

Union of the Russian People: An Anti-Semitic Movement in Ukraine, 1905-1917

**Fond F-10 Kievskoe gubernskoe po delam ob
obshchestvakh prisutstvie; Opis' 1**

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From the State Archive of the Kiev Oblast (GAKO) comes the collection **Fond designated as F-10 “Kievskoe gubernskoe po delam ob obshchestvakh prisutstvie [Kiev Province Office for the Affairs Pertaining to Societies].”**

Before 1905, Imperial Russia had no politically diversified life, only a few illegal left-wing political parties. The 1905 Revolution compelled the autocracy to issue a manifesto on 17 October 1905, where the tsar promised to the people “firm foundations of civil liberties, genuine freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly and freedom of association.” This manifesto spawned political parties and public organizations all over Russia.

As a result, revolutionary turmoil swept the country in the wake of the “Bloody Sunday” of 9 January 1905 and the tsarist government saw that it could not survive through police measures and punitive raids alone. Thus, the government aided and abetted the formation of right-wing political parties in 1905. One of these was the Union of the Russian People, founded in St. Petersburg by Dr. Dubrovin who also edited a monarchist newspaper, *Russkoe Znamia*, and was active in the organization of pogroms. His deputy was Purishkevich (later president of the Union), who later played a part in the conspiracy to murder Grigorii Rasputin. Armed Black Hundred detachments formed the basis for the Union of the Russian People. Its ideology was encapsulated in the motto embroidered on its banner, “For the Tsar, Faith and Fatherland.”

Leaders of the Union claimed a special role in Russia’s political affairs: “The Union of the Russian People is not a political party – it is the Russian people itself united on the centuries-old foundations – the Orthodox faith, autocracy and *narodnost’* [national spirit]”¹ The Union was openly nationalistic and discriminatory against the smaller ethnic groups that made up the Russian Empire. Its charter said: “Members of the Union can only be Russians by birth, of both sexes, of all classes and social standings...All other persons, who are not Russians by birth and non-Russians, can be admitted to

the Union only on the basis of resolutions of general meetings of Union members.”²

Another feature of the Union was rabid anti-Semitism, as shown by this excerpt from the charter: “Jews cannot be ever permitted to become members of the Union, even if they adopt Christianity.”³

The height of the Union’s activity came at the end of 1905 and early 1906 when branches of the Union of the Russian People formed throughout the empire. The organizational session of the Kiev Union of the Russian People took place on 29 April 1906. Its founders numbered 60; its offices located at 30 Glubochitskaia St., and at 52 L’vovskaia St. The application to the Kiev governor of 16 July 1906 asked him to approve the draft charter as soon as possible. It stated the actual date of founding the Union was 23 December 1905 and went on to say: “His Majesty the Emperor has consented to accept a copy of the Charter and lay both upon Himself and the Most August Son and Heir Apparent Crown Prince the Union’s badges, worn on the chest, and expressed His Royal blessing and wished it be united and prosperous.”⁴

The Autocrat of All Russias expressed his special attitude to the Union in a telegram to the Chairman of the Union of the Russian People, Dubrovin:

Convey to all the chairmen of departments and members of the Union of the Russian People who sent me their expressions of the feelings that inform them my heart-felt gratitude for their devotion and readiness to serve the throne and the dear Motherland. I am confident that now all truly faithful and Russian sons who selflessly love their Fatherland will rally even closer together and, as they constantly increase in number, will help Me achieve peaceful renewal of our holy and great Russia and improve the living of its people. Let the Union of the Russian People be my reliable support and set to all and everyone an example of law and order.⁵

Members of the Union of the Russian People were active counterrevolutionary force; they participated in the pogroms, the beatings of striking industrial workers, monarchist marchers and so on.

Here is an excerpt from a report appearing in the newspaper *Rus’* on 12 December 1906: “Kiev. The White Guard. A secret meeting of an armed detachment of the local Union of the Russian People on December 5 was told

that the local university had been seized by assorted 'liberators' who were holding gatherings there every day that 'are exceptionally dangerous for the state,' for which reason vigorous measures should be taken right away 'to rid the university of sedition.'"

These measures led to the signing of a special order which boiled down to the following:

1. Members of the armed detachment have to gather by noon on the streets outside the university.
2. On a prearranged signal, all should promptly enter the university building and proceed to the room where a 'liberation gathering' is taking place.
3. The 'leader' should ask the 'liberators' in an explicit form to immediately disband and he should take down the names of all the participants in the gathering. This list is then handed over to the appropriate agencies for investigation.
4. The chairman of the gathering gets immediately arrested and sent under special guard of the militants to the police precinct.
5. Should the 'liberators' refuse to disband, the armed detachment should immediately use brute force.
6. Special rubber canes to be issued at the HQ of the Union of the Russian People should be used in the application of physical strength.
7. Also in the HQ, they can be issued student cards for unimpeded entry in the university and student uniforms including caps and jackets.
8. Do not use firearms on any account. ⁶

This same order allowed for the formation of a special White Guard student faction in imitation of the one operating in Odessa with expectations that one "should now expect the same infamous deeds which we see in Odessa, that is to say, brutal beatings of defenseless young students."

The Union's operation in the Kiev *Gubernia* was closely watched and protected by the authorities. This can be seen from a circular letter of Kiev Governor A.F. Ghirs of 24 February 1912 sent to *uezd* police officers:

The Union of the Russian People has in the Kiev *Gubernia*, which was entrusted to me by High Imperial Majesty, in towns and villages its departments with the banners emblazoned with the motto 'For the Tsar, Faith and Fatherland'; departments of this party, in accordance with its charter, are protecting the greatness of the Holy Orthodox Church and the supreme power of the Russian autocrat. Consolidated by its holy

mission, the Union, naturally, meets with support of all bodies of government in the matter of strengthening in the people's mind the lofty patriotic ideas. This support to the departments should also be coming from local police authorities, but, as can be gathered from information available to me, not all police officials respond favorably to the finest manifestations of the activities of the Union's departments; some tolerate unfriendly attitude to them, which I cannot consider as normal. On account of this, I want you to keep in mind that, since the Union departments work in strict compliance with the law and their own charters for the benefit of Russian patriotism in the province, ranking police officers should give them full and all-round assistance, and their attitude to their representative should be courteous and civil.

Communicating the above, I am obliged to also note that some of the personnel in the departments often abuse the Union's objectives and under their guise sow discord among Russian peasants and persuade them of the need for using violence against national minorities and plant in the minds of credulous peasants all sorts of absurd and criminal ideas threatening disturbances and unfortunate consequences of economic and agrarian riots. Such harmful and dangerous activity, no matter which high-sounding slogans they use as a cover, cannot be tolerated as this radically undermines faith in the Union among the population. Pointing to the above intolerable things among some members of the departments, I am calling upon you to be alert to the attempts of some such 'Union members' to sow, under the Union's banner, unrest and sedition among the *gubernia's* population. Discovering activities patently in breach of the peace and hurting the public, police officers should thoroughly investigate such instances and report their findings to me so as to seek deportation of the guilty parties from the *gubernia*. As regards 'Union members' caught spreading false and disturbing rumors or inciting people to strike, you should draw up appropriate reports for me to mete out administrative punishments in accordance with the binding decrees of the chief of the territory of 5 November 1910.

I have the right to expect from police chiefs serious attitude to the extremely important instructions stated above. The line of action will also depend on the police officers under his authority with regard to organizations and members of the Union in each separate instance.⁷

With revolutionary activities at a low ebb and with the defeat of the revolution, the Union of the Russian People began to crumble. Some of its members joined the Union of Archangel Michael and Russian People United. Many moved away from active work in these fields. The Union fell apart once and for all when the autocracy became defunct in February 1917.

Delos in **Fond F-10**, which have to do with activities of the Union of the Russian People in the Kiev *Gubernia*, contain vast amounts of sources for research. Some of the documents in this collection include files on the creation of departments of the Union and lists of its members (*delos* 316, 439, 520, 522, 715, 717, 719, 720, 780). *Delo* 317 includes correspondence of Chief of Southwestern Railways Shtukenberg with the Governor of Kiev about actions in breach of discipline in the Kiev department of the Union of the Russian People, when punishments for being late for work, allowing passengers travel without tickets and so on were alleged to be the result of 'Jews, Poles and assorted revolutionaries having seized the Southeastern Railways and harassing Russian employees.'⁸

Other documents include classified Report No. 334 on the closing down of a department of the Union at the Southeastern Railways; materials of investigation into abuses of the Union in the Great Martyr Varvara Nursing Home where Union members were trying to recruit mental patients; materials pertaining to the Archimandrite of the Mikhailovskii Monastery, Adrian, who was head of the Union in Kiev and evidenced expenditures such as 70 rubles of Union money to get his fur coat and cap out of pawn; a complaint from the chief of the Union's transport businesses against the Kiev police; papers concerning the opening of departments of the Union of Archangel Michael (*delo* 138) in the Kiev *Gubernia*; documents from the Kiev department of the Legal Order Party, whose objective, according to its charter, was "to consolidate in the Russian State a system of constitutional monarchy and a system based on law" and to get its candidates elected to the State Duma and the State Council (*delo* 18).

The majority of the documents in this collection are originals, typed or written on printed letterheads. They include various identification elements such as rubber-stamp signatures, imprints of stamps and seals, signatures, registration numbers and records of incoming and outgoing documents.

All documents are in Russian.

¹ GAKO, collection [*fond*] 10, *opis'* 1, *delo* 316, p.10

² Ibid. p.5 ob.

³ GAKO, collection [*fond*] 10, *opis'* 1, *delo* 316, p.5

⁴ GAKO, collection [*fond*] 10, *opis'* 1, *delo* 17, p.15

⁵ GAKO, collection [*fond*] 10, *opis'* 1, *delo* 316, p.2

⁶ The Union of the Russian People, in accordance with materials of the extraordinary investigative commission of the Provisional Government, 1917, Moscow-Leningrad, 1992. pp. 378-379

⁷ The Union of the Russian People, in accordance with materials of the extraordinary investigative commission of the Provisional Government, 1917, Moscow-Leningrad, 1992, pp. 379-380.

⁸ GAKO, collection 10, *opis'* 1, *delo* 317, p. 5.

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