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## Projects of the South of Russia's Government on the Development of Urban Self-Government in the White Crimea, October – November 1920

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**Abstract:** The article studies the development of an economic and political-legal basis for the development of urban self-government under General Wrangel's Government of the South of Russia, in the Crimea, in the autumn of 1920. From among the Wrangel government's reforms in the Crimea in 1920, transformations in the sphere of urban life and urban self-government are less well-known than transformations in agrarian policy and the zemstvo reform. But changes in the operation of city dumas and city administrations are no less relevant for Russian historiography. The article considers the specifics of the evolution of municipal law in a situation where it was hoped that the offensive of the Red Army at Perekop could be beaten back. The article notes the importance of changing the legislative framework regarding the expansion of the powers of city self-government not only in the social, political, but also in the economic sphere. First of all, this was manifested in the field of granting the right to impose taxes and fees by city structures. The article discusses the prospects that an increased role of city self-government was supposed to have on economic and political decisions by the Wrangel government. The analysis includes the supposed forms of cooperation between the White power and the public in the 1920s. Special attention is paid to the problems that were considered at a specially convened congress of city self-government in Simferopol, on the eve of the Perekop-Chongar operation. The decisions taken during this congress were supposed to strengthen the financial situation of the Crimea. The article also examines the interaction between the authorities of the Wrangel government and the local population during the military-political crisis of the White Movement in the autumn of 1920.

**Keywords:** White movement, White cause, Civil war, city government, municipal taxation, Union of cities

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## Проекты Правительства Юга России о развитии городского самоуправления в белом Крыму, октябрь – ноябрь 1920 г.

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**Аннотация:** Изучаются особенности формирования экономической и политико-правовой основы развития городского самоуправления в последний период власти Правительства Юга России генерала П.Н. Врангеля в Крыму осенью 1920 г. В контексте проведения реформ врангелевским правительством



в Крыму в 1920 г., преобразования в сфере городской жизни, городского самоуправления менее известны, чем преобразования в аграрной политике и земская реформа. Но преобразования в сфере работы городских дум и городских управ являются не менее актуальными для отечественной историографии. Рассмотрена специфика эволюции муниципального права в условиях предполагаемого дальнейшего существования Белого движения в Крыму, в случае отражения наступления Красной армии на Перекопе. В статье отмечается важность изменения законодательной базы в отношении расширения полномочий городского самоуправления не только в социальной, политической, но и в хозяйственной, экономической сфере. В первую очередь это проявлялось в области предоставления права введения налогов и сборов городскими структурами. Показаны перспективы роста влияния городского самоуправления на принятие экономических и политических решений врангелевского правительства. Дан анализ предполагавшихся форм сотрудничества белой власти и общественности в 1920-х гг. Отдельное внимание в статье уделено проблемам, которые рассматривались на специально созванном съезде городского самоуправления в Симферополе, накануне начала Перекопско-Чонгарской операции. Показана важность решений, которые были приняты во время работы данного съезда на перспективы укрепления финансового положения Крыма. В статье исследованы особенности взаимодействия власти правительства Врангеля и местного населения в период военно-политического кризиса Белого движения осенью 1920 г.

**Ключевые слова:** Белое движение, Белое дело, Гражданская война, городское самоуправление, муниципальное налогообложение, Союз городов

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## Introduction

Recent studies of the White movement in South Russia have drawn attention to strategic and tactical dimensions of military operations and to political and legal aspects of Wrangel's Crimea. Socio-economic problems of White Crimea in 1920 have received less scholarly attention, though works by contemporary Russian and foreign historians characterize various aspects of the political and economic situation of the White Crimea.<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the 2010s, several histories of socio-political relations and state structures in the territories of White governments were published in connection with the anniversary of the revolution and the beginning of the Civil War in Russia.<sup>2</sup> However, until this year's publication by V.V. Cheremukhin, there have been no studies devoted to the political history of the last weeks and even the last days of the life of White Crimea, with an emphasis on the work of the municipal government.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ross, N. *Vrangel v Krymu* (Frankfurt am Main: Possev Publ., 1982); Karpenko, S.V. *Ocherki istorii Belogo dvizheniia na Iuge Rossii 1917–1920 gg.* (Moscow: Ippolitov Publ., 2003); Krym. *Vrangel. 1920 god.* Sbornik statei (Moscow: Sotsial'no-politicheskaya mysl', 2006); Kroner, E. *Belaia armii Chernyy baron. Jizn generala Petra Vrangelia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Kirmel', N.S., and Handorin, V.G. *Karaiushchii mech admirala Kolchaka* (Moscow: Veche Publ., 2015); Ratkovskii, I.S. *Khronika belogo terrora v Rossii. Repressii i samosudy. 1917–1920 gg.* (Moscow: Algoritm Publ., 2017); Zelenkov, M.Yu. "Social'no-politicheskie aspekty porazheniia Dobrovol'cheskogo Belogo dvizheniia v Rossii (1917–1920 gg.)." *Politika i obshchestvo*, no. 1 (2016): 21–32; Oganegov, G.A. Magdalianidu, A., and Semenov A.A. "Rossiiskaia intelligentsyia i 'Beloe delo' v gody grazhdanskoi voiny." In *Problemy tsivilizatsionnogo razvitiia Rossii: kharakter, faktory i puti resheniia. Materialy II Mezhdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii studentov, aspirantov, prepodavatelei. Kubanskii gosudarstvennyj tekhnologicheskii universitet, Armavirskij mekhaniko-tekhnologicheskii institut. 2017* (Armavir: Frmavirskii gosudarstvennyi pedagogicheskii universitet Publ., 2017), 125–127.

<sup>3</sup> Cheremukhin, V.V. "Gorod Kerch' nakanune Krymskoj evakuatsii 1920g. (po materialam regional'noi pressy)." In *Kliuchevskie chteniia – 2020. Materialy Mezhdunarodnoi nauchnoi konferentsii molodykh uchennykh* (Moscow: Sputnik+ Publ., 2021), 358–362.

Interest in the military history of the Red Army's Perekop-Chongar operation has been intense since the early 1920s.<sup>4</sup> By contrast, the condition of the White rear in October – early November 1920 has scarcely been discussed. Yet the condition of the rear can give the best idea of Crimea's possible prospects for independent development, as a putative “island of Crimea” (after the title of the famous novel by V. Aksenov). In any consideration of this prospect, the condition of local government is crucial, since it was local government on which the stability of the entire regime depended. This regime was established in the territory occupied by the Russian Army (hereinafter – RA) of Lieutenant General P.N. Wrangel and was under the control of the South Russian Government (hereinafter – SRG).

### Local Government: a New Pillar of the White Movement

In the summer and autumn of 1920, the Wrangel government actively carried out reforms in the agrarian sphere and in the area of zemstvo government. The formal transfer of the former landlords' land “into the possession of those who cultivate it” and the creation of zemstvo institutions at the grassroots level required the involvement of the local population in the implementation of land and zemstvo reforms. This affected well-to-do peasant landowners first of all: they who the ones who were supposed to dominate the volost land councils and the volost zemstvo. A “bet was placed” on precisely this group in hopes of creating a social milieu loyal to the White cause.<sup>5</sup>

No less significant changes, also aimed at expanding the social base of the White government, were supposed to take place in municipalities. Some of these transformations had already begun to be implemented, but changes on a much larger scale were projected for 1921–1925, in the event of the continued existence of the White movement in Crimea. These changes will be discussed below.

The sources on this topic are not very numerous, but they nonetheless afford a relatively complete picture of both the dimensions of the proposed changes and the degree of support for the Wrangel government on the part of the urban public. The relevant sources include memoirs by representatives of the “White rear,” which assess the internal political situation on the eve of the “Crimean catastrophe,”<sup>6</sup> as well as newspapers from Sevastopol and Simferopol and the military press. These newspapers, including *Velikaia Rossiia*,

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<sup>4</sup> *Grazhdanskaya voina i voennaia interventsiiia v SSSR. Entsiklopediia* (Moscow: Sovetskaia entstyklopediia, 1983); Tiulenev, I. *Pervaia konnaia v boiakh za sotsialisticheskuiu Rodinu. Ocherk boevykh deystvii* (Moscow: Voenizat Publ., 1938); Levochkin, A.I. *Geroi kakhovki i Perekopa* (Moscow: DOSAAF Publ., 1958); Korotkov, I.S. *Razгром Vrangelya. Operativno-strategicheskii ocherk* (Moscow: Voenizat Publ., 1955); Kuzmin, N.F. *Krushenie poslednego pokhoda Antanty* (Moscow: Gospolitizdat Publ., 1958); Akulov, M. Petrov, V. *16 noiabria 1920 goda* (Moscow: Molodaya Gvardya Publ., 1989).

<sup>5</sup> *‘Sovershenno lichno i doveritel'no!': B.A. Bakhmetev – V.A. Maklakov. Perepiska, 1919–1951*. Vol. 1 (Moscow; Stenford: ROSSPEN Publ.; Hoover Institution Publ., 2001), 231–232.

<sup>6</sup> Savich, N.V. *Vospominaniia* (St. Petersburg; Dyussel'dorf: Logos Publ.; Goluboi vsadnik Publ., 1993); Nemirovich-Danchenko, G.V. *V Krymu pri Vrangele. Fakty i itogi* (Berlin: [S.n.], 1922); Obolenskii, V.A. *Krym pri Vrangele*. Bk. 9 of *Na chujoi storone* (Berlin; Praga: [S.n.], 1925), 5–56; Rakovskii, G.N. *Konets belykh. Ot Dnepra do Bosfora* (Praga: Volia Rossii Publ., 1921); Chebyshev, N.N. *Blizkaia dal* (Paris: [S.n.], 1933).

*Iug Rossii*, and *Voennyi golos*, published in Sevastopol, or *Krestianskii put'*, published in Simferopol, provide valuable information about the state of the Crimean cities and the politics of the SRG at this time.

### **Municipal Government in Crimea: Changes in Economic Status**

Local government in Crimea exerted considerable influence. Even in 1920, a time when the SRG was urgently trying to implement changes proclaimed by Wrangel in domestic politics, it was impossible to ignore the interests of the city representatives. Wrangel commented on the problems of the Crimean cities and towns in his Order № 179 of October 12, 1920 (all dates are in Old Style, following the official practice of White South Russia. – *author's note*). Summing up the results of the half-year work of the government, he expressed anxiety about “the situation of urban residents.”

The balance between town and village has been disrupted. The situation of the workers requires the most serious understanding and sympathy. The conditions for a cultured urban life have been upset; the high cost of food makes the position of educated employees hardly bearable. A way out must be found – along with general financial and economic measure – through the organization of active self-help, with the broad assistance of the state, which I promise in advance...<sup>7</sup>

It was not by coincidence that Wrangel focused on the socio-cultural and economic situation of the Crimean cities and towns. Back in 1919, A.I. Denikin, his predecessor as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of South Russia, had emphasized the priority of the socio-economic sphere over political demands in the daily life of the cities and towns of South Russia. For example, in his speech at a meeting with the workers of Odessa port workshops, he said:

I understand that workers need to dress, eat and feed their children – this should be the main focus of trade unions. Let the people's representative body, the Constituent Assembly, resolve the urgent state issues...<sup>8</sup>

However, the economic situation of the cities and towns did not improve. Not just words and declarations, but real political measures were required. The general orientation of the Wrangel government was to try to resolve various urgent problems of the rear as quickly as possible, while taking into account its limited territory and resources. In keeping with these priorities, the Wrangel regime adopted a remarkably progressive legislative act with regard to municipal government. The act was approved on October 16 (using the signatory authority for the Commander-in-Chief) by the head of the SRG, the well-known Russian politician A.V. Krivoshein, who had served as Minister of Agriculture under P.A. Stolypin. From October 18 – one week before the start of the battle at Perekop – the detailed “Provisional Directive on Municipal Revenues” was promulgated in Crimean newspapers (the first draft of this regulation had been published as a supplement to № 48 of the SRG's official Journal on September 24, 1920).

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<sup>7</sup> Wrangel, P.N. *Zapiski*. Bk. 2, vol. 6 of *Beloe delo. Letopis beloi borby* (Berlin: Mednyi vsadnik Publ., 1928), 220.

<sup>8</sup> *General Denikin v Odessa* (Odessa: S.n., 1919), 3.

The first two articles of the “Provisional Directive on Municipal Revenues” (hereinafter – “Directive”) contained an extensive list of “sources of municipal revenues.” It consisted of 41 items and included guaranteed “receipts from city capital and other city property, enterprises and rent,” along with “various receipts from the treasury and zemstvos,” and “benefits from the funds of the State Treasury.” Thus, the cities were guaranteed financial support from the state, even as the Directive gave city councils the authority to manage the municipal treasury independently. Thirty six additional, fairly lucrative, sources of revenue were enumerated, including both previously introduced taxes and new taxes applied to property, to commercial and industrial activities, and to the work of transport. They included, among others, an “estimated real estate tax,” a “surtax apart from the state public tax and income tax,” an “apartment tax,” a “special apartment tax paid by landlords,” a “room tax,” a “tax paid by establishments selling luxury goods,” a “tax on industrial and commercial premises,” a “tax on delivery services,” a “haulage tax,” a “cargo tax on goods transported by railways and inland waterways,” a “tax paid for the wintering of ships and barges.”

A separate group of taxes and fees were exacted from the “service sector,” especially in the sphere of entertainment. These included taxes on “restaurant bills” and fees for “advertisements, signs and announcements,” “clubs, card playing, and billiards,” “public shows and amusements.” Taxes applied to specific municipal services were supposed to be very effective: “for the sanitary inspection of meat brought to the city”, “for considering plans for new buildings and for issuing permits for renovation and repair of existing buildings, as well as for the installation of lifts (elevators),” “for the occupation of sidewalks during construction and renovation,” “for the branding of weights and measures,” “for the issuance of various kinds of certificates,” etc. Even animals (“horses and carriages,” “dogs”) were considered as objects of taxation.<sup>9</sup>

The main constituent of the tax base remained real estate, however. Only a small fraction of buildings was not subject to municipal taxes (“property belonging to institutions... serving directly for religious purposes,” buildings of “scientific societies” and “serving for educational, charitable and medical purposes” in the event that they did not bring income, as well as “railway lands”), but, obviously, this slightly reduced the opening financial opportunities of municipalities. Notably, “state buildings... which are occupied by government agencies” were not exempt from the property tax (the amount of which was set depending on the quality and condition of urban real estate), but were obliged to pay “half in comparison with other real estate.” The “reduced tax” was imposed on everything that was associated with nature conservation areas, for example, “gardens and parks,” “front gardens and lawns,” as well as “property of historical importance.”

Another important item of the “Directive” is a tax abatement, in force until 1925, for new construction. Payment of property taxes on “new buildings” was extended by six years. This extension confirms the seriousness of the SRG’s intention to create a durable anti-Bolshevik state in Crimea.

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<sup>9</sup> *Voennyi golos*. October 18, 1920.

The expanded “tax base” of the Crimean cities and towns was further regulated by the “Directive.” For example, a fairly simple but effective process for determining the size of the property tax was introduced.

The basis for assessing property taxes on real estate may be either the value of the real estate or its average net profit. The choice of one or the other basis for property taxes is left to the discretion of the City Council. The decision on "marginal prices for apartments

was adopted proceeding from the legislation of the “Denikin period” (April, 1919). Thus, the municipal government could adjust, at its own discretion, the format of taxation, depending on concrete economic or other conditions.<sup>10</sup>

The “Directive” established the maximum level of the “property tax on real estate” and, despite the fact that the city duma could determine it independently and “uniformly for all property,” it was not to “exceed 30% of the net profit of the property or 2% of its value.” The maximum bracket (30%) of taxation was also introduced for leased land plots. Interestingly, due to the probable difficulty of identifying the exact size of the owner's income, taxes were assessed on the basis of “rental prices for similar property, rented in the same area of the city.” The Duma gained the right (after the approval of the Civil and Financial Directorates of the SRG) to impose separate taxation of land and buildings at “different tax rates.” The concept of “net profit” was defined with a generous view of expenses: property owners could subtract their payments for state taxes, “on management, maintenance, protection and repair of property,” “on payment of land rent,” and “on maintenance and repair of sidewalks, if their owners are in charge of them” from their gross income.

The Directive stipulated that a “general assessment of all real estate in the city” was to take place at least once every five years, and earlier in the event of significant construction of new buildings and demolition of old ones.<sup>11</sup> It also obliged property owners to declare “the composition of the property and the income received from it,” which did not exclude further detailed checks by the municipal authorities. In case of “failure to submit applications or their incompleteness,” the municipal government would initiate criminal proceedings for tax evasion and apply a penalty, set at

not more than 5% of the amount of arrears, for each month of delay, and the period of less than a month of delay was considered a full month.”<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, this practice was aimed not only at regulating the system of municipal taxes, but also at combating speculation and fraud. These were clearly a serious concern, as the SRG and General Wrangel had proclaimed economic crime a high-priority area of domestic policy in White Crimea back in the spring and summer of 1920.<sup>13</sup>

Revenues received in this way went “to the municipal treasury.” It would seem as though a property tax could, to a large extent, solve the problems of municipal budgets.

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<sup>10</sup> *Voennyi golos*, October 18, 1920.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, October 20, 1920.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, October 21, 1920.

<sup>13</sup> *Yug Rossii*, May 28, 1920; *Ibid.*, June 11, 1920.

However, the “Directive” was not confined to this. The city municipality gained the right to introduce additional taxes, both indirect and direct. Thus, for example, “in order to improve certain parts of the city,” it was authorized to introduce a one-time or regular “special tax on real estate located in these parts of the city.” Interestingly, the main criterion for the introduction of this tax was either the total area occupied by a certain real estate object of the territory, or the “length of the facade of the real estate object.”

The municipal government’s very best revenue stream, however, promised to be a new form of taxation, tied to income levels. In the fall of 1920, the Finance Department, headed by Professor M.V. Bernatsky, began to regulate the collection of income tax, proposed as an important means of replenishing the Crimean budget in 1921.<sup>14</sup> In this connection, the municipal government gained the right to establish its own income scale, correlated with the state rates. The “Directive” noted that City Dumas could

establish an additional tax to the state income tax in the amount of not more than 10% of the amount of the state income tax;

and this was done “at the same percentage for all payers of income tax.” This was undoubtedly beneficial for the municipalities, since it not only enabled them to use the state’s information about taxpayers, but also made it possible to apply a simplified scheme of progressive taxation that would guarantee stable revenues.<sup>15</sup>

The procedure established by the “Directive” for collecting the “supplementary municipal tax” is also noteworthy. This tax was to be “calculated by the chair of the precinct” on the basis of the state income tax and collected simultaneously with the state tax. Income tax receipts would then be divided between the state treasury and the municipalities according to the ratio established between the state tax and the supplementary municipal tax. In this manner the local tax apparatus could receive support from the state apparatus, and this was an additional factor contributing to the rapprochement of “the regime and the public.”

The “Directive” also regulated the procedure for collecting the “apartment tax,” which was imposed on “persons residing either in their own houses or in rented ones, or in premises provided to them free of charge.” “Landlords” who “rented out rooms” also paid the tax in an amount “established by the City Duma in a uniform manner”; the maximum amount could not exceed “20% of the annual value of the apartment.” The amount of the tax corresponded to “net profit,” which was calculated on the basis of the “annual gross profit of rented rooms, according to the procedure established by the City Duma,” minus the following expenses: “part of the rent for rented rooms,” “tax on rented rooms” and “on heating and lighting”.

The “apartment tax” supplemented the “property tax on real estate,” but was directed primarily at individuals; and a rather large number of subjects were exempted from it: government, zemstvo and city institutions, hospitals, commercial and industrial establishments, monasteries, workers' hostels and military barracks, lodging houses, educa-

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<sup>14</sup> *Yug Rossii*. October 23, 1920.

<sup>15</sup> *Voennyi golos*. October 21, 1920.

tional homes, educational institutions, as well as premises of diplomatic missions of foreign states.

The city municipality was supposed to take an inventory (updated annually no later than January 7) of rental housing. The “approximate rent” at which the premises were rented out was also to be noted. The “tax” was supposed to be paid in “equal installments” by April 15 and October 15, respectively. It can thus be assumed that by the middle of April 1921, the necessary “inventory” of city property should have been carried out in the White Crimea, and the municipalities should have received the first revenue from the implementation of the adopted “Directive.”

The responsibility for non-payment of the “apartment tax” was purely civil and was defined as “a monetary penalty in the amount of not more than 10 thousand rubles.” In case of deliberate concealment of income from rented apartments and rooms the penalty increased up to 15 thousand. The sums of the fine collected were to be transferred to the city treasury. Judging by the prices at the Crimean market in late 1920, these were not significant sums, but for the city budget they also seemed essential.<sup>16</sup>

A comparison of the tax base introduced by the “Directive” with the previous periods in the history of municipal government is indicative. The maximum tax rate was 10%. However, according to some testimonies, Moscow Duma members, for example, proposed to raise the tax rate homeowners up to 30%.<sup>17</sup> As noted above, this very limit (not more than 30%) was set by Wrangel's “Directive.”

### **Political Activity of the Municipal Governments. Creation of the Union of Crimean Cities**

The Crimean government was also distinguished by vigorous socio-political activity. It was not always and not in everything loyal to the authorities. In the fall of 1920 an unpleasant incident took place, which Wrangel described in his “Notes” as “betrayal,” “vile game,” “ugly story”. According to him, “the opposition from the Sevastopol municipality, headed by the mayor, socialist-revolutionary Perepelkin” directly addressed the representatives of France in Crimea with a note “defaming the South Russian Government,” and containing a number of “partly distorted, partly fictional facts.” Having a copy of the note, at a meeting with a delegation of editors of the Crimean newspapers, the commander-in-chief declared the inadmissibility of such “appeals.” After that, Ya.N. Perepelkin, the head of Sevastopol city government, was forced to declare his resignation, though he claimed that he was motivated, not by political but by “material reasons,” namely a lack of living space (the City Duma did not accept the resignation).<sup>18</sup>

Still, criticism of the authorities was not a characteristic feature of the Crimean municipalities. The White authorities sought to apply not only restrictive measures in relation to the political position of cities. Back in 1919, the Denikin government retained

<sup>16</sup> *Voennyi golos*. October 23, 1920; *Ibid*. October 25, 1920.

<sup>17</sup> “Moskovskoye gorodskoye samoupravleniye,” In vol. 2 of *Istoriya Moskvy s drevneyshikh vremen do nashikh dney*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo ob'yedineniya Mosgorarkhiv, 1997), 281.

<sup>18</sup> Vrangl, P.N. *Zapiski*, 217.



the fundamental provisions of the electoral legislation introduced under the conditions of “revolutionary lawmaking” after February – March 1917, though it adjusted them towards limits on universal voting rights and party representation. According to the memoirs of Prince V.A. Obolensky, the chairman of the Taurida Zemstvo Council,

universal suffrage was retained in the cities, but with a two-year residency qualification and the majoritarian system of elections. Whereas the two-year residency qualification was somewhat vexatious, replacing the proportional election system with a majoritarian one was quite expedient, in my view. Of course, what seemed like an improvement to me might be seen by others as worse than the laws of the Provisional Government, but the changes were modest in any case, and it would be completely unfair to emphasize the reactionary spirit in the legislation on local governments... City Dumas were elected and began to work. The residency qualification meant that Dumas elected on the basis of the new law more or less correctly represented the sedentary population of the Crimean cities in terms of political and ethnic composition. Sevastopol retained its socialist Duma; a right-wing majority won in Yalta. Elsewhere victory went either to various progressive-democratic groupings or ill-defined populist groupings that still had a progressive tilt.<sup>19</sup>

In 1920, Krivoshein, with the full consent of Wrangel, supported the local initiatives to intensify the political activity of the Crimean municipalities. In September, S.D. Tverskoy, the head of the SRG Civil Department, reviewed a draft to change the electoral system by dividing all Crimean cities (regardless of the number of residents) into constituencies. A candidate for deputy would not be prohibited from participating in elections “in any constituency.”<sup>20</sup> Particular attention was paid to the creation of new representative structures designed to forge an alliance between “power and society.” With the deteriorating situation at the front, these mutual relations were supposed to strengthen the position in the rear.

One such structure was supposed to be the Union of Crimean Cities. The All-Russian Union of Cities was in operation in Crimea and enjoyed widespread fame and public recognition from the pre-revolutionary period, but the regional union had yet to achieve such authority. The Crimean Union rested on informal meetings of city leaders who appealed to the authorities on various issues. It wasn't until the eve of the “Crimean evacuation,” on October 26, 1920, however, that the congress of the Crimean cities began to work in the provincial capital, Simferopol. The officially published agenda read:

...1) the organization of the Crimean Congress of cities and the election of the executive body of the union (of Crimean cities. – *author's note*), 2) the financial situation of the cities, 3) the food supply question and 4) current affairs...

V.A. Obolensky became the chairman of the congress.<sup>21</sup>

Although pressing current issues clearly predominated in the agenda, the question of the Crimean government's economic prospects was not insignificant. The “Directive” (see above), which had been adopted the previous day and which established procedures for the collection of city taxes and fees, provided the essential basis for municipal budgetary independence and at least a modicum of financial stability.

<sup>19</sup> Obolenskii, V.A. *Krym pri Denikine*. Bk. 8 of *Na chujoi storone* (Berlin; Praga: [S.n.], 1924), 20.

<sup>20</sup> *Velikaia Rossia*. September 25, 1920; *Voennyi golos*. September 26, 1920.

<sup>21</sup> *Voennyi golos*. October 16, 1920.

Information about the work of the all-Crimean city congress, which took place during the battles at Perekop and Chongar, is scarce. Newspapers succeeded in publishing only a fraction of the materials. Daily papers naturally paid more attention to official orders and reports on the situation at the front. One source that has survived is an “unfinished diary” by P.S. Bobrovsky, a member of the Simferopol City Duma. Small in volume, it was published in the magazine *Na chuzhoi storone* in Berlin, in 1924, with the title “Crimean evacuation” and only the initials P.B. in place of the author’s name. It summarized the course of the meetings and gave an assessment of the main results of the congress. Its work lasted four days and ended late in the evening on 28 October. At that time, the Red Army units had already broken through the main lines of the fortifications at Yushun and were preparing to cross the Sivash at Chongar. Obviously, the sessions could have continued, if it not for the sudden (and to many delegates, unexpected) “Crimean evacuation.”

Bobrovsky himself represented the interests of the City Duma of the provincial capital but was also the chairman of the Simferopol Social Democratic group “Unity.” His characterization of public opinion in Crimea on the eve of the evacuation thus reflected not only the view of an elected official but also that of the Center Left toward the policy of the Wrangel government. According to his notes, the congress of the Crimean cities

was planned a few months ago. It was initiated by N.S. (N.S. Arbuzov was a comrade of the Simferopol mayor, a popular socialist by his political convictions). The purpose of the congress was to create the Union of Crimean Cities to resolve a number of pressing issues of the city life, mainly financial and food issues. The Union was also needed as a liaison with the government, which took on an unnaturally large role and significance in the life of the Crimean municipalities. Its leaders, N.S. and I, didn't set any political goals for the congress. However, when it turned out that the congress would meet at such an exceptional moment, it became clear that it could not fail to address the political situation that had arisen.

The congress opened on November 8 (New Style. – *author's note*). It was fairly well attended. There were representatives of almost all thirteen Crimean cities; there were representatives of the provincial zemstvo and random guests (representatives of the old organization of the All-Russian Union of Cities who came from Sevastopol).

Somewhat unexpectedly, the main issue of the congress turned out to be the issue of a foreign municipal loan. N.S. came up with the idea of a loan. I wholeheartedly assented. It boiled down to the following.

Cities have colossal assets that are indestructible under any political system. Foreign banks give money on the basis of these assets. Cities may use this money to open their own industries – mills, factories, etc. Thus, on the one hand, the financial situation of cities improves, and on the other hand, the food supply problems are more easily resolved. At the same time, if France and America (we mostly had in mind these countries) had agreed to this, they would have provided very powerful aid to the anti-Bolshevik Crimea.

This issue was destined to become the linchpin of the congress, both because of its substance and because of the unexpected arrival of V.L. Burtsev from Paris. Burtsev immediately jumped at this idea. I don't know how feasible it seemed to him but it undoubtedly gave him a new weapon in his overseas agitation. The appearance of Burtsev lifted participants' spirits. Political speeches rang out. The text of the appeal “To the citizens of France and North America” was adopted. The congress resolved to enter into negotiations with the Parisian banks through the representative of the French government to the Wrangel government...<sup>22</sup>

It is no coincidence that Bobrovsky mentioned Burtsev as an active participant in the congress. Having arrived from Paris, Burtsev was the editor of the émigré newspaper

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<sup>22</sup> P.B. “Krymskaia evakuatsiia (Neokonchennyi dnevnik),” in book 11 of *Na chuzhoi storone* (Praga; Berlin: Plamia Publ., 1925), 175–176.

“La Cause Commune” (Common Cause) and a well-known “fighter against provocateurs” in the past. He made a vivid statement to the Crimean press, which quoted him as saying:

We must convince the whole world that no compromise is possible with the Bolsheviks – that a merciless war must be declared against them. Until Bolshevism is crushed in Russia, there will be no peace either in Europe or in America...<sup>23</sup>

The “financial situation of the cities” naturally became the “linchpin of the congress.” From the start of autumn 1920, when France gave *de jure* recognition to the Wrangel government, this question was logically included in the general financial and political program of the SRG. Obtaining a loan from French banks became an extremely urgent task for the SRG, since a loan would help strengthen the ruble and stabilize a budget that had been sapped by military and administrative expenditures.<sup>24</sup> In this context, the “Directive” published during the session of the congress was critical. Whereas purely emotional appeals to French financiers on grounds of “Allied duty” were unlikely to yield the desired result, similar statements underwritten by Crimean municipal assets, including urban, resort, and sanatorium real estate, might be perceived in Paris quite differently. The “Directive” provided the Crimean municipalities with stable and indeed substantial receipts. Moreover, alongside revenue from taxes, in the near future the cities were to gain the right to collect taxes “in kind,” i.e. in grain or other agricultural products that were in demand on the market instead of rubles.<sup>25</sup>

**“Earlier... we considered it our duty to criticize the authorities.  
Now this seemed inappropriate”<sup>26</sup>**

The representatives of municipal government declared their support for the SRG. The resolution adopted by the Congress linked socio-economic and military-political aspects:

The Bolsheviks are not only our enemies, they are enemies of the entire civilized world. Crimea must resist and save Russia from the Bolshevik yoke... It is no secret to anyone that our weakness lies in the economic situation of Crimea, and we, representatives of the Crimean cities, elected by universal suffrage, know this better than anyone. Meanwhile this is the only corner in all immense Russia where Russian state authority and culture still exist; where public forces are alive and functioning in elected governments, which are the basis of the future Russian democratic state. Rural and municipal governments still exist, but their work is being destroyed day after day under the pressure of difficult financial and economic conditions. Citizens of France and America! Hear our voice, the voice of the people’s representatives. Provide material support to the Crimean cities, on which lies infinitely important task of combating economic devastation in the rear of the army fighting against the Bolsheviks; help meet the basic needs of the population and save our culture.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *Yug Rossii*. October 28, 1920.

<sup>24</sup> For more details on the financial policy of the Wrangel government in October-November 1920 see: Tsvetkov, V.J., Tsvetkova, E.A. “Professor M.V Bernatsky and his financial policy under the conditions of the Revolution and the Civil War,” *Novyj Istoriceskij Vestnik* 68, no. 2 (2021): 50–75.

<sup>25</sup> *Kresianskii put’*. October 29, 1920.

<sup>26</sup> P.B. *Krymskaiia evakuatsiia*, 174–175.

<sup>27</sup> *Posledniye dni Kryma (vpechatleniya, fakty i dokumenty)* (Constantinople: Pressa Publ., 1920), 8–10.

Municipal “public figures” sincerely supported the White government in its tragic situation. Bobrovsky wrote:

...Wrangel's army retreated to Perekop. Crimea was again left alone; once again it was transformed into a besieged fortress. Everywhere fear is growing that this time the Bolsheviks, having freed their forces from the Polish front, will seize Crimea. I have this fear and so do my friends. Still, we hope that the army will resist and defend Crimea. After all, it defended Crimea last winter. True, at that time the Bolsheviks were weak. Their main forces were on the Polish front. But our army was also negligible at that time. Wrangel's personality as a military leader has inspired complete confidence. We have repeatedly heard his words about the inaccessibility of Crimea. What we feared most was something different: that Crimea would not withstand the siege in terms of food supplies. The future looked extremely alarming in any case. Anything could happen. And we were well aware of this.

All the same neither I nor my friends considered it necessary and possible to reorient our behavior. This was not short-sightedness, as some people later accused. No. Our behavior was based on the complete unacceptability of Soviet power. In the ongoing civil war, we were consciously on the side of the “Whites.” Given that fact, we were obliged, as political and public figures, to fight to the end against the Soviet regime and support the army that was waging this struggle. We were not only obliged to do so, but could not have done otherwise.

We were all well aware of the glaring shortcomings of this army and its government. The first to protest against the wrong, often ruinous, steps of the Wrangel government and against its excesses of power was the Simferopol City Duma, and within it, I myself was among the first to speak out. But our protest, no matter how forceful, always remained a friendly protest. Social Democrat and Socialist Revolutionary malice was utterly absent. With such an attitude to the ongoing struggle, the critical situation in which Crimea found itself only strengthened us in our political position. War is war and it always presupposes the possibility of defeat. We saw this possibility, too. But he who believes in the righteousness of his cause cannot betray it out of fear of defeat. On the contrary, he must redouble his efforts. This is what we did. The danger hanging over Crimea forced us to rally more tightly around the army and its leader.

Earlier, in the period of relative security, we considered it our duty to criticize the authorities. Now this seemed inappropriate. As in a besieged fortress, there remained only two pressing concerns: the army and bread. Everything else receded into the background. This was the mood I was in when – in the first half of November – the city congress convened...<sup>28</sup>

Similar assessments appear in the memoirs by G.V. Nemirovich-Danchenko, a relative of the famous theater director who headed the Press Department of the SRG. Commenting on the people who were evacuated from Crimea with Wrangel's army, he wrote:

These people, who had lost their minds and were burdened with children and belongings, resembled fugitives before the approach of a natural disaster, rather than the defeated capitalists... The sight is very instructive for those who, rejecting the Bolsheviks, seek to explain the failure of the Whites by the hostility of the so-called democrats toward them (obviously, this meant the position of P.N. Milyukov and the Parisian newspaper “Latest News” edited by him. – *author's note*). If these stubborn people could observe the civil war in Russia not from Paris or Berlin, but directly, they would be convinced that not only “democrats,” but even the “lumpen-proletariat,” to which 50% of the Crimean refugees belonged, sought to join the Russian army retreating to the sea. These ragged, hungry and dirty people were democrats, albeit not typical democrats, by virtue of just one quality: that having lost everything, they still retained their pride and did not know how to “submit to violence”, as a good democratic tone dictates... No matter how great the mistakes of the South Russian Government, which led the Russian army to an inglorious exit, the spectacle of 146,000 Russian people abandoning its last refuge in just two days, along with the Russian army, testifies to the fact that broad strata of the population understood everything and forgave its leaders for everything...<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> P.B. *Krymskaiia evakuatsiia*, 174–175.

<sup>29</sup> Nemirovich-Danchenko, G.V. *V Krymu pri Vrangele*, 99–100.

## Conclusions

This article has shown that the economic foundations of municipal life had changed by 1920. For the Russian municipal governments, revenues from property taxes assessed on real estate and rental income seemed to guarantee an increasing in funds. However, given the experience of municipalities in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the revenue received from city enterprises seemed to be still more promising. City transport, utilities, urban credit organizations, plants and factories, cooperatives – all these sources could provide much more revenue than tax sources. In the conditions of the Civil War, the economic crisis, and significant deterioration of the urban economy, however, it was impossible to count on a rapid increase in revenue from these sources. Taxable property, by contrast, always remained within the city boundaries and its value could grow in proportion to the increase in demand and the narrowing of supply. The control of this source of revenue in the “Directive” testified to the significant interest of the SRG in cooperation with cities.

Another possible source of revenues was connected to the specific character of Crimea. Even in the conditions of the ongoing Civil War, it was possible to imagine Crimea as a possible site of development involving international cooperation, joint ventures and internationally financed resort structures. These prospects were quite real, in light of the legal recognition of the Wrangel government by France and France’s interest in the economic development of the Crimean infrastructure. The development of international trade and services, the creation of joint ventures could have compensated for the weakness of Crimea’s own economic base, especially in coastal cities.

Politically, in October – November 1920, the objective preconditions for closer interaction between the power structures and the public existed in White Crimea. The creation of the Union of Crimean Cities, with the direct support of the government, provided more durable relations between the front and the rear. It opened up prospects for the evolution of anti-Bolshevik resistance in South Russia. This would have required the defensive lines at Perekop and Chongar to hold, but that was by no means excluded by the military and political leadership of the White South.

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