

On the National Question in Commissariat

November 15 (28), 1917

On the question of the national army, it was decided:

- 1) To allow free groupings of soldiers based on the national sign within the boundaries of a particular military unit.
- 2) This should not be confused with unauthorized leaving home of thus self-allocated groups. Such resignation is inadmissible under conditions of war, without consent of the general military district.

People's Commissar for Nationalities

I. Dzhagashvili-Stalin

November 15, 1917

Pravda. 1917. № 193. November 18.

Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History

**Conversation on the Direct Line with Representatives of the Central Committee of
Ukrainian Social-Democratic Labour Party N. V. Porsh and the Regional Organization of
the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party (Bolshevik) S. S. Bakinsky**

November 17 (30), 1917

A member of the central committee of the Ukrainian Social-Democratic Party, Porsh, and a member of regional committee of Bolsheviks Sergei Bakinsky, are on the phone line.

Porsh is speaking. Our party would like to determine views of the Central Committee of Bolsheviks on the national questions in general and, in particular, on that concerning Ukraine. Our party, as well as the entire Central Rada, believes that the central authority has to be formed by all organized democracy of the state, and that the central government has to be socialist. In regards to Ukraine, the highest regional authority of it is the Central Rada, and the form of governorship in Ukraine itself is Ukrainian People's Republic, which is bound by the federal relations with the nationwide organism of Russia. Ukrainian Constituent Assembly is convoked for establishment of the constitution, and the deadline for elections to the Constituent Assembly is appointed to December 27, and the Assembly will begin its work on January 9. Our party believes that even now, with some known limitations and under the mutual agreement of central and regional powers, a federal form of the Russian republic can be established. Our party believes that the regional republican governments will also have to partake in formation of the central organ of democracy, upon which the central government will rely. Besides the questions of peace, land, etc., the platform has to include recognition of the newly-formed republics and their governments in regards to the central government.

As such, our party is inquiring about how the Central Committee of Bolsheviks treats these points: whether it essentially recognizes the Central Rada as the highest regional authority and its right in legislative and executive spheres to resolve all questions of regional, socioeconomic, political, and national cultural life [of Ukraine]. Besides that, we are interested in information in regards to the process of uniting all democracy in one central body. I await answers to these questions, which demand immediate resolution from the national commissars.

Stalin. I am speaking. I am a representative from the Council of People's Commissars. Views of the Bolshevik party on the national question are known: please read the resolution of the April conference. If you must listen to opinion on the national question of government of the Russian republic, I am at your service.

Porsh. With great pleasure.

Stalin. I am speaking. The questions that you put forward are subject to decision not of the

Bolshevik party, but of the central authority elected during the Second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and declared valid recently by the Congress of Peasant Deputies. *Views of the central authority on the national question* are as follows: recognition behind nations of the right for full self-determination, up to secession and formation of independent states. The will of a nation is defined by referendum or by national constituents. If the will of a nation is in favor of the federal republic, then the government cannot have anything against it. This is the right of each nation, and the central government will concur with it. Regional authorities, as well as authorities in other areas, should belong to the totality of all Workers' and Peasant Deputies, including all organizations of the Central Rada. There is a wide space provided for agreement between the Central Rada and the Council of People's Commissars. Thus, it will be expedient to organize a meeting between representatives of the Central Rada and representatives of National Commissariat. As for autonomy of, say, Ukraine, - it has to be full and unconstrained by the commissars. No guardianship is admissible from above, and no patrol of the Ukrainian people is acceptable. *On the question of authority and its structure, I can say the following:*

On November 15, at night, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers', and analogous body of the Soviet of Peasant deputies created at the recent congress, have merged. The government will include left-wing revolutionary socialists. The right-wing socialists and Mensheviks excluded themselves from the revolutionary-democratic coalition.

The front, or rather its nine tenths, is in favor of the Council of People's Commissars. All military operations have ceased until November 19. There are talks going on about truce on all fronts. There is no answer yet on the notes sent by the ally embassies. On November 19, negotiations about truce are expected to take place. I would like to know whether the opinion of your party is in agreement with opinion of the Central Rada on all questions, and especially on the national question. Do you represent the Central Rada, or just your party?

I would also like to report that today, the representatives of the Petrograd section of the Central Rada, under agreement with the Council of People's Commissars, took some national Ukrainian relics - medals and others - which were taken away from Ukrainians during Catherine II era, for the purposes of bringing them back to Ukraine.

I would like to ask what you and the Central Rada's relations are to the local councils of Ukraine Do you have contact with any local Bolshevik organizations? Can the Council of People's Commissars count on the commonwealth of the Central Rada after everything I have reported to you about the views of the Council on the national status and regional authorities?

Porsh. I am a representative of the leading party in the Central Rada. Simultaneously, I am a member of the General Secretariat, and am the general secretary of labor. The General Secretariat is the government of the Ukrainian People's Republic, founded on November 1 by the Central Rada. My personal opinion: the commonwealth of the Central Rada in organizing of the central organ of democracy as the source of nation-wide authority in the direction that I

mentioned in the beginning, is imaginable and practically possible. Our relationship with local Bolshevik organizations are characterized by the fact that the local regional committee of Bolsheviks insists on convocation of regional congress of the Soviets of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasant Deputies of Ukraine for the purposes of electing new members of the Central Rada. On the other hand, we believe that the Central Rada, in its current condition based on its membership, already consists of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasant Deputies elected at the congress of peasants, workers, and soldiers, and the last congress of representatives of soldiers from 4 million men ended only on November 1 of this year. At the same time, we believe that appointment of elections for the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly makes this congress excessive and unnecessary, which will only be a hindrance in work for the General Secretariat and in hasty planning of social and economic reforms drafted by the Central Rada on November 7, which is probably already known to you. These relations irritate all democratic Ukrainian and even non-Ukrainian organizations and prevent tranquility in work in expectation for repetition of the Moscow events in Kiev. As for the, as you out it, Petrograd branch of the Central Rada: the Central Rada is in full contact with it. I believe I answered all your questions. If you have no more questions, allow me to ask you two practical questions.

First question: Ukrainian military units of the Petrograd district and particularly that of Petrograd, wish to go to Ukraine but, according to the statement of delegation, this is being interfered with in Petrograd. Would it be possible to ask you to help satisfy their quite understandable aspirations? *Second question:* The local offices of the national bank, which serve the front and the rear, as well as all the industry, is experiencing big difficulties in monetary circulation owing to the lack of bank notes. This circumstance causes the most serious complications in industry, and in particular in such seasonal industry as beet sugar production is. Moreover, the lack of money may cause unrest among the working masses who, along with army servants and government officials, have nothing to pay with. Thus, I would like to out through a request to help supply all offices of the national bank in Ukraine with money - correctly and sufficiently. I am finished.

Stalin. I am speaking. To answer the first question, I can inform you that today or tomorrow several thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, with approval of commander-in-chief, will leave to Ukraine. Needless to say that in peaceful time, Ukraine can be the place of stay of the Ukrainian soldiers. But war complicates it, and without permission of appropriate military authorities, free relocation of national groups of the army should be reduced to a minimum. I am speaking about this as a rule, knowing that any rule allows exceptions. As for the second question, I will report to the Council of People's Commissars today and I have no doubt that all the measures which depend it will be taken.

Sergei Bakinsky. I am awaiting questions.

Stalin. What is the situation in Kiev?

Sergei Bakinsky. Authority is in the hands of the Central Rada which considers the transfer of power to the Soviets impossible. This forces us to be quite skeptical about the statements made by Comrade Porsh in regards to the Central Rada being the congress of the Soviets itself. As such, we insist on immediate convocation of the All-Ukrainian congress of the Soviet of Workers', Soldiers', and Peasant Deputies, since we believe that the authority cannot remain with the Central Rada before convocation of the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly. Authority has to be passed to regional congress of the Soviets in respective regions, and in places - to the Soviets.

Yesterday, Comrade Luganovsky arrived from Kharkiv, reporting that the Central Rada is combating the Soviets even there. This situation is quite acute but I assume that the information reported by Comrade Porsh about possibility of repetition of the Moscow Events are not unfounded. Until this moment, without having come into official contact with the Central Rada, we nevertheless do not go on a complete separation with the Ukrainian socialist-democrats and revolutionary socialists, whose representatives in Kiev councils oppose to implementation of the principle of transition of power to the Soviets. In any case, it is necessary to recognize this situation as rather serious, and it is desirable to discuss it seriously. We mean convocation of regional congress of the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, and also a regional congress of our area, together with the Kharkiv region, in the near future. Has Comrade Pyatakov arrived and has he informed you sufficiently about the current state of affairs?

Stalin. I learned everything from him about the Kiev situation. All of us think that a regional congress of workers', soldiers, and peasant deputies is absolutely necessary. This mistrust with which Comrade Porsh treats the idea of such congress is unclear to us. We believe that you Kievites, Odessits, Kharkovites, Ekaterinoslavets, and others, have to undertake convocation of such congress - obviously, in conjunction with the Central Rada. If the Central Rada refuses to cooperate with you on this matter, which seems improbably to us, then you should convoke [the congress] without the Rada. Authority of the Soviets has to be accepted in all regions. This is that revolutionary precept which we cannot reject, and we do not understand how the Central Ukrainian Rada can argue with this axiom. Comrade Zinovyev will arrive soon, and you will have an opportunity to discuss questions of your interest in detail. So, that is all. Do you have anything else to say?

Sergei Bakinsky. No, I still have something to say. Are you on the line? We are in extreme need to daily receive urgent cable messages from you about the state of affairs, addressed to newspaper "Proletarskaya Mysl" ["Proletarian Thought"], with the copy to the Council of Workers' Deputies, since our newspaper serves both the region and the two fronts. It is very desirable to receive, or at least to loan, around twenty-five thousand rubles for working capital of the newspaper which, undoubtedly, will pay itself off if we regularly receive information from

you.

Stalin. I will report your offer about the newspaper to the Central Committee of the party today. When will your regional congress of the Soviets be convened?

Bakinsky. I cannot tell you about it, but I will ask our regional committee of the Soviets to answer this question.

Stalin. Very well. Do you have anything else to say?

Bakinsky. Has Comrade Yuri Pyatakov arrived?

Stalin. Yes, he is here.

Bakinsky. How soon is he going back to Kiev?

Stalin. He will remain in Petrograd... I repeat once again: our collective opinion is to immediately convene a regional congress of workers', soldiers', and peasant deputies in Ukraine. Questions of the Soviet authority, be it central or regional, do not allow any concessions. I cannot imagine any other way to form regional power and its other forms. Mistrust of the Central Rada to the Soviet power is unclear to me.

Bakinsky. Your mistrust is explained by the fact that, in construction and its membership, the Central Rada is from being a democratic establishment.

Stalin. It has to be so. It is clear from the fact that the Central Rada keeps undemocratically annexing new provinces over and over again, without asking the inhabitants of these provinces whether they want to be a part of Ukraine.

All of us think that in such cases, the question has to be, and can be, resolved only by the population itself by means of polls, referendum, and other [questionnaires]. Since the Central Rada does not do this, but rather chooses to absolutely arbitrarily annex new provinces, it exposes itself as an undemocratic organization. By the way, a congress of the Soviets in Ukraine has to give its opinions on the ways of polling the population about its belongingness to a

particular region. I am finished.

Bakinsky. I do not have anything else as well.

Stalin. Goodbye, Comrade.

Bakinsky. Goodbye. Send greetings to comrades and, in particular, to Comrade Lenin.

Stalin. I will send your greetings to Lenin, and Pyatakov, and the others as well. I am leaving now. Goodbye.

Bakinsky. Goodbye.

Porsh. I am asking Comrade Stalin to remain on the line. The opinion about the undemocratic character of the Central Rada contradicts the factual side of party policy of the Central Rada, which sustained itself from the first days of its emergence in all political and socioeconomic issues. There is no qualification elements in the Rada ever since the cadets left it a long time ago. All regional socialist parties, including the Trudoviks, are represented in [the Central Rada]. There are over 200 peasant deputies elected at the congress of peasant representatives from regional populations; there are over 150 of soldier deputies elected at the last congress, and about 70 representatives of all regional socialist parties. In case you are interested in detailed structure of the Central Rada, it will be sent to you tomorrow. Comrade Bakinsky passed political and socioeconomic platform of the Central Rada in silence. I, too, hold back some information, but I can report necessary data in form of documents and special acts. You are gravely mistaken about [undemocratic] annexation of provinces by the Central Rada: Ekaterinoslav, Kharkiv, and Kherson provincial peasant congresses have supported accession to Ukraine. Ekaterinoslav and, if I am not mistaken, Kharkiv and Odessa Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies have supported the accession as well. This is all.

Marxism and Modernity. 2000. №1. pp. 3-5.

Central Federal Archive of Public Association of Ukraine. 57. 2. 486. 76-84.

Printed from the text in the journal.

Note. The transcription of this conversation was published for the first time in the newspaper "Kievskaya Mysl'" ["The Kiev Thought"], issues №276 of November 18 (December 1), 1917.

Translated by Polina Brik of the American Party of Labor. January 14, 2017.

Edited by Leonard Zorfass of the American Party of Labor. January 16, 2017.

National Commissar on the National Question of Ukraine

November 24 (December 7), 1917

Yesterday evening Comrade Sergei Bakinsky conducted a long conversation with the National Commissar on the national questions and a member of the Central Committee of the Bolshevik party, Comrade Stalin.

ON THE UKRAINIAN REPUBLIC

As a reply to our questions pertaining to the Central Rada and self-government of Ukraine as a federal republic, Comrade Stalin stated that:

– Views of the Bolshevik party on the national question are known: they are stated in the resolution of the April conference of our party.

If you must know opinion on the national question of the Russian republic, I will state: I am authorized to speak on behalf of the Council of People's Commissars.

– Please.

– I am answering. The views of the central authority elected during the Second All-Russian Congress of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and declared valid recently by the Congress of Peasant Deputies are as follows:

Recognition behind nations of the right for full self-determination, up to secession and formation of an independent state.

The will of a nation is defined by referendum or by national constituents. If the will of a nation is in favor of the federal republic, then the Council of People's Commissars cannot have anything against it. This is the right of each nation, and the central government will concur with it.

ON THE UKRAINIAN AUTHORITIES

The regional power, continues Comrade Stalin, as well as local powers in other regions, has to belong to the Worker, Soldier, and Peasant Deputies.

MEETING BETWEEN THE CENTRAL RADA AND THE COUNCIL OF PEOPLE'S COMMISSARS

There is a wide space provided for agreement between the Central Rada and the Council of People's Commissars. Thus, it will be expedient to organize a meeting between representatives of the Central Rada and the Council of People's Commissars.

FULL AUTONOMY

As for autonomy of Ukraine: it has to be full and unconstrained by the commissars. No guardianship is admissible from above, and no patrol of the Ukrainian people is acceptable.

ON THE RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES

On the night of November 15, the Central Executive Committee of the Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers', and analogous body of the Soviet of Peasant deputies created at the recent congress, have merged.

The government will include left-wing revolutionary socialists. The right-wing socialists and Mensheviks excluded themselves from the revolutionary-democratic coalition.

The front, the nine tenths of it, is in favor of the Council of People's Commissars.

Military operations have ceased until November 19. We have sent a note to English and French embassies, but no reply was received yet. On November 19, negotiations about truce are expected to take place.

RETURN OF UKRAINIAN RELICS

Today, representatives of the Petrograd section of the Central Rada, under agreement with the Council of People's Commissars, took some national Ukrainian relics - medals and others - which were taken away from Ukrainians during Catherine II era, for the purposes of bringing them back to Ukraine.

DEPARTURE OF UKRAINIAN MILITARY UNITS

Today or tomorrow several thousands of Ukrainian soldiers, with approval of commander-in-chief, will leave to Ukraine. Needless to say that in peaceful time, Ukraine can be the place of stay of the Ukrainian soldiers. But war complicates it, and without permission of appropriate military authorities, free relocation of national groups of the army should be reduced to a minimum. I am speaking about this as a rule, knowing that any rule allows exceptions.

CONGRESS OF THE SOVIETS IN UKRAINE

Comrade Stalin. All of us think that a regional congress of workers', soldiers, and peasant deputies is absolutely necessary. This mistrust with which the Ukrainians treat the idea of such congress is unclear to us. We believe that you Kievites, Odessits, Kharkovites, Ekaterinoslavets, and others, have to undertake convocation of such congress - obviously, in conjunction with the Central Rada.

If the Central Rada refuses to cooperate with you on this matter, which seems improbably to us, then you should convoke [the congress] without the Rada.

Authority of the Soviets is such revolutionary precept which we cannot reject, and we do not understand how the Central Ukrainian Rada can argue with this axiom.

ON POWER OF THE SOVIETS

Comrade Stalin. I repeat once again: our collective opinion is to immediately convene a regional congress of workers', soldiers', and peasant deputies in Ukraine. Questions of the Soviet authority, be it central or regional, do not allow any concessions. I cannot imagine any other way to form regional power and its other forms. Mistrust of the Central Rada to the Soviet power is unclear to me.

IMPERIALISM OF THE CENTRAL RADA

Comrade Bakinsky. Your mistrust is explained by the fact that, in construction and its membership, the Central Rada is far from being a democratic establishment.

Comrade Stalin. It has to be so. It is clear from the fact that the Central Rada keeps undemocratically annexing new provinces over and over again, without asking the inhabitants of these provinces whether they want to be a part of Ukraine.

All of us think that in such cases, the question has to be, and can be, resolved only by the population itself by means of polls, referendum, and other [questionnaires]. Since the Central Rada does not do this, but rather chooses to absolutely arbitrarily annex new provinces, it exposes itself as an undemocratic organization.

A congress of the Soviets in Ukraine has to give its opinions on the ways of polling the population about its belongingness to a particular region.

Izvestiya. 1917. № 234. November 24.

Collaboration with the Muslim Soviet

December 2 (15), 1917

(NEWSPAPER REPORT)

Yesterday, a representative from the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Muslim Soviet, Ahmed Tsalikov approached the Council of People's Commissars with a proposal of collaboration on the basis of business matter. The People's Commissar of Nationalities Stalin declared that a party label is not necessary from the Executive Committee of Muslims for collaboration with the authorities. Loyal relationship would suffice, so that our collaboration works in the interest of Muslim working people.

Soon, a board of Muslims representatives from the Muslim Volga region, Crimea, Kyrgyz, Transcaspian Tatars, mountaineers of the Caucasus, and others, will be organized under the Council of People's Commissars. This board will involve the representative of the Executive Committee of the All-Russian Muslim Soviet.

Yesterday Comrade Tsalikov declared that the Muslims would like the Osman's Koran, previously confiscated from them and currently kept in the Hermitage, to be returned to them.

The People's Commissar of Nationalities Stalin declared that if this is what is demanded by the Muslims, then their national relic will be solemnly returned to them.

Stalin promised to talk to the People's Commissar of Education A. Lunacharsky, who has the authority over the Hermitage.

Izvestiya. 1917. № 242. December 2.

Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. 71. 10. 171. 19

Note: On the basis of the resolution passed by the Council of People's Commissars on December 19 (6), the relic was transferred to the Regional Muslim congress of the Petrograd national district, and later – to the Muslims of Ufa. In 1922, according to the petition of the Turkestan Muslims, the Osman's Koran was transferred Tashkent, where it is kept up to this day.

To the Ukrainian Workers, Soldiers, Peasants, and to all Ukrainian People

December 10 (23), 1917

Ukrainian brothers! The enemies of our freedom want to divide us. The Central Rada sided with the enemies of the Soviet power in Russia.

The Central Rada entered the agreement with counterrevolutionary forces of Kerensky, in regards to question on how much of province the imperialist Russian bourgeoisie deigned to give to Ukraine. The Central Rada sent delegations to Petrograd for Kerensky and Nekrasov, while patiently enduring all the scoffing of these counterrevolutionary leaders. However, the Central Rada did not take even the slightest step towards the commonwealth with the Workers' and Peasants' Soviets which opened the door to freedom and happiness for all nations of Russia.

Moreover, at the moment when the Workers' and Peasants' revolution won at all decisive points of Russia, – at this moment the Central Rada struck a blow against our revolution. When the counterrevolutionary movement started on Don by the black-hundredist general Kaledin, the Central Rada, laughing at the common sense, supported this “self-determination of the Don” movement. The Rada conducts negotiations with the kornilovite Kaledin. The Rada intervenes with movement of the revolutionary troops and allows Kaledin to mobilize troops against the revolution.

The Rada went even further than that. It committed an act which will fill the hearts of all conscientious workers and peasants with indignation. The Central Rada attacked the Kiev revolutionary troops during the night, disarmed them, and sent them away from Kiev. This is a provocation to the working class of all Russia. This is a provocation to the revolutionary soldiers, workers, and peasants.

Ukrainian brothers! You are being assured that we oppose Ukraine's right to self-determine. This is a lie. Not for a single minute do we think of encroaching on the rights of Ukraine. The revolutionary proletariat is most interested in the national self-determination behind all nations, up to complete secession.

Even only from the point of view of well-understood national interests of Ukraine, you have to support the Workers' and Soldiers' authorities of Russia. Think about tomorrow. Where is that class which would be able to provide freedom to all people, including the Ukrainian people? You have seen during the 6 months of revolution the politics of the cadet bourgeoisie and of coalition ministries where the Mensheviks and the socialist revolutionaries used to preside. These politics led to the defeat of national freedoms of Ukraine. Even several days prior to the fall of coalition government, Kerensky called members of the Rada to Petrograd, so that he can persecute them. The Central Committee of cadets, being the heart of the Kaledinsky plot, even now advocates for suffocation of Ukraine. Nevertheless, the Central Rada factually gives its hands to the kornilovite cadets.

Having scented treason of the Central Rada, all the black crows of counterrevolution immediately flew to Kiev. Imperialists of all countries lay their hopes on the Rada. The bandits of foreign capital are ready to give loans to the Ukrainian Rada – just to set it against the workers' and soldiers' revolution. Those parties and leaders who only yesterday were smothering the Rada, are plotting against the Soviets today.

Ukrainian workers! Your interests are being betrayed to capitalists.

Ukrainian soldiers! You are being set against All-Russian soldier family. You are drawn into criminal internecine wars in the interests of Ukrainian landowners.

Ukrainian peasants! You will not see the land, you will not see the freedom if you break away from the workers and soldiers of Russia.

Remember that. Remember that by opposing the great workers' and peasants' revolution, the Central Rada is committing the greatest crime against workers, peasants, and soldiers of all Russia; it is committing a crime against socialism, against the International. Demand the immediate re-election of the Rada! Demand the transition of power to the Soviets in Ukraine!

Let Ukrainians prevail in these Soviets. Let the Soviet power strengthen – the only power capable to address interests of workers, soldiers, and peasants.

The Central Rada does everything possible to seed discord between us and Ukrainians. But at this moment we declare once again: Soviet power is standing on guard with your national freedoms, as well as all the nations inhabiting Russia. We declare to you:

– Ukrainian worker, Ukrainian peasant and Russian worker, Russian peasant – are brothers; while Ukrainian peasant and Ukrainian landowner – are enemies not for life, but for death.

Socialism is coming. Release of all mankind from enslavement, from all types of oppression including the national oppression, is coming.

Forward, towards your and our freedom, towards the victory of workers, soldiers, and peasants, forward towards socialism!

People's Commissar for Nationalities
I. Dzhagashvili-Stalin

All-Russian Executive Committee of Councils of
Workers', Soldiers', and Peasant Deputies, All-Russian
Peasant Congress, Petrograd Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies,
Red Army Headquarters, representatives of labor union, of factory committees,
of regiment committees, of regional Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies

Army and Fleet of Working and Peasant Russia.
1917. № 17. December 10.

Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History. 71. 10. 199. 107-110

Translated by Polina Brik of the American Party of Labor. March 4, 2017.
Edited by Kevin Kipp of the American Party of Labor. March 6, 2017.
