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Split of the Common National Russian Union during World War I

"The Common National Russian Union" is a political union that is created in the Russian Empire in the early years after the revolution of 1905. This is made possible due to the change in the political system that occurs after issuance of the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, part of which is the resolving to organize political parties that can participate in elections to the created State Duma. Organizational "the party of Russian nationalists"¹ is built in the period 1908-1910, and incorporates a number of smaller organizations, such as the "Russian Party of the National Center," "Party of the rule of law", "Kiev club of Russian nationalists" and others. Parallel to this process, the same take place in the State Duma, which has similar fractions are combined, giving the effect of creating a unified national fraction, including in it groups of nationalists and moderate right that in October 1909, with the beginning of the work of the third session of the III-th Duma, has become a leading political force². On extra-parliamentary level during the period 1908-1910 are gradually build and shape the final look of the CNU, which follows trends that rely on popular representation. In this way on June 18, 1908 is conducted a Constituent Congress of the Common National Russian Union, whose president is elected to be S.V.Ruhlov. On January 31, 1910, an Extraordinary Congress officially made alliance of

¹ Санькова С.М. Русская партия в России. Образование и деятельность Всероссийского национального союза (1908–1917), Орел, 2006, с. 9

² Вернигоров В.И. Политические партии и общественные движения в России и Беларуси: вторая половина XIX–первая треть XX века, Минск, 2001, с. 134

nationalists and moderate right, and as a new president of the Union is elected P.N.Balashov, who holds office until the end of the existence of the organization in 1917.

Ideologically the Common National Russian Union is formed on the basis of a combination of elements from traditional Russian conservatism, which is evidenced by the party's Constitutions from 1908 and 1911, as well as the works of Mikhail Osipovich Menyshikov, who becomes the main ideologue of the organization and constant member of the management committee, on the one hand, and the other liberal-reformist ideas typical of opposing political entities that give the reason to the authors D.A.Kotsyubinskiy and SM Sanykova to unite the opinion that CNU is "moderate straight centered"³ and "a mix of conservative and liberal groups"⁴ formation, located between the reactionary forces, such as the Union of the Russian people and reformist liberal in the face of Constitutional Democrats and the far left. From the conservative elements in the ideology of the party, should be noted the extreme views on the Jewish question, the idea of the leading role of the Russian nationality within the empire, and strong support of the autocratic monarchy in the person of the Emperor of Russia. From the reform ideas in the first place is to strengthen the position of the system introduced by the Manifesto of October 17, especially in the preservation of the national representatives, that have to be **legislative**⁵ (italics mine BN), the right of Russian citizens of religious freedom but preserving the primacy of the Orthodox Church, the right to private property and free economic activity, as well as many other liberal views which find a place in the program documents of the Party, its

³ Коцюбинский Д.А. Русский национализм в начале XX столетия. Рождение и гибель идеологии Всероссийского национального союза, М., 2001, с. 492

⁴ Санькова С.М. Цит.съч., с. 300

⁵ Устав Всероссийского национального союза, СПб., 1911, с.1

material from newspapers and from publicist heritage of party activists. Based on the presented like this an ideological symbiosis The Common National Russian Union should be defined as a Russian nationalist organization that occupies the center of the political spectrum, which resembles more to the representatives of the "Union Oct. 17" and put it away at the same distance from the far right and far left and liberal and entities which on the one hand free to fill the place in the Russian political system, and on the other, a prerequisite for internal ideological imbalance that clearly appears during the First World War.

Chronological history of the CNU may be conditionally divided into three periods, and they are:

1. First period - organizational development, and doctrinal, and structural, shaping the formation during 1908-1910, which is accompanied by a parallel merger of the groups in the State Duma, the result of which is the establishment of a single Fraction of nationalists and moderate right-wing (FNUP) and the finalization of the party as such in 1910.

2. Second period, which partially overlaps with the first and goes back to the opening of the third session of the III-rd Duma (October 1909), in which the national fraction, along with the group of "Union 17 October" (so-called "oktomvriytsi") form a parliamentary majority, which is actively working for reform policies of the government of P.A. Stolypin. This is the time of greatest influence of the parliamentary group and the party as a whole and most active expression of its representatives. The period ends with the death of Stolypin and the refusal of the new prime minister to cooperate with the Duma, leading to its dissolution and the holding of elections for next one, in which nationalists and the "oktomvriytsi", mainly because of the reluctance of the government to work with, failed to reach political unity, and this way both of the groups enter the political crisis.

3. Third period, characterized by a gradual exacerbation of political differences within the CNU, which coincides with the time World War I and the work of the IV-th State Duma and ending with the collapse of the single parliamentary fraction and formal split of the party as a whole.

On November 15, 1912 convened the first session of the IV-th State Duma, in favor of work, from the initial stage, it becomes apparent that there cannot be formed a parliamentary majority to work with the government to implement the reform policy, similar to the previous popular representation. This puts the nationalist fraction expectantly in position with respect to power, which lasted until the beginning of World War I and the inclusion of Russia in it.

The war greatly affects the political processes in the country, in the first year it is a union of all parliamentary political parties, except the far left, behind the government and the emperor, in the name of victory over Germany. In 1915, in parallel with the tightening of hostilities, gradually and rather sharply is deteriorating the internal parliamentary situation in the empire. The parties in the Duma begin to have differences among themselves regarding the conduct of internal policy. Formed into two groups, far right, which clearly supports the emperor and the administration in any form, and do not allow criticism and liberal from the Constitutional Democratic Party and the far left, which enhance the traditionally negative assessments. "Halfway" remains the nationalists and the "oktomvriytsi" that in the initial stage of this process have not strict attitude, waiting until the last cabinet to decide on cooperation with them, by analogy with the time of P.A. Stolypin. This situation is particularly detrimental for the national fraction in which the spring-summer of 1915 gradually strengthens the political differences and which ultimately led to its division, as well as "actual schism the CNU"⁶.

⁶ Коцюбинский Д.А. Цит.съч., с. 453

On August 13, 1915, a new fraction in the State Duma, headed by V.A. Bobrinskiy composed initially of 22 persons, and then increased to 36 former members of FNMR who were called "progressive nationalists" (also "leftist nationalists") and later joined the opposition Progressive block, where the leadership have the constitutional democrats⁷. In the old group remain the so-called "Right-wing nationalists", headed by President P.N. Balashov, who keep unify until 1917.

The reasons for the split in the fraction of nationalists and Common National Russian Union as a whole should be sought as in external also internal political plan. By the external is highlighted the falling into a complex economic, social and political situation of the Russian Empire at the beginning of 1915. Indecision demonstrated by the government to solve the acute problems arising from the war, the lack of almost any communication with national representatives and most importantly, the reluctance to do so, raise doubts among some members of the CNU, such as V.V. Shulygin, A.I. Savenko, V.A. Bobrinskiy for the correctness of the policy pursued. At the same time, "the right-wing nationalists" in the face of the president of the fraction Balashov categorically refuse to criticize the government, considering that this way the attack directly Emperor Nicholas II, which comes into sharp contradiction with the basic ideological premise of the party. The combination of these conditions causes the formation of two groups, and this long before the formal departure of the "progressive nationalists." From an internal plan, the main reason for the split is "primeval absence of one particular political ideology and sufficiently wide gap between the leading party figures, both politically and tactical issues"⁸. D.A. Kotsyubinskiy also agrees that

⁷ Санькова С.М. Цит.сѣч., с. 282

⁸ Санькова С.М. Цит.сѣч., с. 278

the lack of a coherent ideology, a major unifying element in the construction of any political party, it appears "devastating" for the CNU during the war⁹.

The exact reason for the split of the nationalists' fraction is the question of the convening of the next session of the State Duma in the summer of 1915. Its discussion in the Council of the party votes "for" and "against" are equally divided, as "for" is the group of future "leftist nationalists." President P.N. Balashov convene a "secret" meeting of the Council, made up of supporters, which passed a resolution supporting the government's position against the convening of the Duma¹⁰. These acts cause severe and immediate reaction from the opposition-minded members of the CNU, as reflected in several articles by A.I. Savenko in the newspaper "Gazeta Vechernaya." In them, one of the future leaders of the fraction of "progressive nationalists" (PN), talks about the severe problems in the party and split it, which he said is a fact ("the nationalist fraction tear at the seams"¹¹). From August 12 begin individually filing the resignation for leaving of a single group of FNMR and formation of a new fraction of "progressive nationalism" is performed as above already mentioned, on August 13, 1915.

The division of the CNU is part of the larger process of regrouping of all political space in the empire associated with the formation of August 5, 1915 in oppositional "Progressive Bloc" (PB), which incorporates the Constitutional Democrats, the group Center led by P.N.Krupenskiy, also leaving a single fraction of nationalists, leftist the "oktomvriytsi" and created fraction of "progressive nationalists." Political line that follows the new entity is expressed in criticism of the internal policy of the government, mainly in the part on the socio-economic situation in the country and its continued confrontation with the State Duma.

⁹ Коцюбинский Д.А. Цит.съч., с. 496

¹⁰ Санькова С.М. Цит.съч., с. 278

¹¹ Вечерняя газета, СПб, 1915, 4 август

Progressive bloc insists on appointing a new government with their participation, which works to manage the deteriorating situation, expressed mainly by severe food crisis in the country and the poor supply of the army. Second pillar of the program of this kind of heterogeneous group is the view that the government cannot work without the State Duma, as yet, which is reflected in the firm opinion for the need of continued cooperation with parliament, deliberately sabotaged by the executive, in the person of the emperor and his administration.

The political behavior of the group of "left-wing nationalist" is dictated entirely by their participation in the PB. V.V. Shulygin enters into executive bureau of the opposition¹², where together with Paul Milioukov of constitutional democrats define the basic practical steps for the implementation of the program of the block. In this sense, as the main line of conduct of the opposition Nationalists should be searched for this to oppose of the government policies and the insistence on forming a new cabinet, which has representatives of the "progressives" and to work for the release of Russia's from the critical situation in which it is located. For the period 1915-1917, the group successfully pursue this line at the end of 1916, with further deterioration of the internal situation caused by more serious social situation, the difficult situation at the front, and by the early dissolution of the fifth session of the Duma, the criticism against the government are already affecting personal Emperor Nicholas II, suggesting a final rejection of the basic ideological principles of the CNU by the "progressive nationalists." To such a finding leads and rethinking position on key programming issue as Jewish one by Vasiliy Shulygin expressed in a series of his articles concerning the notorious case then "Baileys" in which a Jew was accused of ritual murder of a Russian boy. Shulygin expressed strong reservations regarding the charges in connection with the offering process to find a new approach to the Jewish

¹² Санькова С.М. Цит.сѣч., с. 284

problem as a whole, which immediately cause strong reaction by "right-wing nationalists" who accuse him of treason. It is from these moments should be extract the essence of political practice that leads the group of PN - rethinking the ban on criticism of executive power and politics, which leads; reassessment of basic ideological principles, such as that for full equality between ethnic groups in the empire and politics in the Jewish question, support for equality between different confessions, implementation of practical actions against the government and the ongoing work in this area, cooperation with political subjects, determined at an early stage as compelling enemies. These characteristics give rise to S.M.Sanykova to express the view that "progressive nationalists" individually on the basis of "cleans program" slowly but **neuklonno** retreated from some of its positions" ¹³.

Group of "right-wing nationalists," which formally remain in the single fraction of nationalists and moderate right-wing, led by the old Chairman P.N. Balashov, unlike the left, do not have serious change in political behavior since the split. Until the February Revolution of 1917 in their work leads to greater influence of the far-right parties, which in turn offer no change in his views, both in terms of internal politics and the question of war and foreign policy as a whole. In early 1917 Balashov makes several meetings in his home to work on a new, different position on the current problems, but the result of which is limited to calls to the government to develop and implement a clear program ¹⁴. As the changes brought by the revolution in February, the group of "right-wing nationalists", which is actually officially a Common National Russian Union as a party, cease to exist.

The last issue that should be noted in connection with the issue of splitting the CNU during the First World War, is the participation of Basil Shulygin in the

¹³ Санькова С.М. Цит.съч., с. 289–290

¹⁴ Санькова С.М. Цит.съч., с. 293

adoption of the abdication of Emperor Nicholas II in March 1917. It raises legitimate interest why outspoken Russian nationalist, which until recently did not allow unfounded criticism against the person of autocrat and advocated Russia as autocratic monarchy headed by him, decides to take part in this initiative? According to Svetlana Sanykova, the answer lies precisely in the idea that this monarchy will be saved, even in the strong constitutional type from the previously set¹⁵. Most of his colleagues from the fraction supporting this position, because although it is a formal opposition to the government, even to pursue the removal of power from the hands of the executors appointed by the monarch, the majority of Russian nationalists are convinced monarchists and last no retreat from the principle of imperial state system, led by the autocratic emperor.

History of the Common National Russian Union is the story of creation, evolution and the end of the only party of the political spectrum in the Russian empire, which includes the name "national" and protects the interests primarily of Russian ethnicity, which rightly gives the nickname "nationalists" for its members. The timing of its creation gives advantage of no revolutionary legacy of 1905, which allows you to build an ideology and behavior radically different from most parties in the country and all who are represented in the State Duma. On a program level the position with a moderate nationalism, combined with liberal and reformist views, is an asset that allows to support policies aimed at stabilizing the system established by the Manifesto of October 17, 1905, whose main objective is to maintain of autocratic monarchy, although limited by popular representation. Work with the government of Pyotr Stolypin during the III-rd Duma is an example of fruitful cooperation between the legislative and executive power in a country where parliamentary life dates back only a few years. In this partnership fraction CNU through unification with that of the "Union 17 October," occupies a key place.

¹⁵ Санькова С.М. Цит.съч., с. 295

Meanwhile, combine in the ideology of conservatism, and pronounced liberal principles of Western-style stakes issues that come to the fore at a later stage, which proved fatal to the very formation. The division, which happened in 1915 was due, in addition to the strong influence of the external environment, in particular the internal situation and especially of ideological confrontation, which is part of the political nature of the Union. To this fact should be added and almost permanent opposition between individual party leaders on key issues relating to current public affairs in the country. In this line of thinking goes out the conclusion that the end of the CNU is set from the beginning, or in other words at the moment the official government that represents the will of the monarch, erected on a pedestal in the party doctrine ceases to cooperate the political force that strongly advocates all his actions, which undoubtedly is the national union, including some of its leading members comes ideological vacuum that under the pressure of external circumstances led to rethinking the overall attitude towards the politics of the organization. It is precisely the process ends August 13, 1915, from when the State Duma of the Russian Empire, but the official group of Common National Russian Union begin its organizational life second fraction nationalists remained in history as the "progressive nationalists".