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Boris Sinani: 246 Days in the Life of a Participant in Revolutionary Events in Russia in 1917

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Abstract: From the example of Russian officer Boris Semenovich Sinani's fate, the authors have attempted to reconstruct the events of the first days of the February Revolution, including certain aspects of the work of the "military headquarters of the revolution" – the Military Commission, as well as the reasons for the creation and nature of the functioning of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army. Through their research, the authors have revealed the complexity of the relationship between the Provisional Committee of the State Duma and the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, as well as the attitude of the Russian officers to the revolutionary changes in the country. The authors note that the name Sinani was taken as a pseudonym by Georgy Borisovich Skalov, another participant in the revolution and the Civil War, and this choice played a tragic role in the fate of the latter. The study is based on the analysis of the documents of the Union of Socialists of the People's Army stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation, memoirs, and their comparison with published scientific works. The authors have also attempted to reconstruct the main lines of interaction and contradictions between officer groups during the Great October Socialist Revolution.

Keywords: military anthropology, historical biography, February Revolution, officers, Russian Imperial Army, Petrograd

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Борис Синани: 246 дней из жизни офицера – участника революционных событий 1917 г. в России


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Аннотация: На примере судьбы русского офицера Бориса Семеновича Синани в исследовании реконструируются события первых дней Февральской революции, отдельные аспекты работы «военного штаба революции» – Военной комиссии, причины создания и характер функционирования Союза офицеров-республиканцев Народной армии. Выявляются сложности взаимоотношений Временного комитета государственной думы и Советов рабочих и солдатских депутатов, раскрывается отношение русского офицерства к революционным переменам в стране.

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Авторы отмечают, что фамилия Синани была взята в качестве псевдонима Георгием Борисовичем Скаловым – другим участником революции и Гражданской войны, и этот выбор сыграл трагическую роль в судьбе последнего. Исследование основано на анализе документов Союза социалистов народной армии, хранящихся в Государственном архиве Российской Федерации, мемуарной литературы и их сопоставлении с опубликованными научными работами. Авторы реконструировали основные линии взаимодействия и противоречий офицерских группировок во время Великой российской революции.

Ключевые слова: военная антропология, историческая биография, Февральская революция, офицерство, Русская императорская армия, Петроград

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Introduction

The events of the Great October Socialist Revolution have been carefully studied in Russian historiography. When describing the first days of the revolution, Soviet historians obviously exaggerated the role of the Bolsheviks to the detriment of the analysis of other political forces' activities¹ during revolutionary events. Considerable attention has also been paid to the figures in the forefront who came to power on the crest of the revolutionary wave, namely the leaders of the State Duma, the Provisional Government, the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. Whereas the role of the participants in the first days of the revolution or the “officers of February 27” who ensured the transfer of power to the Provisional Committee of the State Duma and then to the Provisional Government have largely remained in the background. The exception is the monograph of A.B. Nikolayev (which chronicles of the first days of the revolution, including the establishment and beginning of the activity of the Duma and shows the Soviets of the Military Commission was created by joint efforts)² as well as the work of V.L. Kozhevnikov, which were dedicated to the role of officers in the events of the February Revolution³. But even in these studies, it has not been covered another important aspect of the Revolution: the creation of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army as a military-political force aimed to consolidate the revolutionary gains and to support the Provisional Government and the Soviets. The purpose of the article is to eliminate this gap by exploring the history of a “little man” (in this case, an officer) in the context of political transformations caused by the Russian Revolution.

In the study there is used a set of methods adopted in historical science: documentary and system analysis which allows reconstructing the main lines of interaction and contradictions between the groups of officers during the Great October Socialist Revolution. These methods contributed to a critical examination of the source base of the article, which have included documents from the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army, which, when combined with information from the Union's newspaper “Narodnaia Armia [People's Army]” and the memoirs of the participants in the February Revolution, make it possible to identify the main stages and features of the formation of the organiza-

¹ I.I. Mints, *Sverzheniie samoderzhavii* [The overthrow of the autocracy], vol. 1 of *Istoriia Velikogo Okriabria* [History of the Great October Revolution] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1977); V.I. Startsev, *27 fevralia 1917* [February 27, 1917] (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia Publ., 1967); E.N. Burdzhakov, *Russia's Second Revolution. The February 1917 Uprising in Petrograd* (Indiana University Press, 1987).

² A.B. Nikolaev, *Dumskaiia revoliutsiia 27 fevralia – 3 marta 1917 goda* [Duma revolution February 27 – March 3, 1917], 2 vols (St. Petersburg: RGPU im. A.I. Gertsena Publ., 2017).

³ V.L. Kozhevnikov, *Rossiiskoe ofitserstvo i Fevral'skii revoliutsionnyi vzryv* [Russian officers and the February revolutionary explosion] (Omsk: OmGu Publ., 2011).

tion, to see the essence of political relations in the period of dual power, and to show the aspects of the history of the revolution that were practically not considered earlier in historiography.

Pseudonym – Sinani. Georgy Skalov's Russian roulette

The interweaving of human destinies in history it is often so bizarre that it may seem to be fiction. A vivid example of this is the biography of Vladimir Ulyanov-Lenin. Could one imagine that Jozef Pilsudski, who was sentenced to death at the trial of the Second Narodnaia volia [People's Will] along with Alexander Ulyanov, but pardoned by Alexander III, would lead the independent Polish state and the army that won the Soviet-Polish war? No less bizarre is the clash in 1917 between the sons of director of the Simbirsk gymnasium F.M. Kerensky and director of public schools of the province I.N. Ulyanov – prime minister of the Provisional Government of Alexander Kerensky and Vladimir Lenin, who replaced him at the head of the Russian state. While they could not be friends, as the age gap was too big, the fact that they knew about each other in childhood is undeniable.

The combination of surnames “Skalov-Sinani” has found its due place in literature⁴. Whereas after the publication of a detailed biography of Georgy Borisovich Skalov⁵ there was confusion, specialists in the history of the relationship between the Comintern and the Chinese Revolution, well as the Latin American communist movement were aware that Sinani was a pseudonym. However, in the books and articles about the 1917 Revolution, one can encounter confusion between when the names of two active figures, as the actions of Georgy Skalov are attributed to the actions of Boris Sinani⁶.

Soviet advisers sent to China in the 1920s were guided by different considerations when choosing a pseudonym. Sometimes it was done on the spur of the moment. Chief military adviser V.K. Blyukher, for example, offered the combination of the names of his wife and children: Zoy Vsevolodovich Galin⁷. Journalists and intelligence officers later tried discover who General Galin was.

But why did G.B. Skalov, the head of the Khivan Revolution sent to China and a participant in the suppression of the Kronstadt rebellion, play “Russian roulette” when choosing a pseudonym? Afterwards this pseudonym would in the future would be blamed on him, as it was supposed to have originated by choosing the Latin name of the country and prompted him to appear as thoughtless by transferring Chinese practices to Latin America⁸. During the trial, party comrades could not differentiate for a long time between Skalov and Sinani. At the so-called Kremlin trial (1935), Skalov-Sinani had to answer for the “sins” (genuine or mythical) of both. It seems to us that another explanation is more probable: a fatal role in the choice was played by the memories of the events of 1917, when he uncompromisingly defended the Provisional Government and the Constituent Assembly.

⁴ B.I. Koval', *Tragicheskaiia geroika XX veka. Sud'ba Luisa Karlosa Prestesa* [Tragic heroism of the XX century. The fate of Luis Carlos Prestes] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2005), 139–153.

⁵ V.L. Jeifets, and L.S. Jeifets, “Krasnyi karandash sud'by. Dve zhizni Georgiya Borisovicha Skalova [Red pencil of fate. Two lives of Georgy Borisovich Skalov],” *Latinskaiia Amerika*, 4 (1998): 84–92.

⁶ K. Tarasov, *Soldatskii bol'shevizm. Voennaia organizatsiia bol'shevikov i levoradikal'noe dvizhenie v petrogradskom garnizone (fevral' 1917 g. – mart 1918 g.)* [Soldier Bolshevism. Military organization of the Bolsheviks and the radical left movement in the Petrograd garrison (February 1917 – March 1918)] (St. Petersburg: Izdatel'stvo Evropeiskogo universiteta v St. Petersburg Publ., 2017), 211.

⁷ N. Velikanov, *Izmena marshalov* [Marshals' treason] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom Algoritm Publ., 2008), 36.

⁸ B.I. Koval', *Revoliutsionnyi opyt XX veka* [Revolutionary experience of the XX century] (Moscow: Mysl' Publ., 1987), 197.

Mensheviks Sinani and Skalov, who were engaged in military work, and could not but cross paths in the conditions of settling the crises that occurred in those turbulent months. Thus, on July 4, the Bureau of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies expanded the number of its members by adding comrades (including G.B. Skalov) who “enjoyed full confidence” of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee, but who were not its members (among whom was B.S. Sinani). They were instructed to “take all measures” both to “eliminate the July advance, and to resist the rallying of the counter-revolutionaries.”⁹ Both of them were close to the “revolutionary Olympus,” but did not rise to its top. But whereas graduate of the Second Kazan school of ensigns, nobleman G.B. Skalov joined the revolution after being elected to the regimental committee and the Petrograd Soviet, Karaite B.S. Sinani¹⁰, “young, short-haired and clean-shaven, like an artist, an ensign with swarthy, hot eyes,” was a “first hour” revolutionary.

Formation of the revolution headquarters in the Tauride Palace

Ensign Boris Semenovich Sinani belonged to the generation of “officers of February 27,” whose representatives at the most critical moments found themselves in the center of the tumultuous events of 1917 as defenders of the gains of the February Revolution.

On February 27, in rooms 41 and 42 of the Tauride Palace, the ensigns, lieutenants, staff captains who were anti-monarchists and that had gathered there were intoxicated with the air of freedom; together with the members of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and the State Duma, they took responsibility for the fate of the revolution handling daily affairs, on which much depended in those tumultuous times. As Menshevik Nikolai Sukhanov, a participant in the February events, wrote, this was an attempt by the Provisional Executive Committee of Soviets to create a “military headquarters of the revolution” from “several officers known to be democrats” called in by telephone¹¹. Socialist revolutionary S.D. Mstislavsky indicated N.D. Sokolov as the initiator of the commission creation:

<...> there gathered delegates from the rebel regiments, we must be organized, we must act. <...> Young, joyfully excited people <...>. Among the officers who came to the palace, there is not a single “local” person: all of them are front-line soldiers who arrived in St. Petersburg on vacation or on a business trip. Therefore, they have no connection with the regiments. However, with their help, there appear formations¹².

Both participants in the events agree on one thing – in the Tauride Palace there was the “military headquarters of the revolution,” which played an extremely important role in the first days of February.

The duties of the chairman of the Military Commission of the Provisional Committee of the State Duma were assumed by Socialist revolutionary Vasily Filippovsky, a member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, a senior lieutenant of the fleet. Menshevik Boris Sinani acted as head of the automotive department from Feb-

⁹ V.A. Kolerov, ed. *Kornilovskie dni. Byulleteni Vremennogo Voennogo Komiteta pri TS. Isp. Kom. S.R. i S.D. s 28 avg. po 4 sent. 1917 g.* [Kornilov days. Bulletins of the Provisional Military Committee under the Central Executive Committee of S.R. and S.D. from August 28 to September 4, 1917] (Petrograd: [N.s.], 1917), 3–4.

¹⁰ “Born in 1886,” in *Russian socialists and anarchists after October 1917*, March 8, 2022, <http://socialist.memo.ru/lists/slovník/118.htm>.

¹¹ N.N. Suhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii* [Notes on the Revolution], vol. 1 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury Publ., 1991), 76–77.

¹² S. Mstislavsky, *Piat' dnei. Nachalo i konets Fevral'skoi revoliutsii* [Five days. Beginning and end of the February Revolution] (Berlin; Petersburg; Moscow: Ozdatel'stvo Z.I. Grzhebina Publ., 1922).

ruary 28 to March 1. What was important was not the title of the position, but what was done and how it was done, how it influenced the course of events, and what results it led to. On February 28, B.S. Sinani went to the barracks of the Preobrazhensky Regiment and succeeded in joining its Reserve Battalion to the Volynians who rebelled on February 27¹³.

The nature and conditions of the Committee's work are described in several sources. N.N. Sukhanov saw the following picture in room 41:

there is again a crowd, stuffiness, and what seemed to be even greater confusion. <...> Everyone is awfully tired, and most of them have already ceased to do anything. Only the most active group, which had entered the work from the very beginning, was conscious of the role it had taken upon itself, their nerves in the next few days were taut. <...> Its enormous *moral* (italics is ours. – V.J., L.J.) significance was indisputable, and subjectively these people undoubtedly rose to the occasion¹⁴.

V.I. Charnolusky, another witness of these events, characterizes the actions of the Military Commission in the following way:

How people had to work in these positions can be judged at least by the example of Comrade Sinani ...His work was continuous and terribly intense, he performed it without a break for a whole day and when they came to replace him, he could hardly get off his chair¹⁵.

Without the “technical work” which N.N. Sukhanov mentions somewhat condescendingly, there would have been no success. They issued passes, organized the protection of wine warehouses, and guided the actions of the military units that joined the revolution. This is what made it possible to organize the armed forces of the revolution in Petrograd and consolidate the gains of its first hours.

The “Officers of February 27” led many of these units to the Tauride Palace, but almost none of them remained in their positions. The activity of the “revolution headquarters” did not suit the Duma leaders. They couldn't let hitherto unknown ensigns take the lead¹⁶. S.D. Mstislavsky recalled that M.V. Rodzianko who came to room 42:

<...> scornfully looking at the ensigns of the “headquarters,” announced the acceptance by the Provisional Committee of the State Duma of responsibility for “restoring order in the city” and the appointment of member of the State Duma, Colonel Engelhardt, as the commandant of Petrograd. <...> Sokolov intervened sharply: “We should leave it to those who have been working here from the first minute of the uprising to decide for themselves who what and whom will command ... Here we need not “appointees” from the “High Assembly”, but revolutionaries. <...> It is absolutely unacceptable that the Petrograd Soviet, which is currently the only real force <...>, should be completely removed from the headquarters that it created and its task. <...> But Rodzianko, still scornfully grimacing, struck his hand on the table: “No, gentlemen, if you forced us to get involved in this matter, then you should obey.”¹⁷

The Duma appointees resolutely set about curbing the revolutionary wave. Mstislavsky recalls:

I went out into the corridor. At the wall, there stood one of the comrades, being deep in thought, who had been at the headquarters of the uprising from the first hours: he was in charge of our automotive department. (This refers to B.S. Sinani. – V.J., L.J.) – “What are you doing here?” – “What should I do? I am dismissed <...>. I shouldn't have gone home in the afternoon: I left just for an hour.

¹³ A.B. Nikolaev, *Gosudarstvennaia Duma v fevral'skoi revoliutsii: ocherki istorii* [The State Duma in the February Revolution: Essays on History] (Private editor: P. A. Tribunskii Publ., 2002), 283; S.A. Polyakov, “Officers of the Life Guards of the Semenovskiy Regiment in the Russian Socio-Political Conditions of 1917 – September 1918,” PhD diss., Oryol University, 2015, 55.

¹⁴ N.N. Suhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii*, 101.

¹⁵ V.I. Charnolusky, *Ten years ago (Memories [in 1927] of the first moments of the February Revolution)*, March 8, 2022, http://biblio.narod.ru/gyrnal/publicat/fevr_17_tharn.htm

¹⁶ N.N. Suhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii*, 76–77.

¹⁷ S. Mstislavsky, *Piat' dnei*.

I came back, found the whole company (he pointed to room 41) already assembled. And I see that some stumpy man is sitting at my table <...> I see that in front of him is my book of job cards. I tell him: “Let me take a seat.” And he says “What for?” <...> I ask if this is the automotive department”. He gives a positive answer. “Well, I am in charge of the automotive department, here are my folders <...>” “Oh, he says, these are your folders. Very good. Let me express my sincere gratitude to the “Military Commission.” And he tries to shake my hand. And then he says in a different tone: “We no longer need your services <...> “Where are the others?” “God only knows. Filippovsky and two or three others are in the Soviet, about a dozen work with cars. I think the rest were dismissed ...They were ill-suited. The Military Commission of the State Duma moved to the second floor of the Tauride Palace, apparently wishing “even territorially to dissociate itself from the” rebellious headquarters”: as rooms 41 and 42 were reminiscent of the February nights¹⁸.

Activities of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army

The “officers of February 27” were not going to turn into cogs in the bureaucratic machine of the new government and felt the need for urgent self-organization. In his report on March 5 B.C. Sinani noted: “The hostile forces <...> will try to finish us off one by one.”¹⁹ In the hall there were speeches about the “Great and bloodless” revolution, which was “strong with the resurrected spirit of the sacred popular uprising” and that originated “from the Decembrist officers.”²⁰ They clearly felt like Pestel and Ryleyev by defeating tsarism.

Socialist revolutionary V.N. Filippovsky proposed a unifying idea: socialism, from which, with the victory of the revolution, would allow “broad prospects to open up <...> which stand on the old banner of the battle-tested party of socialist revolutionaries.”²¹ B.S. Sinani insisted on organizing a socialist union of officers contacting exclusively with the Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies. In response to the puzzling question: “Are we against the Provisional Government?” he reassured “modestly lowering his eyes”:

Since it is formed in agreement with the Soviet, we <...> will support it. <...> As Comrade Filippovsky said our main slogan is socialism!²²

B.S. Sinani adamantly objected to the entry of Socialist Revolutionary Alexander Kerensky into the Provisional Government:

A bourgeois revolution must be conducted only by a homogeneous bourgeois government. We, socialists, risk only getting both our hands and our reputation dirty if we do it²³.

Opinions of the delegates were divided. A.I. Tarasov-Rodionov, the only Bolshevik in the ranks of the “officers of February 27,” said that socialist officers were already fighting for socialism in the ranks of their parties, and that nonpartisan socialism was a “chimera.” He suggested that the revolutionary officers organize themselves for the sake of a democratic republic²⁴. Despite the objections of V.N. Filippovsky and B.S. Sinani, the majority voted for the establishment of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army (hereinafter – the Union, UROPA), through abandoning the word “socialism” in the title. It was the “officers of the revolution of February 27” that were declared “founding members.”²⁵

¹⁸ S. Mstislavsky, *Piat' dnei*.

¹⁹ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *Tiazhelye shagi. Fevral'. Roman-khronika* [Heavy steps. February. Chronicle novel] (Moscow; Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Publ., 1928).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., 328–329.

²⁴ Ibid., 375–378.

²⁵ “Tasks of the Union of Republican Officers,” in *Narodnaia Armiia*, March 7, 1917, 3.

The Union proclaimed the establishment of the democratic republic as its goal: “the voice of the upcoming Constituent Assembly should be free and powerful,”²⁶ and its immediate tasks were to protect freedoms from all sorts of encroachments, and to organize the army on a democratic basis. The immediate measures for their implementation were: the creation of a people's guard, courts of conciliation in units to resolve misunderstandings between officers and soldiers, and the publishing of their own newspaper, etc.²⁷

The founders of the Union particularly emphasized their firm faith in success based on joint work with the soldiers, their trust of fellow soldiers in all undertakings of UROPA, and that their work was carried out in “fraternal unity with the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies.”²⁸ One of the first steps of the Union was the establishment of the newspaper “Narodnaia Armiia [People's Army],” the name of which connected its work with the traditions of the newspaper of the same name which was published during the 1905–1907 revolution.

Socialist revolutionary V.N. Filippovsky was elected Chairman of the Union and its representative in the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet; nonpartisan lieutenant A.A. Skobeiko, K.F. Grekov and lieutenant Petrov, Socialist revolutionary Lieutenant Colonel S.D. Mstislavsky²⁹, Menshevik lieutenant M.S. Loshchinsky, ensign B. Lyubarsky close to the Socialist revolutionaries, as well as Bolshevik lieutenant A.I. Tarasov-Rodionov were elected to the committee as comrades of the chairman. B.S. Sinani, who considered the issue of war to be the main focus for unity, became the secretary of UROPA³⁰. The Presidium decided to ask him to organize office work, to develop staffing projects, and organize a “court of conciliation.”³¹ Among the tasks that B.S. Sinani solved every day, were both routine and fateful affairs: he was sent to the meeting of officers of the army and navy, sent greeting telegrams, reported on information “discrediting Colonel Peretz and commandant of the Tauride Palace”, made efforts to prevent the execution of Serbian officers in Thessaloniki, and prepared articles “on the current issue” for the newspaper of the Union, etc.³² B.S. Sinani's attitude towards the Bolsheviks, like that of most members of the Union, was uncompromisingly negative. Evaluating V.I. Lenin's April theses, in a polemic with A.I. Tarasov-Rodionov, he said:

Crazy proposals are being made to crush their own party, to change its program and even its name. <...> and about the creation of some other new revolutionary international directed both against the “chauvinists” and against the center³³.

Union of Socialists of the People's Army

As a result of ideological contradictions, according to B.S. Sinani, “both wings left” the Union, “we were [supposed. – V.J., L.J.] to move as a single unity.”³⁴ Later, the organization was renamed the Union of Socialists of the People's Army (hereinafter –

²⁶ “Tasks of the Union of Republican Officers,” in *Narodnaia Armiia*, March 7, 1917, 3.

²⁷ “Resolution of the General Assembly. Chronicle of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army,” in *Narodnaya Armiia*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Sergey Dmitrievich Mstislavsky was the only one among the “officers of February 27” who had experience of participating in the revolution.

³⁰ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *Tiazhelye shagi*, 425–426.

³¹ “Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army. Minutes of the meetings of the Presidium of the Union of Republican Officers of the People's Army and the editorial commission,” in State Archive of the Russian Federation (henceforth – GARF), f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2, 4.

³² *Ibid.*, l. 9 a, 25.

³³ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *Tiazhelye shagi*, 584–585.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 379, 493.

USPA), its Presidium was moved to the “Astoria,” which housed a military hotel for senior officers³⁵.

The Union escaped neither internal political struggle nor personal conflicts, although for some time they were of a civilized character. Speaking at the meeting of the Presidium on March 16, A.A. Skobeiko noted that the Presidium and individual members were overworked “to the point of exhaustion.” He admitted that in the first days of the revolution the work of V.N. Filippovsky and B.S. Sinani could not be assessed (“Their slightest mistake could lead to innumerable troubles <...>”), and accused the leaders of the Union of the fact that they “do not open their doors to those who want to work.” The attack on the leaders was supported by M.S. Loshchinsky who accused B.S. Sinani of telling lies, but then he corrected his harsh statement by saying that:

the coverage of the facts in the report is incorrect. Everyone offends SINANI, whereas he offends nobody, everyone is guilty towards SINANI, he is the embodiment of sinlessness³⁶.

The Presidium considered the conflict as “misunderstanding,” admitting that the overwork of M.S. Loshchinsky and B.S. Sinani contributed to the “their excitement.”³⁷ However, the work style of the Presidium did not change. Despite the creation of the Union departments in several cities³⁸, the Union of Socialists of the People's Army failed to turn into an all-Russian organization that could influence the situation in the army. The promotion of the Union activities was carried out with the help of its own newspaper and various events held in the capital. One of them was at the Mariinsky Theater, where on March 26 a concert took place which was attended by representatives of: the Executive Committees of the Petrograd Soviet, the Provisional Committee of the State Duma, units of the Petrograd garrison, Zemgor, diplomats from France, the United States, and Serbia³⁹.

The Union worked on a voluntary basis, but relied on subsidies from the Provisional Government. At the same time, V.N. Filippovsky was sure that the Union “directly controlled the government,”⁴⁰ which was a delusion, though its leaders were actively involved in Petrograd’s political life. They coordinated their actions with the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet, to this end began delegating: V.N. Filippovsky, K.F. Grekov, A.I. Tarasov-Rodionov, and B. Lyubarsky to it⁴¹.

The All-Russian Conference of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and Front Delegates (April-May) was attended by V.N. Filippovsky, B.S. Sinani (member of the presidium of the section of organizational issues), and S.D. Mstislavsky (Chairman of the Military Section)⁴². According to B.S. Sinani, the meeting reached a consensus on the issue of war:

Certainly, the front should not be abandoned, everyone should fight, <...> to the point of exhaustion, but for the sake of protecting the freedoms we have gained⁴³.

At the same time, he saw a serious threat posed by the headquarters in Mogilev:

There all the officers <...> say that the Petrograd Soviet of deputies will be shot⁴⁴.

³⁵ *Golos Soldata*, June 4, 1917 (in publication mentioned as “Г. Синанинь”).

³⁶ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 19, 19a.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Narodnaia Armia*, March 22, 1917.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, March 29, 1917.

⁴⁰ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *Tiazhelye shagi*, 425.

⁴¹ *Narodnaia Armia*, March 22, 1917.

⁴² *Ibid.*, April 10, 1917.

⁴³ A. Tarasov-Rodionov, *Tiazhelye shagi*, 426.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 441.

It was the All-Russian Congress of Officers' Delegates of the Army and Navy (May 8–27, 1917) attended by a group of delegates close in spirit to the USPA which were hoped to reveal “the political image of the officers called to reorganize the army on a democratic basis.”⁴⁵ At a preliminary meeting, they agreed to defend the “interests of Russian democracy,” “of uniting into the All-Russian Soviet of Soldiers’, Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies,” and to support in every possible way the Provisional Government based on:

Russian revolutionary democracy organized into Soviets of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies providing it with all the power necessary for <...> the opportunity to bring the country under the Constituent Assembly⁴⁶.

Member of the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet of Officers' Deputies Cornet I.S. Saks delivered a “heartfelt speech about the Union and its founders” and introduced B.S. Sinani as a representative of the USPA at the Presidium of the Congress (although he was not its delegate)⁴⁷.

Describing the atmosphere of the congress, B.S. Sinani wrote:

In the lobby, one eagerly listens to individual phrases, individual opinions of the congress participants, and judging by them one tries to guess what results this congress will yield, who this assembly consists of, where they will direct their efforts after leaving Petrograd; one wants to look into their souls and find out whether there have gathered people close in spirit to soldiers, or the adherents of tsarism⁴⁸.

Whereas he did not see a “sharp division” between the centrists and the Left at the congress, there was an “impenetrable wall” between them and the Right. B.S. Sinani tried to reveal the alignment of forces through the delegates' perception of such problems as: the relationship between the Provisional Government and the Soviets, the fate of the Constituent Assembly, attitudes towards the war, reorganization of the army on democratic principles and its combat readiness, and other work issues.

According to Sinani, the indictment against the Soviets by the Right was formulated by Captain K.S. Khitrovo and ensign E.A. Efimovsky – “Dual power” including: the “Destruction of the army,” “Order No. 1,” “Undermining the authority and prestige of an officer separated from soldiers by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies” were their main critics⁴⁹. Defending the Soviets at the congress, B.S. Sinani cited the following arguments: around the Soviets there were grouped soldiers without whom “it is impossible to build an army” and that socialist ministers had much of the same background⁵⁰. Being a participant in the events of the first hours of the revolution, he resolutely opposed the delegates who belittled the role of the Soviets. He considered “intentional or unintentional” accusations of dual power with reference to Order No. 1 as negligence, and based on the construction of convictions that were “away from [everyday] life.”⁵¹ B.S. Sinani drew the delegates' attention to the fact that Order No. 1 had been issued by the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies before the formation of the Provisional Government. Describing the state of power at that moment, he emphasized:

⁴⁵ B.S. Sinani, “All-Russian Congress of Officers' Deputies (Impression),” *Narodnaia Armiia*, March 15, 1917.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Verbatim record of the meetings of the All-Russian Congress of Officers' Deputies of the Army and Navy in Petrograd. May 8–27, 1917 (Petrograd: [N.s.], 1917), 488; “All-Russian Congress of Officers' Deputies,” *Narodnaia Armiia*, March 15, 1917.

⁴⁸ B.S. Sinani, “All-Russian Congress.”

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Verbatim record of the meetings of the All-Russian Congress*, 184.

⁵¹ B.S. Sinani, “All-Russian Congress.”

The State Duma fell, as Nicholas II did. Did the State Duma exercise the people's will? No, it exercised the will of only some classes as well as of Nicholas II. This means that there has been deliberately made a rearrangement of chronological dates: first the Provisional Government, and then Order No. 1, but it is vice versa – Order No. 1, and then the Provisional Government⁵².

As the Soviet was reproached for striving to destroy the discipline of the tsarist army, he rejected the assertion by quoting this fateful document which demanded that the soldiers obey all the orders of the officers at the front.

B.S. Sinani saw the reason for the dissatisfaction of some of the officers in paragraph 3 of the Order, which provided for the subordination of military units in political advances to their committees, and stated:

If an officer wanted to withdraw troops to suppress the uprising, the soldiers would refuse to go. And those who do not strive for this should not be outraged by this feature of the order⁵³.

This declaration elicited applause from a part of the audience at the congress and voices from the seats called: “It is enough.” As a result, he refused to speak in order “to continue the correct course of the proceedings.”⁵⁴

B.S. Sinani was again in the limelight when discussing the causes, nature and goals of the war. His stormy reaction was caused by the speech of ensign E.A. Efimovsky, who declared himself a socialist “but in many years, and not now”, who in his speech revealed the “fatal contradictions” of “zoological German imperialism” and “the desire of peoples and states to determine their real tasks and real interests.”⁵⁵ The military official sarcastically emphasized:

I graduated from the university not so long ago, I studied for 7 years and <...> I had to go to the front, I had no time to study the issue of state international law so thoroughly and seriously to consider myself entitled to deliver a number of lectures and treatises to you⁵⁶.

USPA in the labyrinth of dual power

The leaders of the Union of Socialists of the People's Army were searching hard for a way out of the labyrinth of the political chaos of dual power. Due to the conflict at the dacha of P.P. Durnovo, B.S. Sinani formulated a position of non-intervention, which some regarded as inaction, but the Presidium recognized the actions of its secretary as correct, and rejected the proposal to create the Union's own armed force. They then accepted the resolution proposed by B.N. Sinani of forbidding members of the Union “to take part in the suppression of advances of individual political parties by armed force, until they show violence.”⁵⁷

In October 1917, in the preface to the collection of the documents of the Provisional Military Committee, B.N. Sinani showed his view of the background of the tumultuous summer events:

In the difficult days of July, when rattling their weapons crowds of madmen marched to the Palace of the Revolution to demonstrate the strength of the revolutionary proletariat ready to be a support for the power of the Soviets, there grew the unity of the enemies of the revolution that who plotting evil plans of a coup d'état and they began to assert their rule under the guise of plans to suppress the uprising <...>. Democracy had to exert all its strength in order to be ready to repel attacks from both flanks⁵⁸.

⁵² B.S. Sinani, “All-Russian Congress,” 184–185.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 361–366.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 380.

⁵⁷ GARF, f. 4018, op. 1, d. 1, l. 22, 24, 24 ob.

⁵⁸ V.A. Kolerov, ed. *Kornilovskii dni*, 3.

Later, the leaders of the USPA retreated from this position and joined the Military Revolutionary Committee that was established in order to counter the rebellion of General Kornilov. V.N. Filippovsky became the head of the Military Revolutionary Committee. The Committee included: B.N. Sinani, Yu.O. Martov, L.B. Kamenev, D.B. Ryazanov, V.I. Nevsky, M.I. Lieber, Sh.Z. Eliava, P.E. Lasimir, and others. N.N. Sukhanov noted that in the committee:

the right-wing Soviet bloc in the person of its stars of the first magnitude continued to operate primarily in the sphere of “high politics,” on the parquets of the Winter Palace; “famous names were representatives of *the Left*,” and despite the fact that they were in the minority, “in the Military Revolutionary Committee *the Bolsheviks were hegemon*s”⁵⁹ (italics is ours. – V.J., L.J.).

It is hard to disagree with this assessment, since the activities of the Bolsheviks increased their political influence and the cooperation of the leaders of the Union with them objectively contributed to this process⁶⁰.

During the rebellion B.S. Sinani was a member of the Bureau of the Provisional Military Committee of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies⁶¹. For Sinani, this was not a staff job, he was at the epicenter of the confrontation with Kornilov – as part of the delegation of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee. As a part of his position, he went to the Don Host Oblast and on its behalf spoke at the meeting of the Cossack subdivision and sent back a report attesting to the support of the Provisional Government by the front-line Cossacks⁶².

In September 1917 B.N. Sinani participated in the work of the All-Russian Democratic Conference convened:

for creating a strong revolutionary power capable of uniting the whole of revolutionary Russia in order to repulse external enemies and to suppress any encroachments on the freedom that had been gained⁶³.

However, 1,582 delegates representing almost all political forces in Russia failed to find a way out of the crisis. B.S. Sinani was elected as a candidate member of the All-Russian Democratic Council (provisional Parliament) from the front group⁶⁴.

As is known, relations between the Provisional Government and the provisional Parliament did not work out. On October 24, A.F. Kerensky demanded that the Council of the Republic take “every measure of confidence and assistance” in resisting the Bolshevik uprising. However, the provisional Parliament suggested instead to turn to the allies with a demand to start negotiations for universal peace, to transfer all landowners' lands to the jurisdiction of local zemstvo committees until the final solution to the agrarian issue, and to expedite the convocation of the Constituent Assembly⁶⁵. The premier dismissed “instructions” when actions were needed, and declared that the government would “handle the uprising on its own.”⁶⁶ The next day, October 25, the Mariinsky Palace was captured by the Bolsheviks and the provisional Parliament sank into oblivion.

⁵⁹ N.N. Sukhanov, *Zapiski o revoliutsii*, 113.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Golos Soldata*, August 12, 1917.

⁶² Ibid., September 4, 1917.

⁶³ *Izvestiia*, September 3, 1917.

⁶⁴ GARF, f. 1799, op. 1, d. 2, 7, 10, 22, 24, 26, 32.

⁶⁵ A. Rabinovich, *The Bolsheviks Come to Power: The Revolution of 1917 in Petrograd* (W.W. Norton, 1976), 281–282.

⁶⁶ *Letopis' revoliutsii* [Chronicle of the Revolution], bk. 1 (Berlin; Petrograd; Moscow: [N.s.], 1923), 172–175.

In the wake of October 1917

For some time, the confrontation which occurred between “February” and “October” had literally raised B.S. Sinani to the top of the turbulent events of 1917. On October 26, he joined the All-Russian Committee for the Salvation of the Homeland and Revolution (CSHR) which declared the Bolshevik power illegal⁶⁷. On October 29, an order signed by the “commander of the troops” of the CSHR, and Sinani was sent to the units of the Petrograd garrison:

to ignore any orders of the Revolutionary Bolshevik Committee, to disarm, to arrest the commissars of the revolutionary [committee], and to disarm gangs⁶⁸.

On the same day, they issued Bulletin No. 1 “To the Population and Troops of Petrograd” informing the city’s population about: the liberation of cadet schools and Cossack units by the CSHR troops, the occupation of the Mikhailovsky Manege and its nearby telephone station, the usage of armored and gun vehicles, the concentration of forces to occupy the Peter and Paul Fortress as well as the Smolny Institute – “the last refuges of the Bolsheviks.” The declaration proposed to provide “full support to the commissars and officers who execute the combat orders of the commander of the army for the salvation of the homeland and revolution,” and to arrest all the commissars of the Military Revolutionary Committee. This document was signed by Chairman of the Council of the Republic N.D. Avksentiev, Chairman of the CSHR A.R. Gotz, member of the military commission of the Central Committee of the Socialist-Revolutionary Party M. Brown and B.S. Sinani (already as a commissar of the CSHR under army commander G.P. Polkovnikov)⁶⁹. Under another published version of the address, they added to the position of commissar as follows: a “member of the military department of the committee for the salvation of the homeland and revolution.”⁷⁰ The reasons for this discrepancy are obvious. There was clearly no strict subordination in the Committee, which had created in a hurry, and Sinani could re-take the command functions which he ceded to Polkovnikov who until October 25 who had commanded the Petrograd Military District.

However, already on October 30, after the defeat of the cadet uprising, the Petrograd newspapers published statements disavowing this appeal – on behalf of the Committee and of the persons who had signed it, and it was categorically stated that such an appeal had not been published. B.S. Sinani also claimed this in a letter to the editors of the “Novaia Zhizn’ [New Life].”⁷¹

Well-known Soviet researcher D.L. Golinkov came to the conclusion that the signatures of A.R. Gotz and N.D. Avksentiev had not been on the original appeal. But this is hardly surprising: when every minute counted, who would run around the building of the City Duma, where the committee was based, to get these signatures? There were different groups in the Committee, with their own vision of the forms and methods of combating the “usurpers,” and they could well act independently from each other, but at the same time using the authority of colleagues who had a different point of view⁷².

⁶⁷ *Rabochaia Gazeta*, October 29, 1917.

⁶⁸ *Petrogradskiy Voенno-revoliutsionnyi komitet. Dokumenty i materialy* [Petrograd Military Revolutionary Committee. Documents and materials], vol. 1 (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 1966), 342.

⁶⁹ *Kievskaiia Mysl’*, October 30, 1917.

⁷⁰ *Novaia Zhizn’*, October 30, 1917.

⁷¹ *Edinstvo*, October 31, 1917.

⁷² D.L. Golinkov, “Kto byl organizatorom iunkerskogo vosstaniia v oktyabre 1917 goda [Who was the organizer of the Junker uprising in October 1917],” *Voprosy istorii*, 3 (1966): 202–205.

The members of the Committee, in one form or another, were involved in the uprising of the cadets. John Reed who watched the events in the City Duma stated:

All Smolny's telephones were turned off, but the Duma and Committee for the salvation were in constant telephone contact with all the cadet schools, as well as with Kerensky in Tsarskoye Selo⁷³.

In the Engineering School occupied by the cadets, a regular meeting of the CSHR was held with the participation of the commander of the Petrograd military district. But when it was announced that the Red Guards and sailors were approaching, all those present, with the exception of the armed cadets, left the school. When on the night of October 29, as the Red Guards were arresting A.A. Bruderer appointed by the CSHR as Commissioner of the Vladimir School, they found documents on him testifying to the appointment by the Committee of “special commissioners to the cadet schools for upcoming combat missions.”⁷⁴

It is impossible to credibly claim where B.S. Sinani was on October 29, and to fully determine the motives behind his statement. It is possible that he could not bear the burden of moral responsibility for the death of the cadets who had been pushed into the adventure. The publication in the “Novaia Zhizn’ ” was the last mention of Sinani, who then disappeared from public life. What is known about the 245 days of his life in 1917 suggests that a person with such a temperament could not stand aside from the turbulent events taking place in the country. The example of Georgy Skalov who fought both against and for the Bolsheviks suggests that there can also be assumed to have been a similar turn in the fate of Sinani. But this remains a mystery.

In 1924, there appeared a collection of documents under the editorship of B.S. Sinani⁷⁵ regulating the tobacco trade. It is also known that in 1926 in Moscow, in Staropimenovskiy Lane, there lived a lawyer (apparently, an advocate. – V.J., L.J.) with the same name as him⁷⁶. On December 6, 1930, a member of the Tobacco Committee under the Economic Council of the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR was arrested due to being a member of the “Union Bureau of the RSDLP (m)” and on the accusation of creating a counter-revolutionary organization from “fragments of the former Menshevik organizations,” which had established ties with the foreign Menshevik center and the Second International and had created a bloc with the Industrial Party and the Labor Peasant Party in order to restore capitalism in the USSR. 122 people were brought to justice, but only 14 of who pleaded guilty were brought to an open trial. The others did not admit their guilt and were brought before the “troikas” and the OGPU Collegium⁷⁷. On May 30, 1931 B.S. Sinani was sentenced to ten years in labor camps for membership in the “Union Bureau of the RSDLP (m).”⁷⁸ The conviction was overturned only in 1990⁷⁹.

⁷³ J. Reed, *Ten Days that Shook the World* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1919), 203.

⁷⁴ *Novaia Zhizn'*, October 30, 1917.

⁷⁵ B.S. Sinani, ed. *Aktsiznyy sbor s tabachnykh, makhorochnykh i gil'zovykh izdeliy: Sbranie uzakonenii, rasporyazhenii, raz'iasnenii i instruktsii v sistematizirovannom vide* [Excise tax on tobacco, shag and sleeve products: A collection of laws, orders, explanations and instructions in a systematic way] (Moscow: [N.s.], 1924).

⁷⁶ Georgy Skalov lived nearby, on Tverskaya Street, and both persons might cross paths with each other in the center of the capital. But this is an assumption from the field of alternative history. See: *Apartment.ru*, March 8, 2022, <http://www.apartment.ru/Article/487100001.html>.

⁷⁷ V.N. Uimanov, Process ‘Soiuznogo Biuro Men'shevikov’ i sud'ba men'shevika M.A. Valerianova-Brounshteina [The process of the ‘Union Bureau of the Mensheviks’ and the fate of the Menshevik M.A. Valerianov-Brownstein], *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 355 (2012):76–82.

⁷⁸ Letter of the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation No. 10 / A-2381 dated 07/06/2000 to director of the Memorial Research Center V.V. Iofe // Electronic archive of the Iofe Foundation, f. 6, op. 1, d. 17, l. 1, March 8, 2022, <https://arch2.iofe.center/person/380>.

⁷⁹ Georgy Skalov-Sinani was convicted and sentenced at the Kremlin trial in 1935 as “the head of the White Guard officer terrorist organization” to ten years of imprisonment, but five years later he was shot by the sentence of the “troika.” The defendants in this case were rehabilitated in 1957–1958.

Conclusions

“The revolution devours its children,” Georges Danton, leader of the French Revolution said before his execution. It is not known for certain what many participants in the Great October Socialist Revolution said, shouted or thought before their death. The February Revolution brought Boris Sinani and Georgy Skalov to the very crest of the revolutionary wave. Yesterday's ensigns became the arbiters of the fate of the country. The revolution showed what forces existed, what a powerful reserve for governing the country was available, and how the ruling elites did not try or were afraid to search for that potential. Both Sinani and Skalov consistently defended the ideals of the February Revolution in the October days, and their point of view reflected the opinion of a significant part of the young revolutionary-minded officers. The Great October Socialist Revolution abruptly changed their lives again and they found themselves on the opposite sides of the barricades. But the fate of a revolutionary in Russia is mercurial, but it also made their lives similar again, when the “punishing sword of the revolution” fell on Boris Sinani, an “officer of February 27,” the leader of the Union of Republican Officers, and it also fell on Georgy Skalov, member of the first “Socialist Revolutionary-Menshevik” All-Russian Central Executive Committee who had joined the Bolsheviks. Alas, both of these biographies are incomplete, but finding out the details of their activities in 1917 made it possible to significantly fill in the gap in the historiography of the Great October Socialist Revolution and the role of officers in the events of 1917.

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