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The Russian Nationalists and the First World War

Genesis, Ideology, Leaders and Main Organizations

Russian nationalists gathered in unions, societies, leagues and parties collectively known as "The Black hundreds" ("Чёрная сотня" in Russian) or the far-rights. The term "The Black hundreds" entered the political lexicon of Russia in the early XX century as a phrase describing the ultra-nationalists, staunch supporters of the House of Romanov and opponents to any retreat from the autocracy of the reigning monarch. The Black Hundreds were also famous for extremist russocentric doctrines, xenophobia, anti-semitism and incitement to pogroms. Before that this term was used to describe the poor peasantry. The nationalists used this as advantage in their propaganda and sought their origins from the name given to the common Russian people, defending their fatherland against the Poles during their aggression in Russia in 1612¹.

The nationalists called themselves patriots, real Russians, as well as right-wing and monarchists. They were not one united organization, but dozens of unions and the most popular of them were the “Russian Monarchist Party”, the “Union of the Russian People” and the “Union Archangel Michael”. Their ideology was not monolithic and although the differences therein were not essential this lead to separatism and to the creation of numerous

¹ Грингмут А. Руководство монархиста черносотнеца. Цит. по <http://www.rustrana.ru/print.php?nid=551>. 17.3.2009.

fractions. The Black hundred claimed to be descendants of Russian conservatives and slavophiles. They trusted as the conservatives in the official imperial doctrine - Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality, and like the slavophiles, adored the Russian past and traditions and shared their negativism towards the West. Another very important feature of their ideology was the idea that Russian people were not just Christian but Orthodox. Therefore, they insisted that the Orthodoxy must be the official religion. The far-rights raised the slogan "Russia for the Russians" as a defensive reaction against the emerging nationalism of other peoples in the empire. They wanted the Russians to have privileges and advantages to senior positions in the realm.

The First "Black hundreds" organization - "The Russian Assembly" was founded in 1901 as a response to the growing liberal movement. For chairman was elected Prince Dmitry Golitsyn, a senior public official and the organization emerged as a cultural society. The goals of this society were "... to study the phenomena in Russian and Slavic peoples' lives, past and present; ...to protect the purity of the Russian language"².

The most popular Russian nationalist organization – "The Union of the Russian people" was founded at the end of 1905. For its leader was elected Alexander Dubrovin, who was a MD and a very rich man. But he was a poor speaker and unpopular person to that moment. Vladimir Purishkevich was another leader of the Union. An honours graduate of Faculty of History and Philology, and was known throughout Russia. Purishkevich was also one of the best orators in the State Duma. Due to differences between them, Purishkevich left and created his own organization - "Union Archangel Michael". Nikolai Markov was the third most important leader of the nationalists. He revealed his oratorical talents and qualities of a leader after becoming member of the Parliament.

The Russian Nationalists and the First World War

At the break of the First World War the nationalists in Russia did not want complication of the international affairs, because they recognized the threat an eventual war could bring to the monarchy. Their view was clearly revealed in the report of the Chairman of the right group in the Council of State - Piotr Durnovo. The report was given to the Royal Office in February 1914, but was neglected and sent to the archive. The document was a rare and striking example of political prediction. As the famous American historian Richard Pipes noted: "this document, found and published after the revolution, predicted the course of events so precisely, that if its origin was not certain, it may well be suspect to be a later falsification"³.

² Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 51.

³ Ibid.

In the report Piotr Durnovo explained briefly that the war was going to be a huge effort for Russia and would not be triumphant parade in Berlin. He foresaw military failures, disruptions, and the responsibility for these failures would be for the government, which would lead to inevitable social revolution. Russia “will be lead to an inevitable anarchy, the result of which cannot be foreseen”⁴. According to Durnovo this collapse could be avoided if Russia did not confront with Germany.

The vital interests of Russia and Germany never collide and this is more than enough a good reason for the peaceful coexistence of the two states. The future of Germany is directed to the sea, ie where Russia, essentially the greatest continental power, has no interests⁵.

When the far-rights choose Russian external allies they fallowed their doctrine. That is why while the Liberals kept to republican France and to the constitutional monarchy – England, the far-rights thought that autocracy, as political system, was closer to the German Empires - Germany and Austria-Hungary. Therefore nationalistic leaders were seriously concerned about the course of the government's *rapprochement* with the Entente.

In January 1912 in Russia arrived an British delegation for negotiations. As a reaction to this diplomatic step the nationalist “Union Archangel Michael” sent an address to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, in which shared its hope that the friendly relations with Britain would not have a negative impact on the traditionally good relations with Germany, which the Union considered a guarantee against the revolution and, at the same time a powerful protector of monarchy. In another letter to the Minister, the Black Hundreds emphasized that if the government wanted to lead responsible national policy it should not enter into alliances created against traditional allies. In May 1914, from the tribune of the Parliament, the nationalist leader Nikolai Markov said that for Russia it is advantageous to have “instead of big friendship with England, a small alliance with Germany”⁶.

The far-rights dramatically changed their minds after August 1914, when Germany declared war on Russia. The “Union Archangel Michael” was forced to remove from its organization chart paragraph 17, which was about the great trust the Russian Empire had in the German population. Markov changed his position and started to argue that Russia waged war not with Germany and Austria but with Judeo-Germany. Vladimir Purishkevich, who had previously denounced the diplomatic intrigues of Britain, now expressed his deep admiration of the Albion Empire and named it a virtuous ally. Similar change occurred in the nationalists’ papers - the Germans turned from cultural and civilized people into wild hordes of Huns and Barbarians.

4 Дурново, П. Записка. II. 1914. – Красная новь, 1922, N 6, 182—199.

5 Ibid.

6 Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 398.

The only far-right politician who remained on his previous positions and dared loudly to support them was the lawyer Pavel Bulatsel. When England launched the idea officially to proclaim Wilhelm II to be war-criminal and wanted his submission to the court, Bulatsel responded with an article in the nationalist paper "Russian citizen". There he argued that in terms of preserving the power and sovereignty of the monarchy, the person of the emperor, no matter whether he was Kaiser or Tsar, should remain sacred and undisputable. His position could be considered not only as pro- German but also as a professional comment of a lawman who was a defender of the *Status quo* and the sovereignty of monarchy, realizing that if a precedent was made and a monarch was convicted and lost his divine power, the whole system would be in danger. Nevertheless Bulatsel was officially condemned by all political parties, including his own proselytes. He was even expelled from the Kiev department of the "Union of Russian People".

There is a discussion among the researchers of the far-right movement in Russia, whether the Black Hundreds really wished the defeat of Germany. According to Yuri Kiryanov, monarchists only formally wanted to wage the war until the complete defeat of Germany. "However, part of the right-wing led by P. Durnovo back in 1915, began to regain their former positions and wanted a quick conclusion and a separate peace with Germany in order to rescue the two main monarchies in Europe"⁷. Indeed, contemporaries of the events question the patriotism of the leaders of the "real Russians". Throughout the war Markov was reminded of his words about the "small union with Germany".

The Russian Department of Police had evidences that the Germans were trying to use the far-right members of the Parliament campaigning for instant end of the war, including the leader of the nationalists Purishkevich. A reference to the Department of Police claimed that:

The far-rights in this case are led by the fear that the complete defeat of Germany would lead to a revolution, which would adversely affect the autocracy in Russia, where, as an influence of the neighboring Republic of Germany, may explode secondary revolutionary movements⁸.

Summarizing, we may conclude that the pro-German positioning of the Russian nationalists is a result of their ideology and its main ideas – protection of the autocracy and the anti-revolutionary thinking. As we can now conclude their fears were more than reasonable – the war lead to the crush of the Russian autocracy.

However, it should be noted that to be accused in of pro-German positioning was an appropriate weapon for discrediting political opponents and it often was used by the liberal opposition, enemy of the nationalists . They accused the monarchists, the royal entourage, including the Empress, in pursuit of separate peace with Germany. It should be noted that no evidence was found for that, neither before, nor after the revolution. Leaders of the Black

⁷ Кирьянов, Ю. Правые партии в России. 1911—1917 г. М. 2001, 347.

⁸ Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 400.

Hundred, regardless of their affiliations, did not take any action that could be interpreted as support of the enemy during the years of the First World War.

When the nationalists discussed how far Russia could spread as result of victorious war, they went even further than the most optimistic plans of the liberal leaders who dreamt of Constantinople and the Straits. According to one of the nationalists, A. Hrapovitskiy: "This is too little. It is possible that Russia gains our largest sanctuary – the Holy Sepulcher and Calvary and Bethlehem, which are left in the hands of the Muslims infidels"⁹. The words of Hrapovitskiy revealed one of the main principles of the nationalist ideology – the idea of the Russian Messianism. According to it Russia had a mission – to free and unite all Christians.

Vladimir Purishkevich became president of the "Association of Russian government cartographers" during the war years and founded to prove scientifically the new frontiers of the empire. The nationalists tried to contribute to the victory of their state in World War I. Many of them fought for their fatherland as volunteers. Another activity in this direction was the collection of donations for the wounded soldiers. The St. Petersburg Department "Union of Russian People" opened a field hospital for victims of the war. Provincial monarchist organizations kept with their money the so called "Bunks with the national flag" in military hospitals. Purishkevich also actively participated in sanitary work. He managed the main unit of the Red Cross. Admittedly in his sanitary units reigned the best order. This was, undoubtedly, due also to the fact that Purishkevich used his connections to get the best conditions for the doctors and the nurses.

The Black Hundreds declared the war to be a nationwide cause in which participated all citizens of Russia. One of the leaders of the nationalists Sergey Levashov called the war a "true Patriotic War as that of 1812"¹⁰ and in their propaganda it was called the "Second Fatherland War". Although the far-rights declared the war as common to all peoples in Russia, they did not give up the slogan "Russia for Russians." They actually believed that the war would help the realization of this principle. They wrote in one of their newspapers - "Russian flag": "These days should be considered as time of difficult awakening of national pride and consciousness of the Russian people. Germans are just the *casus belli*. Russia must be free of all foreigners"¹¹.

During the war the nationalists continued with their anti-Semitic propaganda and the nationalist press permanently published stories of Jewish betrayals and espionage. Typical interpreters of this propaganda were the newspapers "Russian Flag" and "Modern Times" who

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid, 402.

11 Руское знамя., 22 авг. 1914.

wrote about the Jews: "The bulk of them are spies"¹². There were groups among the members of "Union Archangel Michael" which were trying to soften the hostility towards Jews, but their positions did not find support among most of the Black Hundreds. In the autumn of 1915 the honorable member of the Moscow department of the "Union" V. Bernov tried to present to the Kharkov nationalists a report titled "Changing the point of view on the Jewish question". The reaction of the audience was described in a letter as follows: "... In the room started a terrible scandal ...". In the same letter the Kharkov nationalists anxiously asked the leader of the Union Purishkevich, if he had not betrayed his principles, "... because this miscreant Bernov spread rumors that you had become a Jew-fellow"¹³. The leader of "Archangel Michael" did not change his principles and relying on the strong support of his followers managed to eliminate this trend from his organization.

One of the most serious problems that the Russian nationalists had to deal with was the Polish-Ukrainian national issue. Russia's rapid invasion of Eastern Prussia at the beginning of the war turned into a heavy defeat. But the monarchists did not expect an easy win against such a strong opponent like Germany. On the other hand, the information of the Southwestern Front predicted a quick and easy victory. Entering the borders of Galicia, the Russian army crushed the Austro-Hungarians and conquered Lvov. The Russian nationalists were confident that these lands inhabited by Slavs, would remain forever in their realm. The nationalist newspaper "Russian Standard" wrote: "Russian Galicia dreams of joining her true motherland - Great Russia, which has been already united with Little Russia (Ukraine) and White Russia (Belarus) and is eager to complete its great historical mission"¹⁴.

The Black Hundreds hoped that not only the Ukrainians but also the Poles were happy to become loyal subjects of the Orthodox Tsar. "Finally, after a long Celtic and Hungarian exile the Poles are able to get rid of the Teutonic chains, if they only acknowledge the supremacy of the most powerful Slavic tribe, who is reaching out to save them"¹⁵. During the meeting in Lvov between Emperor Nicholas II and the new Orthodox Archbishop Evlogij, the latter turned to the Emperor, saying: "Your imperial Majesty, you are the first to set foot here on old-Russian land, votchina of the old Russian knyazes Roman and Danila, there has not been any Russian monarch until now"¹⁶. With the blessing of the Archbishop began mass baptizing of the population from Uniatism to Orthodoxy. According to Evlogij this transition was voluntary and non-violent, while Uniat priests, of course, thought otherwise.

12 Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 403.

13 Кирьянов, Ю. Правые партии....., 22.

14 Русское знамя. 3 авг. 1914.

15 Ibid.

16 Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 405.

While Russia relied on the support of the pro-Russians, the Central Powers supported the combatants for Ukrainian independence or the so called "mazepians" (mazepintsi)¹⁷. The Russian nationalists were unpleasantly surprised by the success of this movement and believed that it was created, sponsored and directed by the Austrians and Germans. The far-rights were confident that the spread of Ukrainian separatism had to be stopped. "The existence of Ukrainian literature Ukrainian bookstores, refugee aid committees for Ukrainians and any establishments where develops this devastating movement are unacceptable"¹⁸.

Another national issue that arose during the First World War was the Russian position towards the Turkish genocide on the Armenians. The Russian society sympathized with the orthodox people and proclaimed the need to strengthen the war in Transcaucasia to protect the Orthodox. Some of the Black Hundreds, especially the followers of Dubrovin, did not accept this plan. They believed that the Armenian nationalists were trying to solve their problems using Russia. Their newspaper "Russian Flag," commented this issue: "If a group of Armenian chauvinists dreams of restoring an Armenian state why must the Russian people become their ally and for the sake of this to sacrifice the lives of hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers?"¹⁹.

The far-rights declared their willingness to cooperate with all parties which gather around the mission for the protection of their fatherland. This principle was common to all political parties at the beginning of the war. The nationalists' newspaper "Zemshina" appealed to all far-rights: "We, the Russian people must stop suspecting and even accusing each other in self-regard and betrayal, only because we belong to different parties"²⁰. The leader of "Union Archangel Michael" who was a strong believer in this unification, started policy of cohesion with the party of the cadets and their leader Pavel Milioukov. But some of the other nationalists, as those led by Dubrovin, considered the negotiations with the party of cadets as inadmissible. In their minds, regardless of the patriotic declarations by Milioukov and his associates, they remained "a party of political thieves, crooks and murderers seeking to establish a republican regime in Russia"²¹.

Despite the differences in the Black Hundreds camp, they united in their dislike and hatred of the left wing and especially of the Social Democrats-Bolsheviks, the only party in the Fourth

17 The "mazepintsi" were named after the Hetman of Zaporizhia from the beginning of the XVIII century, Ivan Mazepa. He broke the contract with the Russian Emperor Peter I and turned on the side of his opponent Swedish King Karl XII. In Russia, his name became a symbol of betrayal and Ukrainian separatism. Ivan Mazepa was even excommunicated by the Russian Orthodox Church.

18 Правые партии. Документы и материалы. Т. 2. М. 1998, 461.

19 Русское знамя. 9 дек. 1914.

20 Земщина. 13. авг. 1914.

21 Русское знамя. 17 авг. 1914.

State Duma, which voted against war credits. In November 1914 a part of the Bolsheviks was arrested for participating in an illegal conference against the autocracy and nationalists wanted strict punishment for the traitors. After they were sentenced to life exiles in Siberia, nationalists claimed that the Left parties had no place in the Parliament. In their newspaper "Russian Flag" they declare: "In every country there are professional criminals, but no one thinks and gives them representation in state institutions"²².

This unity of political parties in Russia did not last long. In the summer of 1915 the Russian army experienced a number of failures on the battlefield. Realizing the danger of war on two fronts, the German commandment decided to move into a strategic defense of the Western Front in order to deliver a crushing attack to Russia and forced her out of the Entente. As realization to this plan, the Germans moved troops from the Western Front to the Eastern, where in May 1915, they launched a broad offense. The Russian army was forced to abandon positions, leave Lvov and start to retreat to the East. The nationalists accepted very painfully the fact that the Austrians conquered Pochaev²³, the center of the biggest section of the "Union of Russian People".

The first signs of war failures caused explosion of anti-Semitic sentiment in Moscow, where at the end of May 1915 flared three-day pogroms of commercial and industrial buildings belonging to people with German families. 668 buildings were damaged in the riot, including the Consulate of the Netherlands because its national flag was mistaken by the vandals to be German. There are no evidences of direct involvement in the Moscow events of the Black Hundreds organizations²⁴. The perpetrators were young people driven by hate, but there were also vandals and criminals. A private letter caught by the police gave a good description of the incident "... Many are arrested, there are many wounded and dead, who have drunk themselves to death, and some were drowned in barrels while drinking straight from them"²⁵.

At the end of 1915 the German advance was stopped but Russia lost Galicia, Poland, Lithuania, parts of the Baltic States and Belarus. After these failures Russian politicians began to realize that this war was not like the previous ones - it was going to be long and would require a full mobilization of all vital forces. One of the first steps, taken by the Russian government in order to deal with the new situation, was the creation of several special advisory councils. In them participated members of the State Duma, of the State Council and of public organizations. One of the leaders of nationalists - Nikolai Markov was appointed in the Special advisory defense council. This was a surprising move to most of his colleagues

22 Руское знамя. 30 януари 1915.

23 Pochaev is a town in Ukraine, a very important orthodox center.

24 Кирьянов, Ю. Майские беспорядки в Москве в 1915 г. Вопросы истории. 1994, кн. 12. 137-150.

25 Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 408.

who knew him as an unpredictable demagogue, but there he proved to be a man capable of giving competent advice even on the most complex issues.

One of the main reasons for the failure of the Russian army was the heavy shortage of ammunition. The Russian military command miscalculated the amount of ammunitions needed for a gun per year and as a result, even in the first month of the war, half of the ammunition was used up. As a result the Russian artillery could answer to ten shots of German guns with just one or two. The Special Advisory Defense Council was given the order to increase the production of projectiles. The correct number, suggested by experts, seemed to most of the members inflated and unnecessarily high. Markov, however, considered it insufficient and proposed the number to be doubled. The further course of the war proved the correctness of his position.

The government took measures to soften the passions and the discontent that emerged as a result of the military failures. Some ministers, directly responsible for the bad support of the army, were fired. However, the liberal opposition considered these changes as insufficient. As a result, in August 1915 they created the so-called Progressive Bloc, uniting six fractions of the State Duma (236 out of 422 members of the Fourth State Duma) and three groups from the State Council. Out of the Progressive Bloc remained just the far-lefts and far-rights. The bloc included even some nationalists, who received the name of "progressive nationalists". Although this was a union of various political parties, the new coalition had moderate demands and the most radical was a vote of no confidence.

The Black Hundreds assumed the creation of the Progressive Bloc as a mobilization of anti-monarchist forces. Nikolai Markov said in an official letter: "Using temporary difficulties in the supply of our virtuous army, the internal enemies of our country: constitutionalists, parliamentarians, revolutionaries and especially Germans and Jews are desperately trying to deceive the Russian people"²⁶. Among the nationalists occurred the idea to create as opposition to the Progressive (or the "yellow" as they called it) a Patriotic or "black" block. In order to achieve this the nationalists decided to deal with their greatest problem – separatism and organized three meetings.

The first of them was in Saratov on 27 – 29 August 1915 immediately after the foundation of the Progressive Bloc. This meeting was called "private" because of the small number of participants. In Saratov arrived representatives of 14 monarchical organizations. For President of the Assembly was elected Nikolai Tihmenev, the honorable member of the Saratov Department of the "Union Archangel Michael". Above all, participants demonstrated their loyalty to Emperor Nikolas II. The nationalists also tried to warn the Tsar about the danger that he took as he decided to head the Russian army. The problem was that in case of failure, which at that time seemed more likely than victory, he would bear the responsibility and all

²⁶ Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 411.

the negativism of the defeat. That would threaten not only his personality, but the same foundations of monarchy and autocracy. Another danger arose from the absence of Nikolai II in the capital. The absence would prevent him from leading the government. As a reaction eight ministers took an unprecedented step in the name of autocracy and wrote a collective letter to beg the emperor to rethink and change his decision. The Black Hundreds offered the tsar to appoint a trusted man and to give him extraordinary authorities in order to fill the vacuum of power in the government.

The far-rights also advised the Emperor to dissolve the State Duma because they believed that its actions could be considered as subversion. According to the Black Hundreds the Parliament was "more dangerous enemy of Russia than enemy artillery"²⁷. Nationalists attacked and the military committees founded in the summer of 1915 in order to mobilize the industry for military purposes. These organizations were also the main supporters of the liberal opposition, which further motivated monarchists to ask for their disbanding. According to the far-rights the committees were not doing their job and had proven their inefficiency. Nationalists found the solution of the problem by nationalization of the private factories and plants which could produce supplies for the army and also wanted their workers to be militarized.

In an address from the meeting of Saratov the nationalists warned the government about the danger of revolution. As countermeasures they proposed rule with "iron fist" and no compromises for the left-wing parties because soft measures would only strengthen them. The far-rights declared their willingness to defend the monarchy if the government allowed them. They want, in case of a riot or a revolution similar to that of 1905, to be armed so they could effectively defend autocracy.

As a result of the Saratov meeting nationalists decided to create a bureau which had to coordinate the monarchist organizations by strengthening their communication. For head of the bureau was elected the chairman of the Astrakhans' People monarchist party Nikolai Savitsky-Tihanovich. Finally, the Black Hundreds achieved consensus on the need of a new meeting – this time on a national level.

This provincial initiative was well accepted in the capital, but nevertheless the far-rights failed to reach agreement and as a result, in November 1915 they held two new separate meetings. The first one was in St. Petersburg and was prepared by the right-wing fractions in the Duma and right groups in the State Council. The attendants were 250, representatives of the higher clergy, members of the parliament, Senators and Representatives of the united nobility. The actual meeting was pronounced as unification of the nobility. The Aristocratic spirit of the capital forum was not liked in the province and cause negative comments.

²⁷ Ibid, 413.

Despite the attempts of the organizers of the Petersburg meeting to gather all trends and directions in the Black Hundred, it did not work. Some of the most prestigious organizations such as the "Union Archangel Michael" refused to participate. The decrees of the Capital Forum criticized all aspects of the program of the Progressive Bloc, with emphasis on the attempts to change the national policy. The far-rights reacted very sharply to the proposal of a new policy canceling certain restrictions on the rights of the Jews. Monarchists claimed that: "The request of the Progressive Bloc seems to be done against the very existence of Russia as an independent state. Especially now, during the World War, when it is undoubtedly proven that the Jews wage war against Russia together with Germany"²⁸.

Another Progressive Bloc proposal that caused vigorous reaction of the nationalists was the idea of a new softer policy on the Finnish national question. Monarchists sarcastically noted that the Progressive Bloc fought for equality of Jews in Russia, but at the same time was trying to take away the equal rights of Russians in Finland. One of the most important decrees from the capital forum was a request for an immediate seizure of all factories, shops, capitals and generally all property belonging to the nationals of the countries at war with Russia. Naturally, these enemies were mainly Germans.

In the meeting in St. Petersburg did not participate the most extreme and radical elements of the Black Hundreds and it was more a meeting of the pro-government monarchists. For this reason, in late November 1915, a new forum was held in Nizhniy Novgorod of the extreme nationalists. The choice of this location had symbolic meaning because, according to the far-rights, precisely in this town was born the first true Black Hundredist - Kuzma Minin. In this city, three hundred years before the events, he made his famous call for unity of all Russian people against the Polish invaders. This was the reason why the nationalists gathered there to call on the Russian people to rise again and defend Orthodoxy and autocracy.

Despite the pretenses of the forum to be an all-Russian meeting, it had fewer delegates than that in St. Petersburg. The participants were mostly from the province and people with little impact. Nevertheless two of the main leaders of the nationalists participated in the meeting - Alexander Dubrovin and Nikolai Markov, who managed to overcome their differences in the name of the common cause. Their speeches were complementary and the main criticism in them was against the political opposition which was accused of secret pro-German feelings.

Dubrovin informed the delegates about the decisions of the Zimmerwald Conference²⁹ of the European socialist parties who adopted Resolution against the "imperialist" war. The leader of the Union of Russian People accused the Social Democrats of hypocrisy and treasonous ideas. He said: "Do not believe them because they speak insincere. In the long run, all Social

²⁸ Ibid, 417.

²⁹ The Zimmerwald Conference was held in Zimmerwald, Switzerland, from 5 to 8 September 1915. It was the first of three international socialist conferences convened by anti-militarist socialist parties from countries that were originally neutral during World War I.

Democrats, led by the German socialists wanted to give the Germans the conquered lands, to make peace with them and start a civil war in Russia"³⁰. His words appear prophetic, considering the later deeds of Vladimir Lenin.

Of course, one of the main issues discussed at the Nizhniy Novgorod conference was the national. Some of the proposals for conclusion of this problem, as the one dealing with the "Jewish threat" were quite strange. The Black Hundreds proposed to adopt a law according to which the study of Hebrew and the Talmud would become mandatory in all schools, in order to expose the "Jewish danger". Probably even the most faithful rabbis have never dreamed of such popularization of Jewish culture and this would definitely help the spread of Judaism, instead of its exposure. So the nationalists actually offered to make a huge contribution to their worst enemies...

The other fundamental enemy of the Russian people, according to the far-rights from the Nizhniy Novgorod conference, was the Germans. But unlike their colleagues from the Petersburg meeting, who examined the issue as an economic one, they accepted it more as a religious one. The far-rights from the Nizhniy Novgorod conference proposed to exclude Protestants from the family of Christians. According to them they should be recognized as pagans worshiped the Golden Calf and militarism. Naturally, a step in this direction would lead to more practical consequences - such as the dismissal of Germans from the government. The nationalists offered state monopoly on trade with bread in order to prevent exportation of the grain. They believe that tougher punishment is necessary for monopolists and speculators who ravage the Russian people.

Finally, the three meetings of November 1915 did not achieve their main purpose - the creation of a unified monarchist block. The differences between the nationalists' factions appeared insurmountable and their fragmentation led to a royal lack of thrust. The government also realized that the Black Hundred cannot support effectively the autocracy.

The Black Hundreds and the end of the Russian Empire

After the unsuccessful attempts to unite, the Russian nationalists gradually began to lose influence in the political life. Their political activities during 1916 limited to accusations in

³⁰ Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 419.

the Parliament. Two of their leaders Purishkevich and Markov led dispute about the reasons for the failure of the Russian army. According Purishkevich the main problem was the so-called "dark forces" and precisely Grigori Rasputin, who he accused in pro-German feelings and bad influence on the Empress, and therefore on the Emperor. It is a fact that this Siberian "old man" had very strong influence on the royal family and the accusations that he guided the government policy are not entirely groundless. Purishkevich also blamed some of the ministers of failing of their duties.

Meanwhile Markov - the other main leader of the far-rights, tried to protect the government and the royal family focusing on the corruption of the military-industrial committees. Comparing the reactions on the both speeches, that of Purishkevich made stronger impression and was acclaimed even by members of the left and the liberals. Apparently the leader of the Union "Archangel Michael" felt better the problems of the Russian empire at that time.

The problem with the influence of Rasputin on the royal family worried seriously not only the nationalists but the Russian high society, including relatives of the imperial family. Gradually it becomes clear that the Empress, and because of her – the Tsar, so much trusted in the "old-holy man" that no one could convince them of his destructive influence. So the Rasputin's foes realized that they could not eliminate him in civilized way and decided to kill him. Purishkevich was one of the leaders of this plot and along with Prince Felix Yusupov murdered Rasputin in December 1916. It was believed that they acted with the approval of part of the royal family because they were not effectively punished for the crime. This was the most remarkable deed of the Black Hundreds in 1916 in protection of autocracy. Even if the elimination of Rasputin is considered as a positive act in the name of the Russian monarchy, by all means, this was not enough and much more adequate actions were expected from monarchists.

The inefficiency of the nationalists led to events in 1917 and the monarchists had to live through the collapse of their dreams and illusions. Though constantly warning the government about the danger of revolution, they were completely unprepared when it broke out. Entangled in inner struggles and accusing each other, the far-rights lost sense of the situation in Russian society and allowed the "dark forces" to surprise them. They failed to respond adequately to the February Revolution of 1917. Before the events the Black Hundreds claim that their supporters were no less than several million loyalists ready to sacrifice their lives for Tsar and the fatherland. The Royalist parties and organizations in the capital and the province could not get out of their "lethargic sleep" in which they fell, according to them yet in 1916³¹.

Nikolay Markov remembered: "From the evening of February 27 the Chief Council of the "Union of Russian People" in Petrograd was defeated and its chairman barely managed to

31 Кирьянов, Ю. Правые партии..., 416.

escape"³². This chairman was actually Markov himself and even the liberal newspapers laughed at his panic run. In the first days of the revolution the leaders of the nationalists either panicked or were hiding in their homes, or flee the capital. So after the revolution the far-rights logically lost influence in society and failed to do anything to preserve the autocracy. With the end of the monarchy the Black Hundreds descended from the political scene, some of them were killed and some of their leaders escaped abroad to keep up the "fight" from a distance but actually achieved nothing.

³² Степанов, С. Черная сотня. М. 2005, 447.