

The Latest Publications of the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia in Modern Russian Historiography (1914-1920)

Albert N. Valiakhmetov¹

¹ Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia

Correspondence: Albert N. Valiakhmetov, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, 420008, Kazan, Kremlyovskaya Street, 18, Russia. E-mail: albert80@mail.ru

Received: June 15, 2015 Accepted: June 24, 2015 Online Published: June 30, 2015

doi:10.5539/jsd.v8n7p49

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v8n7p49>

Abstract

The urgency of the problem stems from the fact that the history of the Czechoslovak Corps is viewed in modern Russian historiography in the context of the history of the Civil War in Russia and continues to be the key to its history. The article deals with the problem question in modern Russian historiography in studying the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia. Three approaches, which differ in varying degrees of recognition of the responsibility of the Czechoslovak Legionnaires in the outbreak of the civil war in Russia, are examined in this article. The conclusion is that it is wrong to shift the responsibility in this matter to an external force, as it leads away from understanding the nature and root causes of the civil war. It is noted that despite the expansion of the source base, researchers continue to focus their attention on various aspects of military and political history of the Czechoslovak Corps. The article highlights the national discourse in research on the history of the Czechoslovak Corps. As an important achievement of modern Russian historiography it is stated that national liberation motives in the actions of the Czechoslovak armed forces in Russia are considered to have been of primary importance. The article notes the priority of regional historians in the study of the topic. This priority can be explained by the specifics of the subject of their study as well as the opportunities that regional archives open. The practical significance of the study is that the results and conclusions can be used to assess the state of development of modern historiography and find the strategy of historiographical research, and to develop the courses on historical specialties: "History of Russia", "Historiography of the history of Russia" and special courses on history and historiography of the civil war and foreign military intervention in Russia.

Keywords: Czechoslovak Corps in Russia, Czechoslovak legionaries, internationalists, modern Russian historiography, the civil war in Russia, "a small civil war"

1. Introduction

In Soviet historiography the main facts of the history of the Czechoslovak Corps was its "rebellion" (armed uprising against the Soviet rule in May 1918) and subsequently its participation in the fighting on the side of the anti-Bolshevik forces. It was considered as part of the invading troops, and its prehistory was not actually taken into consideration, while the chronological period from August 1914 (creation of the Czech unit - the first volunteer armed group consisting of Czechs) to May 1918 ("rebellion") was twice the period of the "rebellion" (May 1918) to complete evacuation of the Corps (September 1920). History of the Czechoslovak Corps was integrated into the formal concept of the civil war in Russia. The historiography of the Civil War was an important part of the ideology of the Soviet state.

The elimination of the monopoly of the Communist Party in Russia led to scientific pluralism in the country. The first reaction of the scientific community was a change in views: some historians shifted the responsibility for "rebellion" from the Czechoslovak Corps and the Entente (it was typical for the Soviet historiography) to the Bolsheviks (Joffe, 1992; Ivanov, 1997; Tsvetkov, 2001). There was a time frame extension: historians began to study history of the Czechoslovak Corps before "the rebellion." The expansion of the time frame led to the expansion of the context: history of the Corps was viewed as a part of the world war history. These processes were accompanied by an extension of the source base, which resulted in the publication of collections of documents, greater access to the archives. Now there is a possibility of convergence of domestic and foreign historiography (Valiakhmetov, 2012).

Despite all these changes, in scientific publications and fiction, "BeloCzechs" still can be found (Gergileva & Gergilev, 2015) (members of the Czechoslovak Legion were called "BeloCzechs" in Soviet historiography since the 1930s). In the history books the beginning of the Civil war is still May 1918, that by default is associated with the already mentioned "rebellion." Connection of the civil war beginning with the actions of "external forces" takes us from understanding its root causes and distorts its essence.

Such "residual effects" in historiography are due to the strong influence of traditions. This is typical for the works in which the Civil War is not studied thoroughly but only "shown" (course books, works of art). The authors of these works express their own ideas and some well-established view on this issue. At the same time they influence the public opinion and social memory not less than professional historians. Such involuntary adherence to established clichés and stereotypes may contribute to a distorted picture of the past.

For this reason, it is obvious that professional historical community should take the initiative in the revision of the history of the Czechoslovak Corps in their hands. Since the 1990s, there has been a "historiographical explosion": the number of works on the history of the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia reaches tens, which is significantly greater than it was in Soviet historiography. However, the problem is if there has been a qualitative leap? Have historians reached a new level in understanding this question?

All this makes the historiographical compilation and interpretation of the scientific literature (especially articles) about the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia in modern Russian historiography actual.

2. Methodological Framework

2.1 The Objectives of the Study

In the study, it was necessary to solve the following problems:

- 1) to describe the problem field of modern historiography of the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia;
- 2) to examine the national discourse in research works on the history of the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia.

2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Basis of the Research

The article is based on general scientific principles of knowledge (historicism, scientific objectivity). The methods used are due to the object of the study and depend on the problems to be solved. While working on the article a system of methods was applied: general scientific (analysis, synthesis) and specifically historical.

Historical and comparative method allowed to compare different historiographical concepts and to identify peculiarities (in terms of content, perspectives, etc.). The typological method helped to identify common features in the development of modern Russian historiography of the Czechoslovak Corps. The historical and systematic method allowed to reveal the impact of external (relative to historical science) factors on the course and content of the problem.

In addition, philological methods applied in this research allowed to identify and analyze the semantic structures used by historians.

3. Results

3.1 The Czechoslovak Corps in Russia (1914-1920): The Problematic Issue

For a long time in the national historiography the Czechoslovak Corps was "connected" with two main contexts: foreign (the participant of intervention in 1918-1920) and internal (the participant of the civil war of 1918-1920 in Russia).

The history of the Czechoslovak Corps study is actual especially for historians of the civil war in Russia to "to picture the events that happened 96 years ago [in 1918] in Russia" (Kuptsov, 2014). In spite of the fact that the theme is "traditional" the history of the Czechoslovak Corps still requires studying. An example is an article of historian and ethnographer I.V.Kuptsov from Chelyabinsk "Brief History of the Czechoslovak Corps" (devoted to the erection of the monument to the Czechoslovak legionaries in Chelyabinsk in 2011), which was "prepared in late 2011 (shortly after the installation of the monument to the Czechoslovak legionnaires) at the request of Ministry of Culture of the Chelyabinsk region and placed on the Ministry website" (Kuptsov, 2014).

The history of the Czechoslovak Corps study in the context of the history of the civil war in Russia raised one of the major problems: the question of the degree of responsibility of the Corps for unleashing civil war in Russia. In this connection three approaches can be noted.

The first approach, according to which the civil war in Russia started with "the Czech performance at the end of May 1918" (Gergileva & Gergilev, 2015) is, in fact, a continuation of the view that prevailed in the Soviet historiography.

The second approach is more reasonable. Historians note the role of parts of the Czechoslovak Corps "in the escalation of the conflict between the Red Guards and the anti-Bolshevik forces in the Volga region" (Vasilchenko, 2013). The Corps actions are described as "the catalyst of the Civil War in the Middle Volga" (Vasilchenko, 2013).

The third approach is an attempt to get away from the traditional assessment. "Analyzed sources and the events do not support the opinion that existed in the Soviet historiography that the Corps played a role of detonator in deploying large-scale social war in Russia. But at the same time one must admit that its presence aggravated a military-political situation" (Ribkov & Demidova, 2013).

The desire to shift the responsibility for the outbreak of the civil (internal) war to an external force (in this case, the Czechoslovak Corps) takes us from understanding its essential reasons. Removing the responsibility for unleashing the civil war from the nation and shifting it on the foreigners, we thus distort our own past.

The Czechoslovak Corps was an external force against the Russian history. It is not surprising that historians paid attention to those aspects of its history that bound the Corps with the history of Russia. This led to the fact that "research repertoire" almost always remained the same: the military-political history of the Czechoslovak Corps - or rather, the history of struggle against it.

In modern historiography there are attempts to broaden the range of research. A.G. Rybkov and E.S. Marutsky admit the necessity to pay attention to the sources, "the analysis of which gives an indication of the internal life of the Czechoslovak Corps" (Ribkov & Marutsky, 2014). Their study will allow "to judge the moral and psychological atmosphere in the Corps, which in difficult conditions of the war was important" (Ribkov & Marutsky, 2014). There are articles containing "interesting facts about the daily life of legionaries" (Vasilchenko, 2013). However, even in this article the daily life of the Czechoslovak legionnaires is regarded as a "factor of the anti-Bolshevik revolt." Therefore, in modern Russian historiography there is still the traditional attitude to the general problematic issue of the history of the Czechoslovak Corps.

3.2 The Czechoslovak Corps in Russia (1914-1920): The National Discourse

In the national historiography the national discourse escaped the attention of historians for a long time: the political (class) discourse was primary, and the national discourse was secondary. The situation began to change in the 1990s.

The national discourse in the history of the Czechoslovak Corps is manifested in several ways.

First of all, it is the recognition of the national character of the Czechoslovak liberation movement abroad the part of which was the Czechoslovak Corps in Russia. According to historians, by the autumn of 1917 "the prevailing idea in the Czech national movement was the idea of the state establishment with the support of the Entente. In the opinion of T.G Masaryk, the author of this idea, Czechoslovak units in Russia were to become the basis of the future national army and the guarantor of national independence of Czechoslovakia" (Vasilchenko, 2014). Moreover, that the national discourse, the struggle for the independent Czech state was typical for the Czech military volunteer movement since its formation (Zakharov, 2012). Recognition of national liberation primary motives in the actions of the Czechoslovak armed forces in Russia since their creation (which determined the behavior of the Czechoslovak Corps almost throughout its existence) is an important achievement of modern Russian historiography.

A second aspect of the national discourse is the role of national rhetoric in the relationship of local (Russian) socio-political and military forces with the Czech Corps.

"Slavic rhetoric" was observed particularly among representatives of the anti-Bolshevik forces who invited Czechoslovak legionnaires to cooperate in the joint fight against the Bolsheviks. They understood the national character of the Czechoslovak movement and took advantage of it.

In modern Russian historiography there is an opinion that "Slavic rhetoric" was popular with the Bolsheviks as well: "In the Soviet press there were articles in which the Czechs and Slovaks were described as Slavic brothers, with the same spirit, goals and objectives. The struggle for freedom and the creation of the independent Czechoslovak state were considered to be revolutionary. The Corps of legionnaires was not thought to belong to counter-revolutionary forces (Ribkov & Demidova, 2014). The following examples were given: in Penza "May 27, 1918 a joint meeting was held, the settlement of the conflict was in its agenda. The speakers (V.V. Kuraev,

N.G. Liberson) talked about friendship of Slavic peoples, the joint struggle against world imperialism, urged Russian people not to fight for Entente interests." (Ribkov & Demidova, 2012).

Another important aspect of the national discourse is the relationship of the Czechoslovak legionaries with subjects of Austria-Hungary and Germany, which were on the territory of Russia as well.

According to A.M.Zaharova: "The phenomenon of foreign volunteering during the Civil War in Russia is well known, but it still needs studying. Domestic historiography paid attention mainly to the so-called "Internationalists". Their activity was studied carefully but unsystematically" (Zakharov, 2012).

The movement of internationalists is now reinterpreted: "The Bolsheviks did a lot to form internationalist groups of prisoners, mostly from the Hungarians, Austrians, Germans, and the White Army generals brought the legionaries from Czechoslovak Corps to military action against the Bolsheviks.

They used the national hostility between the Hungarians, Austrians, Germans, on the one hand, and Czechoslovaks on the other "(Gergileva & Gergilev, 2015).

It came to bloodshed, "it is natural that in response to the repression of the Czechoslovaks against the Germans and Magyars the latter began to defend themselves joining the Red Army and forming international battalions, which the Bolsheviks used against the Czechoslovaks. In the battles the two sides were ruthless" (Gergileva & Gergilev, 2015).

At the same time "the legionnaires understood and justified military actions against the "International Brigades", which consisted of the Hungarians, Austrians and Germans from the former Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war and German armies. They fought against them with great ferocity; prisoners were not taken"(Kuptsov, 2014).

Special attention should be paid to the complicated relationships between the Czechoslovak legionnaires and Czechoslovak internationalists. In the memoirs of legionnaire V.Kaplitskii there is the evidence that after the conquest of Penza Czechoslovak legionaries arranged lynching of Czechoslovak Communists; a few people were first beaten and then executed (Kaplitskii, 2012).

This phenomenon can be described as "a small civil war" on the territory of Russia "armed confrontation between nations inhabiting Austria-Hungary (including the fight of the Czechoslovak legionaries with Czechoslovak internationalists)" (Valiakhmetov, 2013).

However, despite the serious contradictions between the Czechoslovak legionnaires and Czechoslovak internationalists, there was something that brought them together: "It is noteworthy that the Slavic volunteers, who fought in the Red army, understood the aims of their compatriots. National independence meant a lot for them, but from their point of view, it was to come after the social revolution, and not to go before it "(Zakharov, 2012).

4. Discussions

Among the historiographical works on the subject, published in the last decade there are articles on modern Russian (Valiakhmetov, 2012) and western (Zakharov, 2006) historiography. More often, the historiographical digressions can be found in the articles devoted to the Czechoslovak Corps.

In the first place historians estimate the previous Soviet period of historiography of the Czechoslovak Corps development: "The opinion that the Czechoslovak Corps was a counter-revolutionary force that provoked a full-scale civil war in Russia was a determining opinion for a long time in studies of the question. The domestic historiography was based on this fact. According to it the legionaries were considered the participants of the events, against the Soviet power and acting as conductors of the Entente plans. It must be admitted that the events of 1918-1920-ies seemingly confirm these assessments and conclusions. But history is not one-dimensional: the more time passes from the events, the more obvious their versatility becomes. As we identify new, previously inaccessible sources, with the disappearance of the ideological pressure, it has become possible to expand the range of research problems and to highlight the key points "(Ribkov & Demidova, 2012).

M.A. Vasilchenko notes in modern Russian historiography a surge of scientific interest to the issues related to the history of the Czechoslovak units in Russia: "These works are often based on the superficial factual data describing well-known historical episodes such as Chelyabinsk incident, the May telegram of A .D. Trotskii, the first clashes of the Czechs and the local Soviets in Siberia. To these works we can add the existing array of similar works, differing only in the methodological approach and in the author's interpretation of the well-known historical events"(Vasilchenko, 2013, the Soviet government).

5. Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made after the study of the question.

1. The Czechoslovak Corps is still viewed in modern Russian historiography in the context of the civil war and foreign military intervention; historians continue to focus their attention on various aspects of the military-political history of the Corps in 1917-1918.

The national discourse, highlighted by us in the works of other researchers discover new facets in the study of history of the Czechoslovak Corps as well as the events of the Civil War in Russia, which included not only the social and political confrontation, but also the opposition at the national level. An integral part of that period was the so-called "small civil war", which included the confrontation between the subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The confrontation between different Czechoslovak legionnaires and Czechoslovak internationalists was particularly dramatic: they had one goal - an independent country - but they tried to achieve the goal in different ways. Some chose the national revolution, while the others relied on the victory of the world revolution. In any case, the recognition of the fact that national liberation motives were primary in the actions of the Czechoslovak armed forces in Russia since their creation (these motives determined the behavior of the Czechoslovak Corps almost throughout its existence) is an important achievement of modern Russian historiography.

2. The regional historians have the priority in the study of this topic (Kazan, Krasnoyarsk, Samara, Saratov, Chelyabinsk). Obviously, this is due to the fact that the main actions of the Czechoslovak Corps during the Civil War took place in the regions and as a result some materials in the local archives were gathered, and served as an important prerequisite for the interest in this topic.

The enthusiasm of regional historians can be explained by the fact that there is a considerable number of materials in the regional archives on the history of the Czechoslovak Corps. On the one hand, this is a positive factor as it opens up further prospects in the study of the topic. On the other hand, there is a negative aspect: this fact prevents from creating one information (source) space. It turns out that every researcher has an access to only a certain segment (with the possibility of scientific mobility) and recreating the whole picture of the sources is connected with certain difficulties.

Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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