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The Establishment of Soviet Power in Turkestan and the Activities of Left Esers in the New Government

[1] Safarov Bakhtiyor Boymurotovich

Abstract In the following article the establishment of soviet power in Turkestan and the activities of left esers in the new government is considered. Also the new methodology of the analysis of the socio-political events is proposed based on the recent scientific studies. New approach to these events are established due the archival data.

Keywords: Esers (Social revolutionaries - SRs), Kolesov incident, Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Turkestan Autonomy, Qurultai, Kokand autonomy.

[1] Research fellow of the Institute of History at the Academy of sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Uzbekistan

Introduction

In the former Soviet historiography, the Turkestan Autonomy is often presented as serving a single primary purpose. That is, the national leaders who demanded their rights allegedly sought to turn the peoples of Turkestan against the other peoples of the Soviet state and established an autonomy based on Islamic principles. During the period when the peoples of this region were determining their own destiny—namely, when national autonomy was declared—the Russian communists in Turkestan accused the Left Socialist Revolutionaries (Left SRs), Mensheviks, and other similar political parties of having adopted a bourgeois path and of supporting the Turkestan Autonomy. In reality, however, some leaders among the Left SRs and Mensheviks tried to explain that the Turkestan Autonomy was an expression of the indigenous people's national rights. Nevertheless, during the violent campaign led by the Bolsheviks against the Turkestan Autonomy, the Left SRs, Mensheviks, and other similar political parties neither defended the interests of the local population nor participated in the struggle on their behalf.

Methodology. The Bolsheviks referred to the Turkestan Autonomy government established in Kokand as an attempt by the overthrown exploiting classes to retain power in their own hands following the October Revolution. Although outwardly adorned with national-Turkic slogans, they claimed it was, in fact, part of

an international counter-revolutionary movement. It was alleged that the Autonomy was led by Uzbek, Jewish, Russian, Tatar, and Kazakh capitalists, large merchants, former leaders of the Provisional Government, Tsarist officers, and religious scholars (ulama).

Results. In early November 1917, as the Bolsheviks began seizing power by force in Tashkent, the people of Turkestan began forming a national government in the city of Kokand. At that time, the influence of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks in Kokand was stronger than that of the Bolsheviks. However, the Bolsheviks claimed that the autonomy did not emerge as a result of a so-called denial of all autonomies by Russian communists, but rather as a movement driven by the desire of counter-revolutionary classes to overthrow the revolution.

In December 1917, Soviet power had not yet been established everywhere. In the Fergana region, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries closely linked the issue of autonomy with the victory of the Soviets. On December 6-7, 1917, at the congress held in the city of Skobelev, which brought together soldiers, workers, peasants, and Muslim deputies' soviets of the Fergana region, as well as representatives of trade unions, craft organizations, and factory committees, two important issues were discussed: the attitude toward Soviet power and, more generally, the attitude toward the Turkestan Autonomy, particularly in relation to Kokand [1].

The Mensheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries strongly opposed the recognition of Soviet power established in Tashkent and Petrograd. They persistently demanded that the government of the Turkestan Autonomy be recognized as the legitimate government for the entire Turkestan [2].

According to the Menshevik Doriomedov, this autonomy was composed of members elected by a general vote to the Constituent Assembly. His like-minded colleague, Danishevsky, echoed this: "All power belongs to the Constituent Assembly." Pavlyuchenko, a Menshevik who later became a Left Socialist Revolutionary, expressed fear regarding the deputies: "Russia is economically a backward country; therefore, capitalism cannot fully develop to the level seen in Europe, and only then transition to socialism (you have to wait for that)" [3].

All the deputies—Mensheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries—opposed the establishment of Soviet power in Turkestan and came to the following conclusion: the best force for the conditions of Turkestan was the Turkestan Autonomy. Furthermore, they tried to intimidate the regional congress deputies by arguing that foreign countries would not recognize Soviet power, and under such international conditions, Soviet power would especially be unable to maintain its rule in Turkestan without an appropriate internal socio-economic basis.

The Bolsheviks firmly resisted these threats and pressures. Bolshevik Uryupin said: "The autonomy must be recognized, but currently it is controlled by a handful of capitalists who only yesterday hated autonomy. We must drive out this group, unite with the Muslim democrats, and lead it ourselves[4]. The delegate from Old Margilan, Bolshevik Sugrobov, also exposed the bourgeois nature of the Turkestan Autonomy, saying: "We must recognize the autonomy in principle, but if the Constituent Assembly stands on limiting the interests of the proletariat, it will never be authorized to establish power there"[5].

The head of the city of Skobelev (Fergana), Menshevik V. Doriomedov, who was one of the supporters of the "Turkestan Autonomy", attempted to objectively explain the reasons for its emergence. In newspaper articles, he accused the Soviet government of the RSFSR of allegedly "rejecting all autonomies" and of denying oppressed peoples the right to self-determination [6]. The Left Socialist Revolutionaries and

Mensheviks solely blamed the Turkestan Communists, who “denied all autonomies”, for the emergence of the Turkestan Autonomy.

Doriomedov expressed his attitude toward the Turkestan Autonomy as follows: “Yesterday, a telegram was announced from the Turkestan People's Commissars' Soviet granting nations the full right to determine their own destiny independently. For us, autonomy can only be declared with the consent of the central government. Since the initiators are acting in a friendly manner, this issue should be approached seriously; however, careless attitudes could worsen the situation.”

The terms “bourgeoisie” and “proletariat” explain nothing. The Kokand Qurultai consists of like-minded individuals elected to the Constituent Assembly by general vote; they are not reactionaries. If an agreement cannot be reached, there may be a massacre[7]. The Bolsheviks’ violent suppression of the Turkestan Autonomy was anticipated in advance, and it was openly stated that a massacre could occur.

The Bolsheviks tried to distort who the true creators of the Turkestan Autonomy were and for what purposes it was established, in an effort to conceal their own ulterior motives. They claimed that the White Guards of the Turkestan Military Organization led the government of the Turkestan Autonomy. Furthermore, according to their fabricated information, the leaders of the Turkestan Autonomy, who supposedly supported secession from Soviet Russia, were bourgeois nationalists aiming to unite Turkestan with the restored Russian monarchy. They portrayed the White Guards as the true inspiring leaders of the autonomy movement in Turkestan.

The British government also placed great hopes on the government of the Turkestan Autonomy. According to the Bolsheviks, foreign imperialists saw this as a means to overthrow Soviet power in Turkestan and establish their own colonial rule there. Since the summer of 1918, Eserton, who held the position of British consul in Kashgar, spoke clearly about these calculations. In his book “The Heart of Asia”, he wrote: “Muslim propaganda was mainly in favor of the Allies; it was a convenient time to exploit the desire for autonomy in Central Asia. Therefore, the British government decided to send a special mission to Russian Turkestan [8]”

The leaders of the Turkestan Autonomy government did not hide their connections with the British government. At a meeting held in the Jome Mosque in early January 1918, one of the ulama, Shukurhon, directly stated, “...the autonomists are not alone; England protects them”. It was with British assistance that a plan was developed to attack Tashkent from Gulja via Zhetysu. An agent of the German-Turkish bloc also participated in the preparation and activities of the Turkestan Autonomy government. Some “autonomists” paid particular attention to this bloc, especially Turkey. At the congress, one of the autonomist delegates, Alimov, said: “We invite Anwar Pasha from Turkey and, with his help and by God's grace, we will restore the times of Khudayar Khan and establish the Turkestan autonomous state[9].”

The government of the Turkestan Autonomy maintained close ties with the “Alash” Kazakh-Kyrgyz autonomy based in Orenburg. At that time, the “Alash” autonomy signed a treaty with Dutov regarding the creation and support of a future union of autonomous states in the southeast of Russia. Numerous plans were made, agreements signed, and assurances of help and support were obtained from foreign allies. In particular, strong relations were established with the government of the Turkestan Autonomy. One of the enthusiastic supporters of the autonomy, Mahmudkhoja Behbudi, wrote in the newspaper “Khurriyat”: “We will resist with all our soul and faith those who want to divide our land and property. In fact, autonomy is an opportunity created to preserve land, property, and religion. Only then will the land and property remain

undivided"[10].

Soviet power reached even the most remote corners of Turkestan. At the beginning of January 1918, Turkestan's Labor Commissar Poltoratsky visited the city of Andijan and spoke with representatives of the local population. Poltoratsky praised the Turkestan Regional People's Commissars' Soviet and declared their full adherence to Bolshevik views [11].

Prominent Muslim community leaders such as Ubaydulla Khojaev, Sultanbek Khojanov, Mustafa Choqaev, Islam Sultan Shagiakhmedov, and others strongly condemned the transfer of power to the Soviets. They expressed their dissatisfaction with the Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries seizing power in Tashkent, stating that authority should belong not to the incoming population but to the local people. They insisted that the peoples of Turkestan must take their fate into their own hands. The Muslim newspaper "Ulugh Turkiston", which was published in the region, wrote shortly after the October Revolution in Tashkent that power could not be handed over to extremists from the "European" population. It declared, "We claim the right to take power into our own hands in Turkestan"[12].

The influence of the Bolsheviks continued to grow throughout the entire territory of Turkestan. Thus, at the beginning of January 1918, the Tashkent Council of Soldiers' and Workers' Deputies included 45 members from the Bolshevik faction, 40 from the Left Socialist Revolutionary faction, and 19 from the Menshevik-Internationalist faction. At the 4th Congress of the Turkestan Soviets, the Bolshevik faction also gained strength and, based on their proposals, all important decisions were adopted. At this congress, by a majority vote (62 votes to 11, with 3 abstentions), the resolution "On the Turkestan Autonomy" proposed by the Bolsheviks was adopted. At the same time, based on the opinion of the workers, the soviets' congress rejected the "Turkestan Autonomy." After the fall of the Kokand Autonomy in February 1918, the victorious advance of the Soviets in Turkestan accelerated. At the beginning of March 1918, Soviet power was established in distant regional centers such as Verniy in Zhetysu[13].

In the Samarkand region, the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party held a significant majority, surpassing the Bolsheviks in several soviets (such as in Uratepa, Santo oil fields, and others). For example, in the Khujand district council, the distribution of seats among the parties was as follows: 15 seats for the Bolsheviks, 27 seats for the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and 20 seats allocated to non-party peasants[14]. At this point, the most important political issues were resolved by the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party. According to social composition, the deputies were distributed as follows: 13 small-scale artisans, 16 peasants, 20 administrative employees and former officials, and 16 individuals with unspecified occupations[15]. In the center of the Samarkand region, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries held a significant number of seats in the councils.

The Bolsheviks called the March 1918 clash between the Red Guard detachments under the command of the Emir of Bukhara and F.I. Kolesov a conspiracy orchestrated by the Left Socialist Revolutionaries. They claimed that this military conflict arose due to the aggressive actions of the Emir of Bukhara, who violated the sovereignty of Soviet Turkestan. The Emir was accused of preparing for a large-scale attack against the Soviets, aiming to seize all of Turkestan. Additionally, the emirate's territory was blamed for being a refuge for counter-revolutionaries, remnants of the Kokand government, and the English, who ran espionage networks in Soviet Turkestan.

In February 1918, events unfolded in Turkestan that made the struggle against the Emir of Bukhara the primary and most urgent task for the Soviet government in the region. At that time, the government of the

Turkestan Autonomy—direct adversaries of the Bolsheviks—had been suppressed. However, armed resistance against the Soviet regime began throughout Turkestan. The Bolsheviks saw a very serious threat in Emir Bukhara, viewing the entire region as a center for “counter-revolutionaries”, and devoted all their efforts to quickly eliminating it. However, F. Kolesov and the young Bukharans miscalculated and underestimated the strength of the Emir. Here’s the English translation: Emboldened by his victory in Kokand, Kolesov also intended to defeat Emir Bukhara with the same ease[16]. However, the Red Army troops under the command of F.I. Kolesov were defeated and signed the humiliating “Kiziltepa Agreement" with the Emir of Bukhara. The Bolsheviks blamed the Left Socialist Revolutionary commanders for this shameful defeat of Kolesov. The commander of the large detachment, Left Socialist Revolutionary P. Domogatsky, was accused of irresponsibility during the struggle.

The leading detachment under Kolesov, relying on the assistance of P. Domogatsky, unnecessarily delayed for a long time when they found themselves in a difficult situation. Another Left Socialist Revolutionary, Z. Pechatnikov, delayed the advance of the Red Guard units from Kaspyort. The Red forces suffered heavy losses because supplies arrived very late. Despite the results of the negotiations and the signed ceasefire agreement, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries sought every possible way to discredit F. Kolesov’s actions and portray the military expedition as a “mere adventure”. At the same time, they exaggerated the role of the detachments under their leadership.

At that time, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries achieved some success through the press in various places. At the 5th Congress of the Soviets of Turkestan (April 20–30, 1918), the Left SRs had 70 delegates, and together with their allies, they formed a faction of 140 members. The congress also included 86 Bolsheviks, 17 non-party members, 17 internationalists, Right SRs, and others[17].

The left SRs opposed the federal autonomy of Turkestan. They demanded that the peoples of Turkestan submit to the European peoples. For example, K.Ya. Uspensky said at a demonstration in Tashkent: “Comrades Muslims! Know that we are the big brothers! You are small, and of course, you must obey us.” These great state-chauvinistic intentions of the left SRs were rejected by the working masses, just like the claims of the national bourgeoisie.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of the Bolsheviks in the struggle against the petty bourgeois parties, they defeated the political regime projects that belittled the dignity of the peoples of Turkestan and upheld the Leninist principles of national policy in Turkestan.

On May 1, 1918, after months of stubborn struggle by the Bolsheviks, Turkestan was declared a Soviet Autonomous Republic within Soviet Russia based on the principles of federation. The V Congress’s Charter on the Turkestan Soviet Federative Republic stated the following:

“The Turkestan Soviet Federative Republic, governed on the basis of autonomy, recognizes and coordinates its activities with the central government of the Russian Soviet Federation.

To establish relations with the central authority, the qurultai will form a commission consisting of five members, and this commission will be sent to Moscow for this purpose after the congress[18].

The qurultai formed a new government. Accordingly, the Central Executive Committee was established with 36 members. Within the Council of People's Commissars, a People's Commissariat for National Affairs was included, which was especially responsible for local peoples' everyday issues and took into account their specific conditions.

There was a fierce struggle between the left SRs and the Bolsheviks over the distribution of positions within

the People's Commissariat. The left SRs tried to secure more seats in the government, aiming to occupy the most important people's commissariats and their key positions. In particular, they attempted to appoint K.Ya. Uspensky as the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars and fought to assign the Commissariat of Military Affairs to their allies. Had the decision not been made to form the state governing bodies on a parity basis, the struggle would have lasted much longer.

Apart from the left SRs, no representatives of other parties were included in the government by the Bolsheviks themselves. The positions in the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars were equally divided between the Bolsheviks and the left SRs. The Turkestan ASSR Central Executive Committee consisted of 22 Bolsheviks and the same number of left SRs. As honorary chairman of the Turkestan ASSR CEC, P.A. Kobozev, a representative of the RSFSR Council of People's Commissars and the RCP(b) Central Committee, was appointed, and Bolshevik A.F. Solkin was appointed as the second chairman. The left SRs Tikhomolov and Nagaybakov served as deputies[19].

The Turkestan ASSR Council of People's Commissars was composed of 7 Bolsheviks and 7 left SRs. Bolshevik F. Kolesov was elected as the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars. The left SRs secured leadership positions in the People's Commissariats of Foreign and Internal Affairs, Industry, Agriculture, Education, and Health. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks headed the Commissariats of Military and National Affairs, Justice, Communications, Post and Telegraph, Labor, and Finance [20].

The intense struggle between the two parties is evidenced by the fact that none of the Bolshevik resolutions were adopted by the Fifth Qurultai. In particular, the Bolshevik resolution on the nationalization of industry was rejected by a majority vote..

In honor of the proclamation of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Republic, thousands of workers belonging to all nationalities in the region took part in demonstrations and rallies, fighting to establish one of the combat detachments of the Communist Party in Turkestan.

Conclusion. In short, the left SRs, unlike the bourgeois nationalists, did not stand aside from the great historical events. Adhering to the principles of internationalism, they stood together with the working masses of the local nationalities. The Bolsheviks, aiming to discredit the Mensheviks and left SRs, considered them not to be revolutionaries of Turkestan. They persistently spread false information that these parties had no revolutionary service to the peoples of Central Asia.

The decisive struggle carried out by the left SRs in Turkestan for the victory of Soviet power and the implementation of national policy there was denied by the Bolsheviks. In conclusion, the Bolsheviks waged a fight against all political parties and organizations in Turkestan in their pursuit of sole domination.

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