during the awakening national consciousness of the Yakuts. It is characteristic, that at this stage it developed in the framework of the national-liberation movement and carried the brightly expressed political coloring. The necessity of establishing equal rights with Russians put political-legal priorities in the foreground. It's not accidental that the right to own land (territory), which symbolized independence for the Yakuts, was put forward as a fundamental right. This demand was the highest priority for the country population.

The open public activity of the Yakut intelligentsia and their appeals to join the Union disturbed the administration. They began to realize the gravity of the situation. There soon followed telegrams with reference to measures which authorities should take against the opposition. The participation of "allies" in the action named as "intrusion into the Duma," on January 9, 1906 in Yakutsk, testified to the support received from other organizations and also among the urban population. The participants of the action unlawfully entered a building of the urban Duma during a session, with the purpose of achieving the demands of the "Union of the fine dealers." Among the members of the "Union of the Yakuts," V.V. Nikiforov, I.S. Govorov, P.V. Sleptsov, and D.N. Andreev were submitted. Demanding the execution of their demands before the Duma, the participants of the action insisted that Russian authority rightly belonged to the people.¹³

As a result of the activists' pressure, the urban Duma satisfied the economic demands of the "Union of the dealers." Moreover, the Duma agreed with the political demands of all of the revolutionary-democratic factions of the city, by combining public powers.¹⁴ The intrusion into the Duma caused serious concern among the local administration. The central administration delivered instructions to each city simultaneously to begin the

¹² RGIA. F. 1363. Op. 3. D. 1360. L. 11.

¹³ NA RS(Y) F. 192-H. Op. 18. D. 18. L. 149.

¹⁴ Nikolaeva V.V. *Revolutsionnye sobytiia v Yakutii //Revolutsionnye sobytiia 1905-1907 godov v Yakutii.* Yakutsk. 1956. P. 18.

liquidation of the “ Union of the Yakuts. ” On January 18th and 19th the arrests of the members of the Central Committee in Yakutsk and the local regional committees began. All participants of the organization, including its chief Nikiforov, were arrested. This event caused an intense, negative reaction from the Yakut public, and the political exiles. The petitions for releasing the arrested persons began arriving from specific regions. Leaflets were distributed in the city directing allies to protect those who shared the ideas of the “ Union of the Yakuts. ” Moreover, other illegal organizations sympathizing with the Yakut union undoubtedly existed. So the “ Citizens ” leaflet was well received by the Yakut “ Circle of the Peaceful Citizens. ” It said in the leaflet that the police, having unlimited power over the allies, provoked the new acts, accusing all of being “ revolutionaries. ”⁵

The members of the “ Circle of the Peaceful Citizens ” warned the towns dwelling people not to give in to a similar provocation. These facts testify that the activities of the “ Union of the Yakuts ” had deep resonance with the public at large. However, as results of the arrests of the leaders of the Union, the organization actually broke up. The leaderless participants repented, and dissociated themselves from any activity involving the Union. Actually the active phase of the nationalist movement in Yakutia also was finished, but it did not disappear. We do not condemn those members of the Union who hurried to disavow their Union affiliation. Moreover, it was the first attempt at organizing opposition, and its short-term existence reflected more the lack of political experience of its participants, than their disappointment in the outcome.

In comparing the national movement in other areas of Siberia, the movement in Yakutia was very strong. The Yakut organization managed to consolidate all opposition forces within the Yakut community and to put forward uniform demands, along with the intelligentsia acting as the mouthpiece for national interests. The creation of the Yakut union ushered in the beginning of a propaganda phase of the national movement, which captured the interest of a broad spectrum of the population. The “ Union of the Yakuts ” hastened the process of the development of nationalist consciousness, the organization of the intelligentsia and the intensified interest of the common population in political life. From this moment forward, the Yakut intelligentsia began to play a key role in the development of the nationalist movement in Yakutia, which had a place before and after the revolution of 1917.

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