The Office of the Kyiv Governorate Commissar of the Provisional Government

Fond F-1716 The Office of the Kyiv Governorate Commissar of the Provisional Government

Opis 1-3, 204 delo

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The State Archive of Kyiv Region is home to a number of archival collections that serve as a valuable source of material on the history of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921. The evolution of Ukrainian statehood and government institutions required official documentation of the activity of those institutions, as well as the archiving and storage of official records.

The central state archives contain a significant collection of documents reflecting the activity of the supreme bodies of power and their executive agencies. In turn, documentary records from local government bodies, governorate and rural commissars of the Provisional Government, are stored in provincial state archives. One such collection [fond] in the State Archive of Kyiv Region, Fond No. 1716: The Office of the Kyiv Governorate Commissar of the Provisional Government, reflects the multiplicity of political processes, the intensity of the military conflict and the personification of political processes.

The fond contains three inventories [opis] comprising 204 files [delo]. In the Soviet era, the documents remained in secret storage. It was not until 1958 that all but two files, which remained in secret storage and did not become accessible to the general public until 1988, were moved from the secret storage section to the pre-Revolutionary section of the State Archive of Kyiv Region.

The preservation of the fond documents was affected not only by the military-political developments of the revolutionary period, but also by subsequent administrative reforms, as well as the Community Party's policy for organizing archives that prioritized the collection of documents on the history of Bolshevik organizations.

In addition, some of the items in the fond, mainly Opis No. 3, include not only documents from the office of the governorate commissar, but also documents from its predecessor, the Office of the Kyiv Governor prior to the February 1917 Revolution, which are closely related in terms of the contents of the issues they examine.

In February 1917, a bourgeois-democratic revolution broke out in Russia that led to the fall of the tsarist autocracy in Russia; the declaration

of Russia as a bourgeois republic; the emergence of divided power – the Provisional Government, on the one hand, and the Soviets, on the other; the disintegration of the Russian Empire; and a wave of national-state sovereignty declarations by the oppressed peoples of the former empire.

After the fall of the autocracy, on March 2, 1917, Prince Georgy Yevgenyevich Lvov, with approval from the Petrograd Soviet, became the head of the Provisional Government of Russia (it was proclaimed a republic in September 1917). Following the de facto liquidation of the old system of government, the diarchy at the center quickly began falling into anarchy at the local level. Kyiv newspapers did not report the fall of the autocracy until March 3, 1917. As soon as the Petrograd events became known, a power struggle erupted between different political forces. Unlike Petrograd, where divided power evolved after antigovernment protests, in Ukraine, three political centers emerged:

- 1. Mikhail Akinfievich Sukovkin, governorate commissar of the Provisional Government, who was supported by the pro-Russian intelligentsia, bankers, industrial plant owners and big land owners. Mixed committees began to be set up in Ukraine's pro-Russian towns, which, together with city dumas, became Provisional Government bodies. The Executive Committee of the Kyiv Soviet of Public Organizations was headed by M. Starodomsky, who was not affiliated with any political party.
- 2. The Soviets of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies, comprised of pro-socialist Russian parties and organizations that were active in Ukraine at the time: the RSDRP [Russian Social Democratic Workers Party] (Mensheviks), the RSDRP (Bolsheviks), and socialists socialist revolutionaries. During March 1917, 170 Soviets were created in Ukraine.
- 3. The Ukrainian Central Rada, which was established on March 3-4, 1917 in the city of Kyiv. Ukraine's Central Rada was formed by representatives of pro-Ukrainian socialist and liberal parties and organizations. Ukraine's Central Rada became a mouthpiece for the Ukrainian people's democratic aspirations.

On March 5, 1917, pursuant to an order from Prince G. E. Lvov, chairman of the Provisional Government, Mikhail Akinfievich Sukovkin* was appointed commissar of the Kyiv Governorate. The fond documents can be divided into several groups based on their content and informational substance. This division is hypothetical, because the documents are very diverse in terms of their type, category and informational content.

Group 1: office records of the Kyiv Governorate commissar of the Provisional Government;

Group 2: office records of district commissars reflecting the process of the transformation of local self-government bodies after the February Revolution;

Group 3: documents pertaining to elections to district zemstvos and city dumas:

Group 4: military documents relating to operations by Southwestern Front armies:

Group 5: personnel documents on newly appointed governorate and rural commissars and their aides;

Group 1 documents include copies of circular letters and directives from the Provisional Government and ministries, primarily the Interior Ministry and the Ministry of Agriculture Land and Food Production; directives from the Kyiv Governorate commissar; correspondence between the governorate commissar and top bodies of power and district organizations.

emigration in France. He was a member of the Association of the Alumni of the Imperial Alexander Lyceum.

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M. A. Sukovkin was born into the family of Privy Councilor A. P. Sukovkin, chief of staff at the Council of Ministers, and came from an old Russian noble family. In 1877, he finished the Imperial Lyceum in Tsarskoe Selo; chamberlain, actual state councilor. From 1916, chairman of the Kyiv Governorate Zemstvo Administration. From March until September 1917, Kyiv Governorate commissar, on good terms with Ukrainian nationalist circles. Between 1918 and 1919, ambassador of the National State of Ukraine and the People's Republic of Ukraine to Turkey. When the Ukrainian Hetmanate disintegrated, he took a hostile stance on Ukrainian statehood. From 1921, he lived in

The fond contains one significant document: a record of the transfer of the Kyiv Governorate. An address by the former Kyiv governor to acting Kyiv Governorate Commissar M. A. Sukovkin reads: "Pursuant to the interior minister's order, I request Your Excellency to take over the administration of the Kyiv Governorate from me. Respectfully and humbly yours." The document is signed: "Assumed control of the Governorate on March 6, 1917, Governorate Commissar of the Provisional Government M. Sukovkin. Control handed over***" That was how painlessly and calmly the formal handover of power was completed in the Kyiv Governorate.¹

On the following day, March 7, 1917, the Kyiv Governorate commissar sent the chairman of the zemstvo administration, the marshal of the noblesse, the district police captain, district arbitrators, and the chairman of the congress of arbitrators a telegram announcing the assumption of the position of Kyiv Governorate commissar of the Provisional Government and the establishment of the institution of district commissars in the Kyiv Governorate. The duties of district commissars were entrusted to the chairmen of district zemstvo administrations. The telegram clearly formulates the principal functions of the district commissars: "District commissars shall exercise control over all local agencies that are answerable to me as head of the governorate. All authorities shall remain in their positions and perform their duties on instructions from the commissars until further notice.*** I am confident that all the authorities and the general public will sincerely wish for the good of their homeland and carry out their duty in accordance with directives from the Provisional Government."2

The principal functions, rights and duties of the governorate commissar were defined in the Interim Statute on the Governorate and District Commissars. In accordance with that statute, "the governorate commissar was the representative of the Provisional Government in the governorate who made sure that the laws, decrees and orders of the Provisional Government were faithfully executed by the local authorities and self-government bodies in the governorate on a daily basis. The governorate commissar, as part of the Interior Ministry, was appointed and dismissed by the Provisional Government on recommendation from the interior minister." Analysis of the governorate commissar's functions, rights and duties shows that all power to oversee local self-government bodies, including food and land committees, was concentrated in his hands. The governorate commissar's principal functions were as follows:

- promulgation of laws, decrees and orders of the Provisional Government;
- oversight of the status and activity of all governorate and district governmental public organizations;
- inspection and appraisal of the activity of local governorate institutions, and requisition of information and explanation;
- collation of information from governmental organizations on all measures taken to fulfill the directives of the Provisional Government, and on the appointment of civilian officials;
- oversight over the execution of court rulings on administrative affairs;
- oversight over the activity of local self-government bodies and the electoral process.⁴

The nature of the local bodies of the Provisional Government is evident from the social status of the governorate and district commissars. In accordance with the March 4, 1917, decree by the Provisional Government, all governors and deputy governors were dismissed from their positions with their duties being reassigned to governorate commissars, while the duties of district commissars were assigned to district commissars, chairmen of district zemstvo administrations. The majority of commissars were Constitutional Democrats or Octobrists whose function was to preserve the old state apparatus and its officials on the local level, except for those representatives of the tsarist regime who had compromised themselves. So the pro-Russian governorate and district commissars did all they could to halt the further development of the revolution and democracy, and prevent the development of the national liberation movement in Ukraine. That much is evident from the numerous circular letters and telegrams of the Provisional Government, the Interior Ministry and other central government agencies that are widely represented in the fond documents. For example, Delo No. 14, Opis No. 1 (March 1917) contains the following telegrams: from Rodzyanko, dated March 7, 1917, on the new system and bread supplies to the army (p. 28); from Governorate Commissar M. A. Sukovkin, dated March 14, 1917, on freedom of expression and the press (p. 36); from Rodzyanko, of March 14, 1917, about the necessity of the spring sowing campaign (p. 38); from Chairman of the Council of Ministers G. E. Lvov, March 15, 1917 on the formation of governorate and district public committees (pp. 46, 47); from the interior minister, dated March 25, 1917, on the provision of private information on persons in positions of authority in the governorate and districts (p. 50); from the interior minister, of March 27, 1917, and on the separation of city and governorate committees (p. 54). The scale of correspondence is evident from Prime Minister G. E. Lvov's telegram dated March 28, 1917: "Recently, correspondence by telegraph has become extremely voluminous. Recognizing that this situation jeopardizes the timely exchange of telegrams related to the provision of supplies to the army and the provision of food to the army and the public, I propose that decisive measures be taken to reduce correspondence by telegraph."

Unlike the documents of the Provisional Government and central government bodies, which are amply represented in the fond, there are almost no documents from the Central Rada or its General Secretariat, for which the Kyiv Governorate commissar had personal sympathy. In his memorandum to G. E. Lvov, M. S. Sukovkin states: "I am happy to say that the National Ukrainian Congress, which met in Kyiv, has reaffirmed the state of calm on the local level across Ukraine*** The Congress has asked me as a government representative to attest to the unanimous and firm commitment by the entire organized Ukrainian people to render all-round support to the Provisional Central Government with which the Ukrainian nation will move hand in hand in establishing a free and democratic system. In that respect, the offer made to me by Congress Speaker Prof. Grushevsky was enthusiastically accepted. The Congress recognized that sanction for [the declaration of] Ukraine's autonomy belongs to the Russian Constituent Assembly, while Ukraine's organized citizens are to facilitate the problem-free preparation of that assembly****"7

Group 2 documents, among the largest in the fond, describe the process of the creation of new local government bodies – district commissars – as well as the power vacuum that evolved on the local level. Documents in this group fully and graphically reflect the political, socioeconomic, public and crime situation on the local level. The files in Opis No. 1 are the most informative in that respect, containing documents on the administration and supervision of the activity of district commissars in individual districts: Berdichev (dd. 22, 23, 24), Vasilkovsky (dd. 25, 26, 27), Zvenigorodsky (dd. 28, 29, 30, 31), Kanevsky (dd. 32, 33, 34), Kyivsky (dd. 35, 36, 27, 38. 39), Lipovetsky (dd. 40, 41, 42), Radomislsky (dd. 42,

43, 44, 45), Skvirsky (dd. 46, 47, 48), Tarashchansky (dd. 49, 50, 51), Umansky (dd. 52, 53, 54, 55), and Chigirinsky (dd. 56, 57).8

Whereas after the dismantlement of the old system three main centers of political gravitation were established at the center - the governorate commissar of the Provisional Government, the Soviet of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies, and the Ukrainian Central Rada – a virtual power vacuum emerged on the local level. Ukrainian towns and villages were effectively left on their own with their own socioeconomic and governance problems. Here is how the situation is described by residents of the village of Taganchi, the Kanevsky district, in their letter to the Kyiv Governorate commissar: «Виявилося, що в м. Таганчі і в околиці скріз немає ні миліції, ні виконавського комітету, а як де й є, то вибрані ни вміло, без статута і, крім того, вибранці зрікаються своїх обов'язків, без одержування коштів...» (language of the original). Е. Gumennik, a female resident in the village of Barishevka, the Pereyaslavl district of Poltava Province, offers her own interpretation of the situation that had evolved on the local level: "***I consider it my duty to inform [you] that our people are in a state of extreme ignorance and are still unable to understand what has actually happened. Neither the peasants nor the burghers living in our place can be blamed for that; the blame lies with the local intelligentsia which, regrettably, does not consider it necessary to explain to the people - through meetings, speeches and the reading of newspapers – the essence of the coup that has occurred in our state. This is due to the fact that our intelligentsia consists of advocates of the old system or rather the Black Hundreds."10

A lack of real power structures on the local level led to serious economic and social consequences: Villagers seized landed estates, land plots, hayfields, forests, cattle, etc. On November 6, 1917, the Lipovetsk district commissar reported to the Kyiv Governorate commissar: "Seizures of hay and firewood and other such violations of law and order are becoming widespread; there are not enough resources not only to prevent seizures but even to reinstate the status quo and put an end to disturbances as they break out." 11

The helplessness of the [local] authorities is also evident from the large scale theft of timber designated for army needs. In a telegram to the Kyiv Governorate commissar, dated September 24, 1917, V. A. Brodsky, a prominent timber industrialist, asked for help: "For a fourth day in a row,

peasants in Kanevsky district, Kornilov Province, have been seizing processed timber from Kaschenko's dacha near Korsun and taking it away, as well as cutting trees, causing huge losses. Help is needed as a matter of urgency; otherwise hundreds of thousands [of rubles worth of timber] will be stolen. The timber has been sold for defense needs. I have repeatedly asked for help from the district commissar: He is powerless. I beg you to immediately dispatch a detachment of Cossacks to stop further plundering."

Special weekly and bimonthly reports by district commissars to the Kyiv Governorate commissar, sent between September 20, 1917, and January 7, 1918, are an essential source of information on the situation at the local level. These documents contain information about public organizations that existed in the districts, political parties, the agrarian movement, the seizure of private land plots, labor, national and religious movements, police activity, the preparation of elections for the Constituent Assembly, strikes, etc.¹³

Group 3 documents, pertaining to district zemstvo and city duma elections, feature Opis delo Nos. 99-119. These include electoral lists, official records of district electoral commissions, and lists of town councilor candidates in the Vasilovsky, Kyivsky, Lipovetsky and Chigirinsky district zemstvos, in separate electoral districts, and the Chigirinsky and Umansky city dumas.

This group also includes *Zhurnal Chrezvychainoi 12 sessii Kyivskogo uyezdnogo zemskogo sobrania* on March 28-29, 1917 (op. 1, d. 37) featuring a list of zemstvo councilors and an evaluation of the work of the Kyiv Zemstvo in 1912-1914. In his presentation, V. Ia. Demchenko, chairman of the Kyiv District Administration, thus characterizes the role of the zemstvo in Ukraine: "But remember how the old regime mistreated our Ukraine. While zemstvos were introduced across Russia 52 years ago, even though ours was the richest land, [we] were not granted self-government. A truncated version of the zemstvo was introduced. It was a parody, of course. That truncated zemstvo insisted that it should be elected. And that kind of zemstvo was introduced." ¹⁴

The minutes of town duma meetings represented in the fond's second opis are of great interest: the Tarashchansky (d. 5), Radomislsky (d. 6), Lipovetsky (d. 7), Belotserkovskaya (d. 9), Berdichevskaya (d. 10),

Chigirinskaya (d. 11), Umanskaya (d. 12), Kanevskaya (d. 13), Zvenigorodskaya (d. 14), and Vasilkovskaya (d. 15) city dumas.

Group 4 documents, on military matters relating to Southwestern Front army operations, are not very numerous in volume but significant, considering that World War I was ongoing and factoring in the role that the army played in that context in enforcing law and order on Ukrainian territory. In his appeal on March 5, 1917, Gen. Brusilov, commander in chief of the Southwestern Front armies, stated: "Remember that the stubborn enemy is still on our land, watching the situation very closely in order to take us by surprise as we are affected by internal squabbles and domestic troubles, and is seeking to rout our army and defeat Great Russia. I am urging the entire population of the Southwestern Front to forget their differences, put an end to their disagreements; I am calling for unity, law and order, which are crucial for success." 15 Furthermore, the army was used as a tool for enforcing order in the territory of the Kyiv Governorate. Thus, in his circular letter to district commissars, the Kyiv Governorate commissar defined their tasks as follows: "***Pogroms and looting in the rear are assuming disturbing proportions. To guell them in the future it is necessary for army units to arrive at the sites of pogroms and looting without delay. In order to ensure the quick termination of disturbances that may arise in the future, I request that district commissars follow these guidelines: (1) district commissars are to establish close ties with the troops at their disposal; (2) on orders from commissars or city militia chiefs, the commanders of the relevant military units are***to fulfill the commissars' orders." These documents also list all military regiments and units that were stationed in the Kyiv Governorate, their locations and areas of their operation. This group of documents includes information about the location of the troops of the Kyiv Military District, orders in the Kyiv Military District and the Kyiv Garrison, telegrams from the chief of supplies at the Southwestern Front armies, etc.

Group 5 includes personnel documents. After the February Revolution and the fall of the autocratic regime, the people of course wanted to see people in new positions who would be more in tune with the times. That brought about significant personnel changes in the government. New people were appointed to the positions of commissars, their deputies and chiefs of the newly established militia. Information about them is contained in service and travel certificates, ¹⁷ standard personnel forms for district executive committees, ¹⁸ lists of regional commissars, ¹⁹ welcome

telegrams to Governorate Commissar M. A. Sukovkin in connection with his appointment to that position,²⁰ and lists of district commissars.²¹

Opis No. 3, which enumerates the appointments of district commissars, militia chiefs and their deputies, is a valuable source for biographers. Regrettably, the files themselves have not been preserved and are listed as missing, but the headlines in the opis delo indicate the first and last names, as well as patronymics of those persons, and can serve as a subject for separate study.

Fond No. 1716 documents from the Office of the Kyiv Governorate Commissar of the Provisional Government are some of the most authentic historical sources pertaining to the regional history of the Ukrainian Revolution of 1917-1921. They reconstruct the dynamics and nature of the events that were unfolding on the territory of the Kyiv Governorate and personify those distant events.

The fond documents are in Russian and Ukrainian.

Sources:

¹Gosudarstvennyy arkhiv Kyivskoi oblasti, f. 1716, op. 1, d. 18., p. 1.

²Op. cit., f. 1716, op. 1, d. 61 a, p. 2.

³ Op. cit, op.1, d.16. p. 27 ob.

⁴ Op. cit, op.1, d. 16. p. 28, 28 ob.

⁵ Op. cit, op. 1. d. 14.

⁶ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 14. p. 55.

⁷ Op. cit, op. 1. d. 6. p. 24.

⁸ Op. cit, op.1., dd. 22-57.

⁹Op. cit, op. 1, d. 32, p. 24.

¹⁰ Op. cit, op. 1, d.12, p. 37.

¹¹ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 40, p. 67.

¹² Op. cit, op. 1, d. 33, p. 100.

¹³ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 64.

¹⁴ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 37. p. 10.

¹⁵ Op. cit, op. 2, d. 3, p. 1-2.

¹⁶ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 66, p. 28.

¹⁷ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 6, 7, 9.

¹⁸ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 9.

¹⁹ Op. cit, op. 1. d. 10.

²⁰ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 11.

²¹ Op. cit, op. 1, d. 6.

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