



## ESTABLISHING THE SOVIET REGIME IN THE POLTAVA PROVINCE BY REVOLUTIONARY COMMITTEES (DECEMBER 1919 – APRIL 1920)

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### Summary

The article deals with Poltava province revolutionary committees' activity on the establishment of the Soviet regime, which included, in particular, the persecution of non-proletarian population, recruitment of former regimes' civil servants, registration of politically unreliable individuals. An essential part of the Soviet regime establishment was getting revolutionary committee staff's work on the right track. It is indicated that one of the methods of province's social and political life sovietization was conducting nonparty peasants' and workers' conferences by revolutionary committees. It is shown, that in order to purge anti-Soviet minded officials from the Soviet staff special attestation commissions were formed within provincial and district revolutionary committees. It is pointed out that province revolutionary committees as non-constitutional temporary extraordinary Soviet authorities turned out to be an effective political tool of Sovietizing the social and political life of the Poltava province as an administrative unit of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.

**Key words:** Poltava province, extraordinary bodies of Soviet power, revolutionary committees, Poltava Provincial Revolutionary Committee, Sovietization, Soviet regime, nonparty peasants' and workers' conferences, attestation commissions.

### Аннотация

В статье рассматривается деятельность революционных комитетов Полтавской губернии по установлению советских порядков, включавшая, в частности, преследования непролетарских слоев населения, мобилизацию служащих бывших режимов, регистрацию политически неблагонадежных. Важной составляющей деятельности по установлению советских порядков было налаживание работы аппарата ревкомов. Указано, что одним из способов советизации общественно-политической жизни губернии стало проведение ревкомами беспартийных крестьянских и рабочих конференций. Показано, что с целью очистки советского аппарата от антисоветски настроенных служащих при губернском и уездных ревкомах создавались специальные аттестационные комиссии. Указано, что ревкомы губернии как неконституционные временные чрезвычайные органы советской власти оказались достаточно эффективным политическим инструментом советизации общественно-политической жизни Полтавской губернии как административной единицы Украинской Социалистической Советской республики.

**Ключевые слова:** Полтавская губерния, чрезвычайные органы советской власти, революционные комитеты, Полтавский губернский революционный комитет, советизация, советские порядки, беспартийные рабочие и крестьянские конференции, аттестационные комиссии.

### Formulation of the Problem.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution "Reunification of divided Europe" of 2009 urges the OSCE member-states to continue to study the totalitarian legacy. The foundations of Stalin's totalitarianism were laid by the statecraft theory and practice of the first years of the Soviet system, that determines the significance of the suggested research. The actual process of establishing the Soviet regime in Ukraine, in particular, in the form of its extraordinary bodies – revolutionary committees requires an unbiased examination, as the Soviet history science's approaches to the above mentioned problem were characterized by the compulsory unavoidable set of ideological clichés [1], and contemporary researchers do not pay much attention to the Soviet statecraft, in particular, at the local level.

The activity of revolutionary committees of the Poltava province, that covered a significant part of Ukraine, fell off the radar of both Soviet and contemporary history-law science

reinforcing the significance of the suggested research.

**The aim of the paper** is to conduct a detailed analysis of the Soviet regime establishment measures which were being taken from December 1919 till April 1920 by the Poltava province revolutionary committees led by the Provincial Revolutionary Committee in order to Sovietize the province.

**Basic material.** The Poltava province revolutionary committees as extraordinary non-constitutional bodies of the Soviet power, formed in late 1919 – early 1920 by mainly Russian Soviet authorities, carried out intensive rule-making and organizing activity aimed at establishing the Soviet revolutionary regime. In that respect during the initial period of their activity the Provincial Revolutionary Committee and county ones were greatly influenced by Soviet Russia's military authorities. Thus, following the special instruction heads of the above mentioned revolutionary committees had to inform weekly the Inspection for organizing South front revolutionary committees

first of all on the issues of providing assistance to the Red Army, regaining the Soviet authority, determining political public mood, supplying food to cities and towns [2, fol. 83]. In terms of regaining the Soviet authority and establishing the Soviet regime the Provincial Revolutionary Committee led by the Russian military authorities acted expeditiously, in many cases without taking into consideration the position of the All-Ukrainian Revolutionary Committee which frequently took pertinent general ordinances behind time, for example, the ordinance on annulling Denikin's power's regulations and enacting Ukrainian Soviet of People's Commissars' previous decrees was only adopted on 21 January, 1920 [3, fol. 12].

Orders and regulations, issued by the first staff of the Poltava Provincial Revolutionary Committee headed by M. Alekseev, allow us to realize their approaches to the urgent issues concerning regaining the Soviet authority in Poltava. Thus, according to Order 1 all searches and arrests had only to be instituted



on the bases of warrants issued by the Administrative-Operations Department of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee and had only to be conducted where it was required from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., all requisitions and confiscations had only to be carried out on the basis of Provincial Revolutionary Committee's warrants. The individuals, who instituted searches, made arrests, carried out requisitions and confiscations without the above mentioned warrants, were declared enemies of the Soviet power and had to be shot in sight. Poltava commandant and head of provincial militia had to take measures to immediately stop robberies conducted under the guise of arrests, searches, requisitions and confiscations. Order 2 obliged all house owners, house managers and house management committees in two-day term to submit information about the individuals who fled with Denikin's supporters, in particular, about their abandoned private property. The individuals who had been stealing abandoned private property had to be brought to the military-revolutionary tribunal court [4, p. 1].

According to Order 11 of the new staff of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee, signed by its head Ya. Drobnis, drinking and showing up in public places intoxicated with alcohol were prohibited under the threat of arrest and brining to the military-revolutionary tribunal court, and production and sale of alcohol were prohibited under the threat of shooting and property confiscation. According to the relevant regulation there were formed two committees. The first one dealt with confiscation and requisition of property belonging to the individuals who had fled with Denikin's supporters. The second one was engaged in collecting and investigating the data concerning Denikin's authorities' crimes. The designated head of the provincial extraordinary committee was set the task to immediately form extraordinary committees in the province [5, p. 1]. On December 21 the "Soviets' Power" newspaper on behalf of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee published a statement according to which the individuals caught producing and selling alcohol had to be shot in sight and their property had to be confiscated [6, p. 3], though the relevant order determining such punishment for the above mentioned

crime had not been adopted by the Provincial Revolutionary Committee.

Revolutionary committees of the province had to involve previous regimes' staff and public servants in the process of establishing the Soviet regime. Forming the power from scratch on the basis of the idea of annihilating the previous state machine turned out to be counterproductive. Thus, the first staff of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee urgently subordinated the provincial food committee with its administrative support office and employees that remained after the previous government [7, fol. 222]. On 12 January, 1920 at the Provincial Revolutionary Committee meeting there was adopted a resolution obliging all employees of county statistical divisions, preserved from the previous regime, to remain in their jobs [8, fol. 179 v.]. Order 1 issued by Kremenchuk County Military Revolutionary Committee on 23 December 1919 required the employees who had worked in the civilian bodies of power in the time of Denikin's regime to begin working in the relevant offices from 24 December [9, fol. 15]. In Order 9 of 6 December 1919 Pryluky County Revolutionary Committee noted that local councils' institutions, hospitals, pharmacies, schools as public-required institutions were not abolished, and had to continue operating under the leadership of the Soviet authorities with the only difference that they had to "strain not to serve the interests of the bourgeoisie, but to meet the needs of working people" [10, fol. 14].

County revolutionary committees actively imposed the Soviet regime in the Poltava province. Soon after its founding, on December 1919, the Kremenchuk county revolutionary committee issued a resolution appointing head of investigation committee, county military commissar, Kremenchuk station commandant and heads of food and housing departments. According to Order 1 of 23 December 1919, issued by that revolutionary committee, all individuals who had worked in civilian agencies in the time of Denikin's regime were obliged to gather in their premises on 24 December and get back to work. In addition, they had to inform the revolutionary committee about the agency's location area and describe the abandoned property. Kremenchuk factory committees also had to provide

information about present property to the county revolutionary committee. Owners of engravers workshops under the threat of brining to the military-revolutionary tribunal court were prohibited to make any stamps without a permit of the county revolutionary committee board [9, fol. 15–15 v.].

Since the first days of its functioning Zinkiv county revolutionary committee's public utensils department confiscated property of individuals who had fled with Denikin's supporters, brought it to warehouses, took measures to stop illegal logging [11, p. 4]. Via the management department that county revolutionary committee "due to counter-revolutionary actions and according to central government regulations" took measures aimed at "isolating" 77 representatives of county's well-off segments of the people by imprisoning them into forced labour camp [8, fol. 286]. According to Order 1 issued on 21 December 1919 by the Poltava Provincial Revolutionary Committee the latter committed to establish "strict revolutionary order by iron hand".

Pogrom-makers, robbers and murderers had to be immediately shot in sight [12, fol. 1]. There was also issued the order requiring former local council's civil servants to remain in their offices and calling county peasants for contributing to Soviet regime [7, fol. 215].

According to the Kobeliaky County Revolutionary Committee's Management Department's order, issued on the basis of the County Revolutionary Committee's resolution all Kobeliaky residents aged 17–45 had to get registered (military men – in military commissariat, civilians – in militia). House owners were ordered to record tenants in a house register, simultaneously registering their documents in militia. For neglecting the order offenders were warned to be prosecuted according to martial laws [14, fol. 6]. The Revolutionary Committee's appeal (without any date indicated) to Kobeliaky residents suggested that individuals caught spreading inflammatory rumours, profiteering, racketeering should be immediately detained and sent to the county revolutionary committee's management department [13, fol. 7].

The Romny County Revolutionary Committee's resolution of 19 December 1919 provided for levying 5 million ruble



emergency tax from Romny profiteers and bourgeoisie and 15 million ruble emergency tax from county' well-to-do peasants. The Provincial Revolutionary Committee, having considered the Romny County Revolutionary Committee's request to confirm that tax, permitted it with its resolution [14, fol. 4].

Spread by county revolutionary committees practice of illegal contributions and emergence taxes agitated population, therefore, on January 6, 1920 the Provincial Revolutionary Committee had to send to all Poltava province county committees a circular note, signed by head of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee and head of the provincial finance department, stating the fact that county revolutionary committees "regardless of all decrees, orders and resolutions issued by the central authorities before evacuation and then renewed" levy the emergence tax against the set rules, in particular, make banks and treasuries transfer individual's money to revolutionary committees accounts, justifying it by priority expenditure and lack of money. Having declared such actions illegal and their justification insufficient, based on the RSFSR Soviet of People's Commissars' Decree "on local councils' monetary funds and expenditures" prohibited under the threat of revolutionary tribunal to impose any contributions on population or transmit individuals' money. However, the Provincial Revolutionary Committee permitted, if necessary, to cover "revolutionary time expenditures" by imposing on bourgeois class individuals one-time emergence "revolutionary taxes", which had to be approved in the Provincial Revolutionary Committee [15, fol. 12-12 v.]. Thus, in late March 1920 the Pryluky County Revolutionary Committee levied 5 million karbovanets "emergence tax" from local bourgeoisie [16, fol. 183]. That measure was approved of at the Provincial Revolutionary Committee meeting [17, fol. 32].

Revolutionary committees paid much attention antialcoholism. In that respect the punishment was not proportionated to the social danger. Thus, in February 1920 the Kobeliaky County Revolutionary Committee took a decision to punish individuals caught drinking, selling and producing alcohol for the first time by imposing a 3000-10000 ruble fine for

the second time – by bringing them to the military-revolutionary tribunal court [14, fol. 68].

District and village revolutionary committees after the manner of provincial and county ones conducted activity aimed at establishing Soviet revolutionary regime. Soon after its formation the Poltava district revolutionary committee based of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's resolution sent all village communities a regulation obliging the latters to convene a village meeting for electing village military-revolutionary committees consisting of three members. Under the regulation, the revolutionary committee had to form village self defence comprising all people able to carry arms to provide protection from rowdiness and robbery [18, fol. 43].

Revolutionary committees, first of all provincial and county ones, registered different population strata, primarily those which were socially alien to the new regime or potentially politically unreliable [19, fol. 14].

The important component of the Soviet regime establishment process was managing revolutionary committees' staff, that can be observed through the example of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's law department that resumed its activity on 16 December 1919 based on the Regulation on provincial, county and city executive committees' law departments, ratified by the Decree of the UkSSR Council of People's Commissars on 20 February 1919. Its first measures were forming its own subdivisions [20, fol. 22]. By late January 1920 the judicial subdivision of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's law department had managed to some extent to organize province courts functioning. One of the first measures of the judicial subdivision in terms of, as it was stated in reports, resuming "judicial power" was providing clarifications concerning elected in early 1919 people's judges who had to enter upon their duties after being confirmed in office by county revolutionary committees [20, fol. 8]. Control and investigation subdivision was responsible for instructing both people's investigators' and revolutionary tribunal investigators' actions as well as supervising their actions [20, fol. 22 v. – 23].

During the first month of its functioning the law department of the Poltava Provincial Revolutionary

Committee managed to resume the activity of Poltava and Poltava county institutions that were under the supervision of the UkSSR People's Commissariat of Justice.

The first meeting of the provincial revolutionary tribunal, which was reorganized into provincial revolutionary military tribunal by the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's resolution in January 1920, was held on 13 January. First and foremost it dealt with the issues of nonfulfillment of Soviet authorities' orders and resolutions, the cases of people who had given away Soviet power devotees to Denikin supporters, had been engaged in robbery, had blackmailed peasants and had done other coercive actions against peasants in the Denikin's time, had agitated against the Soviet power, had committed misdemeanors, had deserted from the army, had been charged with profiteering, racketeering and selling alcohol [20, fol. 26].

Revolutionary committees' holding the so called non-party workers' and peasants' conferences had become an important way of Sovietizing the social and political life of the province. The conferences were convened and organized by special committees which did appropriate preparatory work, in particular, determined conference date and agenda [21, fol. 6]. At such events there were elected different interim workers' and peasants' commissions that assisted revolutionary committees in holding different events.

Resolute anti-Ukrainian sentiment of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee authorities can be proved by the adopted on 25 January 1920 resolution which stated: "Considering the All-Russian Central Executive Committee's resolution on depriving the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission of the right to apply shooting as the highest measure of punishment for counter-revolutionaries rather appropriate and urgent, Poltava Provincial Revolutionary Committee, taking into account different Civil war conditions in Russia and Ukraine, stands for preserving this right for the Ukrainian Extraordinary Commission with regard to bandits and profiteers" [7, fol. 152]. The "bandit" category is known to have included not only criminals but also rebels pursuing political goals. On 4 February, having listened to the law department head's report on Poltava Provincial Extraordinary



Commission's "arrogation" of judicial functions, the Provincial Revolutionary Committee took the decision to preserve for the extraordinary commission the right to pass sentences upon individuals approved of by the commission, and to allow revolutionary committee's head to monitor these sentences. According to the resolution the extraordinary commission had to publish sentences in the "Soviet Power" – the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's and KP(b)U Provincial Party Committee's newspaper. Thus, the Provincial Revolutionary Committee permitted the non-judicial body to execute justice and accepted the responsibility to supervise it [17, fol. 10].

On March 1920 at the Provincial Revolutionary Committee's meeting there was formed a commission, comprising representatives of the Provincial Revolutionary Committee, the Provincial Extraordinary Commission and the Provincial Law Department. Its aim was to assign the provincial prison to the Provincial Extraordinary Commission for forming a forced labour camp within it [17, fol. 31]. In late February 1920 the "Soviet Power" newspaper published a very enthusiastic comment in one of its issues: "... the Provincial Extraordinary Commission has to foster the efforts to demonstrate all bandits and profiteers that the workers' and peasants' regime is not intended to joke. Shooting of dozens or even hundreds of bandits and profiteers is the only way of fighting with this category of people. Crackdown on them will be approved of by all revolutionary workers and peasants" [22, fol. 1].

In order to weed out unreliable civil servants from the Soviets' staff special attestation commissions were formed within provincial and county revolutionary committees. As stated in the attestation commission statute, they were formed to prevent "counter revolutionaries, profiteers and criminals" from getting into the Soviet power bodies and to spread evenly provincial and county revolutionary committees' staff members. The statute was supplemented with "Instruction on recruiting civil servants to Soviet institutions", which prioritized candidates to Soviet power institutions: communists and socialist parties' members, who supported the Soviet power, and by their recommendations: soldiers dismissed from the Red Army, members

of their families, members of trade unions, registered in the trade council. Attestation commissions had to consider thoroughly ("from social-economic and political perspectives") applications and accept resolutions with conclusions on possibility or impossibility of employing applicants in the Soviet institutions. In case of discovering compromising information and discrepancies while questioning individuals the their cases had to be sent to the revolutionary tribunal [23, fol. 3].

**Conclusions.** Thus, Poltava province revolutionary committees' activity aimed at establishing the Soviet regime included, in particular, harassment of non-proletarian strata of population, recruitment of former civil servants and local councils' employees, registration of politically unreliable individuals. The important component of the Soviet regime establishment process was managing revolutionary committees' staff. One of the ways of Sovietizing the social and political life of the province was Revolutionary committees' holding non-party workers' and peasants' conferences.

Generally, province revolutionary committees as non-constitutional temporary extraordinary Soviet authorities turned out to be an effective political instrument of Sovietizing the social and political life of the Poltava province as an administrative unit of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic.

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