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Book review: Nikolaev A.B. *'The Duma revolution': 27th February – 3rd March 1917: in 2 volumes.* St Peterburg: The Herzen State Pedagogical University (RSPU), 2017.

The study of the history of Russian Revolution of 1917 is the most important trend in the historical sciences in Russia. Despite enormous amounts of literature on the topic of the February Revolution, many controversial questions remain, including the place and role of the State Duma in the events of that February. The debates on this issue began immediately after the abolition of the monarchy, and it is the non-stop discussion today. In the spring and summer of 1917, the liberals, hoping to 'channelize' the people's movement in the right direction, emphasized the great role of the 4th State Duma in the revolution. "It is true that the revolution started not because of a planned conspiracy but because of the spontaneous mass activity. It is not true that it owed its success to the disorder and anarchy. The revolution owes its victory to the State Duma, which granted sanction to this coup and that united not the individual parties but the whole nation", P. N. Milyukov declared at the Moscow State Conference in August 1917¹. On the other hand, the socialists gave an outright denial of the revolutionary role of the parliament. Typical were the statements similar to that of the famous socialist-revolutionary M. V. Vishnyak, that the State Duma of the third and fourth convocations were the helpless 'ball of fortune' for the authorities that lacked credibility for the wide range of the public and the lower classes. According to his opinion, the role of the parliament in the February events "could not be more insignificant", since the Duma, as an institution, "was always against the revolution, did not want it, was afraid of it, and even hated it". The Provisional Committee of the State Duma that replaced the Duma "did not control the events but was ra-

¹ Milyukov P.N. *Istoriia vtoroi russkoi revoliutsii* [The History of the Second Russian Revolution]. Moscow, 2001, p. 315.

ther controlled by the events themselves"². Such evaluations originated in the socialist environment already during the days of the revolution. On 28th February 1917, Zinaida Gippius wrote about the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, "The revolution toppled this regime without their participation. They did not topple the government. They only 'mechanically' stayed on the surface – on the top. By the passive and secret procedure"³.

The Soviet historiography always linked the key events of the February Revolution with the people's uprising on 27th February, whereof it followed that the Provisional Committee of the State Duma joining the revolution was belated and was not of any importance. Even in 1923, Ilya Vardin emphasized that the State Duma became the heart of the revolution "only because *the building of the Tauride Palace* [hereinafter marked by the author. – A. Egorov] ... was the central spot for the people's rebellion". In it, the Petrograd Soviet was formed to become the center of the rebellion. In such a situation, the liberals had no choice but to accept the revolution, otherwise they would have faced the 'poetic justice' exercised by the people. "Such a travesty of the historical evidence are these words about the liberals 'leading' the revolution! Rodzyanko and Milyukov *did not take the lead in the revolution but rather appeared to have been 'captured' by the said revolution*. And the naive revolutionary 'leaders' gave them the ministerial portfolios, i.e. allowed them to get what they wanted because of the people's revolution, by means of an agreement with Tsarism!"⁴, Vardin notes. In the 1930s, the first volume of 'The History of the Civil War in the USSR' formulated the official point of view on the conduct of the State Duma opposition during the February Revolution. According to it, the revolution was carried out by soldiers and workers alone, without any support from the State Duma that rather tried to help the Tsarist autocracy to suppress the uprising. When the revolution succeeded, the liberals decided to form their own government hoping to suppress the people's movement and to establish its class authority⁵. In the 1960s, this point of view shifted ground. The historians of the USSR began to believe that the State Duma opposition had their own policy orientation in the February Revolution, which in many respects did not agree with the position of the old regime. The researchers emphasized the confusion and indifference of the State Duma opposition during the first days of the revolution, believing that the liberals did not really tried to help Tsarism to suppress the people's movement but rather waited to see how events would finally

² Vishnyak M.V. *Dva puti: Fevral' i Oktiabr'* [Two Ways: February and October]. Paris, 1931, pp. 106–107.

³ Gippius Z.N. *Peterburgskie dnevniki. 1914–1919* [Petersburg Diaries. 1914–1919]. New York, Moscow, 1990, p. 89.

⁴ Vardin I.V. Liberalizm – tsarizm – revoliutsiia [Liberalism – Tsarism – Revolution]. *Krasnaya Nov'* [Krasnaia Nov'], 1923, book 2, p. 288.

⁵ *Istoriia grazhdanskoi voiny v SSSR* [History of the Civil War in the USSR]. Moscow, 1936, vol. 1, pp. 116–131.

unfold. When the victory of the people became obvious, they decided to assume power, holding a course for entrenchment of the bourgeoisie. In the 1990s, this point of view did not undergo any significant changes.

Since the late 1990s, A.B. Nikolaev has focused on the study of the role of the State Duma in the February Revolution⁶. He is also among the organizers of the annual international academic conference 'The 2016 Tauride Readings' held at the Tauride Palace since 2007. The event is dedicated to the study of various problems of Russian and foreign parliamentary systems. Within the framework of this conference, the most controversial problems of the participation of the State Duma in the February Revolution were repeatedly raised. The monograph of A.B. Nikolaev 'The Duma Revolution' published in 2017 sums up the multi-year research of the author and takes to the next level the discussion of the role of the parliament in the February events. The work was carried out based on the large source base, which included the entire complex of documentary and narrative sources on the declared problem. It includes the documents of the State Archive of the Russian Federation, the Russian State Historical Archive, the Russian State Historical Archive, St Petersburg; and many others, materials of the printed media, journalists' research, memoirs, diaries, letters, and interviews with the contemporaries and participants of events. Russian and foreign historiography of the raised problems is analyzed by A. B. Nikolaev in detail.

The main idea of the monograph is that "the State Duma played a leading role in the February Revolution starting from 27th February 1917, working their way from the attempt to carry out the idea of creating a responsible ministry (government) and to taking actions aimed at seizing power, creation of the Provisional Government, and the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy in Russia"⁷. All the information used by the author focuses on the verification of this idea. A. B. Nikolaev's attempt to show that the State Duma began to get involved in the revolution as early as on the morning of 27th February 1917 is very convincing. Even at the meeting of the Council of Elders and the private meeting of the members of the State Duma, several steps were taken that predetermined the transformation of the State Duma into the heart of the revolu-

⁶ Nikolaev A.B. *Gosudarstvennaia дума v Fevral'skoi revoliutsii: ocherki istorii* [The State Duma in the February Revolution: Essays on the History]. Ryazan, 2002; Idem. [Revolution and Power: The 4th State Duma of February 27 – March 3, 1917]. St Petersburg, 2005; *Revoliutsiia i vlast': IV Gosudarstvennaia дума 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 g.* [Revolution and Power: The State Duma of the 4th convocation February 27 – March 3, 1917: Doct. Dis. in Historical Sciences]. St Petersburg, 2005; Glava IV. *Gosudarstvennaia дума i Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia. Pervaia mirovaia vojna i konets Rossiiskoi imperii* [Chapter IV. The State Duma and the February Revolution. The First World War and the End of the Russian Empire: in 3 volumes. In R. Sh. Ganelin. (Ed.)] St Petersburg, 2014, vol. 3: The February Revolution, pp. 186–342, etc.

⁷ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskai revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, p. 267.

tion. In the first place, the question was about the non-recognition of Nicholas II's decree on the dissolution of the State Duma for vacations and about the participation of the Duma deputies in the abolishment of the old authority and replacing it with the new one. Having adopted the decision to create the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, the deputies made it clear that the State Duma was ready to assume the leading role in the revolution and to form a new government. The researcher refers various things to the revolutionary arrangements of the Committee: publication of a leaflet without censorship specifying the composition of the Committee, granting sanction to publish the first free newspaper in Russia 'The News of the Petrograd Soviet of Workers Deputies', and the negotiations with Nikolai Golitsyn, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Russia, and Grand Duke Michael Alexandrovich of Russia, during which the deputies demanded the abdication of Nicholas II and threatened to arrest the Tsarist ministers⁸.

Contrary to the assertions in Soviet historiography about the participation of the State Duma in the revolution only in the sense of the Tauride Palace becoming center of the people's movement, A.B. Nikolaev brought into sharp focus the transformation of the State Duma on the morning of 27th February into the real 'headquarters' of the uprising. The soldiers and workers who came to the Tauride Palace fell under the organizational influence of the emerging Military Commission, which the author calls 'the headquarters of Kerensky'. It was that informal structure, as it is proved in the monograph, that played a central role in the organization of the soldiers' uprising. By the evening of 27th February, 'the headquarters of Kerensky', soon transformed into the Military Commission of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, received at their disposal not only the disorderly crowds of soldiers, but also the military units that retained the command officers. According to the author, the strategy of revolutionary violence pursued by Alexander Kerensky and the staff of his 'headquarters', such as the orders to occupy buildings and arrests of the supporters of the Tsarist regime, contributed to the fact that the State Duma got the extension of its influence.

The monograph also pays significant importance to the analysis of the activities of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma. Having become the governmental authority, the State Duma began to issue various legislative documents, acquired the rights of the judiciary, and moved in the direction of obtaining the functions of the supreme power. The most important element of this new government was the appointment of commissioners with emergency powers. As shown by A. B. Nikolaev, these commissioners were important because they were an essential link in the new combination of powers, having provided the State Duma Committee with the nature of governmental authority, with the reservation of the right to supreme power⁹.

⁸ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, p. 263.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

In the opinion of A.B. Nikolaev, taking the central administration into the hands of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, contributed to the 'revolutionizing' of the whole country, because it was from the telegrams of M.V. Rodzyanko, A.A. Bublikov and others that the country learned about the events in the capital, and these telegrams insisted on "the special role of the State Duma in the revolution"¹⁰. It seems, though, that at the provincial level, the role of the State Duma was not as significant as in the capital – for the provinces, the very fact of the collapse of the Tsarist regime was more important than those who replaced it. This can be easily illustrated by the following example. On 1st March 1917, a telegram of M.V. Rodzyanko was received in Vologda that was addressed to the municipal government with an appeal to form a governmental committee. An urgent meeting of the councilors with representatives from local community-based organizations, cooperatives, workers, peasants – 'the crowd', was held in the building of the City Duma with over thousand people participating. After the speech of the socialist-revolutionary S.S. Maslov on behalf of the representatives of the parties currently operating in the city – socialist-revolutionaries, social democrats and cadets, it was decided to oust the governor and the local administration from power, to form the Provisional Committee of Vologda Governorate and hand over power to them¹¹. Maslov's speech was not an impromptu one – they knew in Vologda about the events unfolding already since 28th February. By that, the telegram of Rodzyanko did not revolutionize the country, but it was simply used by the local revolutionary circles to seize the power. It seems that the question of the State Duma influencing the revolution development in the regions still requires a background study.

In his work, A.B. Nikolaev disagrees with the point of view of Soviet historiography on the development of the 'duality of power' in the revolutionary days. He believes that it is more correct to talk about the formation of the so-called 'Duma-Soviet power', which started to be in effect after 9 pm on 27th February, when N.S. Chkheidze became Chairman of the Petrograd Soviet, with A.F. Kerensky as his comrade, and they were both delegated by the general meeting of the Petrograd Soviet to the Provisional Committee of the State Duma. As the monograph shows, the policy of this co-operation with the Soviets was mostly initiated by the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, and the activity of the Petrograd Soviet corresponded to it only to a lesser extent. The coordination of military and food issues led to the emergence of the Duma-Soviet Military Commission and the Food Supply Commission of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies, the activities of which are also examined in

¹⁰ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 1, p. 539.

¹¹ Egorov A.N. Kadetskie organizatsii Vologodskoi gubernii v 1917 godu [Cadet organizations of Vologda Governorate in 1917]. *Istoriia: fakty i simvol'y* [History: Facts and Symbols], 2017, no. 4 (13), p. 53.

detail by A. B. Nikolayev. The author also analyzes the cooperation between the Provisional Committee of the State Duma and the Petrograd Soviet in terms of creation of city militia(s). In fact, this cooperation took place without the creation of joint commissions. The study proves to satisfaction that the Provisional Committee of the State Duma and the Petrograd Soviet, having arranged the cooperation with the Petrograd Soviet, acted as the creator of the new authority. The author of the monograph calls it 'the Duma-Soviet authority', with the obvious supremacy of the State Duma over the Petrograd Soviet¹². It is also worth mentioning that this idea is supported by the opinion of A.F. Kerensky, who wrote in his memoirs, "... the State Duma remained the only locus of power in the whole country. Its Provisional Committee acted without any intrusions from the far-left parties; the Committee took the lead in the revolution simply because the time has come"¹³.

The pioneering approach used by A.B. Nikolaev consists in the proposal to replace the term 'duality of power' with a new term 'March 3rd: a set of liberal principles'. The researcher refers the following features:

- 1) acknowledgment of the Provisional Government of the State Duma represented by its Provisional Committee and of the Petrograd Soviet represented by its Executive Committee, as the main sources of authority in the country;
- 2) presence of conditionally unaccountable Provisional Government;
- 3) the constitutional monarchy employing a parliamentary system;
- 4) solution of the question on the political system by the Constituent Assembly;
- 5) implementation of the new approach with regards to the separation of powers in April 1917, according to which the supreme power, prior to the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, passed into the hands of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma with the simultaneous operation of two legislative chambers (the State Duma and the State Council) and the responsible ministry¹⁴.

Introduction of the term 'March 3rd: a set of liberal principles' into scientific nomenclature allows to demonstrate the role of the State Duma in the creation of the new government and its influence on the future events. Thus, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma did not quit the political stage after the formation of the Provisional Government but continued its work until early October 1917. As estimated by A. B. Nikolaev, only during the period from 4th March to 19th March 1917, 12 meetings of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma were held, where executive decisions were taken, including personnel matters – appointment of commissioners

¹² Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27–March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, p. 266.

¹³ Kerensky A.F. *Rossiiia v povorotnyi moment istorii* [Russia at the Turning Point in History]. Moscow, 2006, p. 197.

¹⁴ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, p. 261.

on sites. Up to the end of August 1917, private meetings of the members of the State Duma were held on a regular basis, a certain influence of which over the political processes was recognized even by the Soviet historiography, with all the underestimation of the parliamentary institutions¹⁵. Thus, the introduction of the new term allows to integrate the powers of authority given to the State Duma, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, the Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, as well as the Provisional Government into a sole political system. However, the weakness of this statement lies in the absence of any official documents authorizing this system. In addition, the author of the monograph notes that contemporaries perceived the course of events preeminently through the prism of 'duality of power', as no one, except for M. V. Rodzyanko, was interested in the existence of 'March 3rd: a set of liberal principles'.

The argument about the State Duma being the center of the February Revolution is not accepted by all historians. Thus, in the review of the first monograph by A.B. Nikolayev on the role of the parliament in the February events, I. V. Lukoyanov considered it more correct to talk about not the leading role of the Duma, however about its desire to temperate the mass movement, to place it under rules, or 'bring to heel' in order to prevent chaos¹⁶. He also emphasized that it was necessary to talk not about the position of the entire State Duma during the Revolution, but only about that part of the State Duma that stood in opposition to the autocracy. A.B. Nikolaev, who disagreed with this position, introduced information on the active participation in the revolutionary events of about 150–200 deputies out of total 403, half of the State Duma overall. He had revealed and provided the names of 137 members of the State Duma known as active participants of the February events¹⁷. Effectively, the participation of parliamentarians in the February Revolution was quite impressive.

A.B. Nikolaev believes that in the days of the February Revolution, the Duma liberals transformed from oppositionists to revolutionaries. Without denying the active participation of the State Duma opposition in the revolution, one is inclined to note that the position of the liberals was strictly determined by the specific historical situation, where the evolutionists in fact found themselves in the middle of social upheavals. This position is clearly seen through the actions of P. N. Milyukov. In the

¹⁵ See: *Burzhuziia i pomeshchiki v 1917 godu. Chastnye soveshchaniia chlenov Gosudarstvennoi dumy; pod red. A.K. Drezena* [The bourgeoisie and the landlords (pomestchiks) in 1917. Private meetings of the members of the State Duma. In A.K. Drezen (Ed.)]. Moscow, Leningrad, 1932.

¹⁶ Lukoianov I.V. Rets. na: A.B. Nikolaev. Gosudarstvennaia дума v Fevral'skoi revoliutsii: ocherki istorii [Review on: Nikolaev A.B. The State Duma in the February Revolution: Essays on History]. *Otechestvennaia istoriia* [Russian History], 2004, no. 4, p. 166.

¹⁷ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralya – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, p. 267.

middle of the day on 27th February 1917, he said in a conversation with N. N. Sukhanov, "We, as responsible opposition, undoubtedly strived for power and embarked on a course towards it; however we did not want to come to power by means of a revolution. We rejected this way, it was not our approach..."¹⁸. Sukhanov added that he did not vouch for the quote to be unedited, however the precise meaning 'with full guarantee' was like that. When the revolution became a fact, the liberals found themselves in quite tricky situation. They were not going to save the old regime, as they did not take the liking to the government bureaucrats, including the Tsar himself and his closest associates. However, it was also impossible for them to take the side-line, thus smoothing path to power for the left-wing parties, as this would mean, at the very least, to show irresponsibility and frivolity. The only solution that remained in this situation was to try to take the lead in the revolution and 'channel' it in the right direction, en route with their own designed evolutionary reforms. In this case, the liberals had to say the 'left-wing' words and 'make' the revolution, as it is shown in the monograph. Therefore, it is not surprising that some liberals quite sincerely considered themselves as the leading force of the February Revolution. In July 1917, at the private meeting of members of the State Duma, the Progressist member A.M. Maslennikov said, "The State Duma is responsible for this revolution. I am blunt about that the coup was staged by the State Duma, and not the proletariat or the workers"¹⁹. It appears that the motives for participation of the State Duma oppositionists in the February Revolution needs further study, first, from the point of clarifying the ideological attitudes of the participants in this revolutionary drama.

A number of extremely informative appendices to the monograph by A.B. Nikolaev should not go unnoticed, the most important of which is the general list of members of the Military Commission containing 500 names, including those previously unknown²⁰. Thus, the research breaks new ground and makes a significant contribution to the study of the role and place of the State Duma in the February Revolution. The importance A.B. Nikolaev's contribution is not only in the introduction into scientific discourse of a huge number of facts about the activities of the State Duma deputies in the February events, however also creating a new conception of 'the Duma revolution' on its basis. Undoubtedly, this monograph is an important milestone

¹⁸ Sukhanov N.N. *Zapiski o revoliutsii: v 3 t.* [Notes on the Revolution: in 3 volumes]. Moscow, 1991, vol. 1, p. 88.

¹⁹ *Burzhuziia i pomeshchiki v 1917 godu. Chastnye soveshchaniia chlenov Gosudarstvennoi dumy; pod red. A.K. Drezena* [The bourgeoisie and the landlords (pomestchiks) in 1917. Private meetings of the members of the State Duma. In A.K. Drezen (Ed.)]. Moscow, Leningrad, 1932, p. 220.

²⁰ Nikolaev A.B. *Dumskaia revoliutsiia: 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [The Duma Revolution: February 27 – March 3, 1917: in 2 volumes]. St Petersburg, 2017, vol. 2, pp. 270–349.

in the study of the history of the February Revolution, and the controversial nature of several ideas expressed in the book inspires further scientific research dedicated to the turning points of Russian history.

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