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NATIONALISM AND SOCIAL CLASS IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION:
THE CASES OF BAKU AND TIFLIS

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NATIONALISM AND SOCIAL CLASS IN THE RUSSIAN REVOLUTION:

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Historians have either neglected unintentionally or skirted deliberately a most perplexing anomaly of the revolutionary events in Russia in 1917-1918. While most would accept at this point the presence, if not decisiveness, of class antagonisms and conflicts in the central Russian cities -- with an increasingly militant working class standing opposed to the propertied elements of Russian society -- when studying the national borderlands they generally dismiss the importance of class struggles and insist more often than not on the overwhelming significance of ethnic conflicts between different nationalities, particularly those between the formerly-dominant Russians and the newly-emerging minorities native to the periphery. While emphasizing the importance of nationalism and focusing almost exclusively on the political struggles between ethnic parties, the principal western writings on the national borderlands have largely ignored investigation into the social structure of the minority communities. The contrast between the image of the revolution in Russia proper and in the borderlands has been drawn much too starkly to be convincing and clearly demands further investigation of the social basis of nationality conflicts and nationalism to see if class as well as ethnic factors played a part in the intensification of hostilities evident in 1917-1918.

Of those western writers who have examined Transcaucasia during the years of revolution, Professor Richard Pipes is the least concerned with the social dimension. In his Formation of the Soviet Union: Communism and Nationalism,

1917-1923, he depicts the history of these years as a "conquest" of the borderlands by a dynamic, centralizing Russian regime.¹ The Bolsheviks "temporarily won considerable public support" in Russia proper and in other areas inhabited by Great Russians and then engaged and defeated the minority nationalities who in most cases were led by the nationalist intelligentsia. The contest was uneven, and the nationalists were defeated almost everywhere. Pipes argues that national struggle was much more vital than struggle between classes in these regions, and even where one might expect class conflict to be paramount, as in the oil-producing city of Baku, national struggle took precedence. Pipes exaggerates the point made by a Soviet historian and asserts that the Baku Bolsheviks came to power "in the wake of a purely national clash."²

In his encyclopedic Armenia on the Road to Independence, 1918, Professor Richard G. Hovannisian is primarily concerned with the political and psychological pressures which forced the Armenian leadership in Transcaucasia to embark on the perilous journey to state sovereignty.³ As he weaves his narrative through the complexities of the revolutionary year, he stays close to the major political actors, their programs and policies, "hopes and emotions," but in not exploring the roots of Armenian nationalism leaves the reader with an impression of its permanence and inevitability.

In contrast to Pipes and Hovannisian, Professor Firuz Kazemzadeh, the author of The Struggle for Transcaucasia (1917-1921), probes into the nature of the society in which the Armenians, Georgians, Azerbaijanis, and Russians of the region lived and delineates the various class and ethnic divisions.⁴ He notes, for example, that the Georgians "had practically no native bourgeoisie. The tasks of the middleman were performed by the Armenians, who were hated for their wealth and their virtual monopoly of all Georgian commer-

cial life....In a certain sense national feeling became one with class feeling; national struggle and class struggle fused."⁵ Kazemzadeh argues that Georgia in the early twentieth century was experiencing three revolutions at once: the national struggle for Georgia as a nation, the liberal revolution for civil and human rights against the autocracy, and the "socialist revolution of the small concentrated proletariat of the railway shops and a few industries."⁶ Kazemzadeh is unsure whether this third revolution, the struggle of the working class against the upper classes, was more important than the other two, thus leaving the question of primacy of national versus social allegiances unanswered. But the implication seems to be that nationalism and national aspirations were more important, even to Georgian socialists, than the class struggle. Here Kazemzadeh agrees with Pipes, Hovannisian, and others that "socialism -- at first unwittingly, then consciously -- allied itself with the rising nationalism."⁷ As for Baku, Kazemzadeh sees the conflicts there as almost purely ethnic in nature. In his analysis of the March 1918 events he argues that they "assumed the character of a gigantic race riot."⁸ "The 'civil war' had degenerated into a massacre, the Armenians killing the Muslims irrespective of their political affiliations or social and economic position."⁹

While I do not take issue with the general consensus that Caucasian minorities experienced intense national feelings during the Russian Civil War, it is difficult to accept a strict separation between national expression and the social context in which it is manifested. When the social aspects are played down or left out, the resulting impression is that nationalism or a sense of nationality is an instinctual, inevitable, permanent or natural feeling which transcends historical context. I would argue, on the contrary, that even such deeply seated feelings as national awareness or nationalism

appear (and are absent) at different times, under different circumstances, and that the history of their volatility demands some exploration of the social base from which they spring. More narrowly the question must be asked: what is nationalism's relationship to social structure, particularly to class and the struggles between classes?

The assumption of this paper is that both nationality and class existed as demonstrable demographic entities in Transcaucasia in the first decades of this century, but that the transformation of members of these social groups into "class-conscious" or "nationalist" was mediated by the existence of the other social group. That is, class and nationality both existed "in themselves," but as they proceeded to change into entities "for themselves" they ran up against the contradictory loyalties toward the other social group. An Azerbaijani worker, for instance, had vertical ties, based on language, history, religion, and social origin, with other members of his nationality, be they mullah or businessman or peasant. But at the same time he had horizontal ties to his fellow workers, based on economic interests, the antagonism felt toward industrialists and foremen, and their shared social experience and distance from other classes. Under specific historical circumstances and in the context of what real threats to his well-being existed, the worker could shift his primary loyalty and consequent behavior from class-conscious solidarity with his proletarian comrades to nationalist unity with his ethnic brethren. Why such shifts occurred and the consequences for the revolutionary process in Transcaucasia in 1917-1918 are the subjects of this paper.

Beginning with the imposition of imperial Russian rule over the non-Russian peoples, tsarism implied not only the dominance of one nation over another but also the identification of a class of rulers with one ethnic group and the bulk of the classes of the ruled with other ethnic groups. In the world

of severely limited goods and privileges that characterized tsarist Russia membership in certain ethnic groups implied claims to privilege. As Karl Deutsch has pointed out in his seminal study of nationalism, nationality "emphasizes group preference and group peculiarities, and so tends to keep out all outside competitors. It promises opportunity, for it promises to eliminate or lessen linguistic, racial, class, or caste barriers to the social rise of individuals within it. And it promises to reduce the probability of outside competition for all sorts of opportunities, from business deals to marriages and jobs."¹⁰ In national regions even members of subordinate classes who happened to be Russian enjoyed at times an ambiguously privileged position vis-a-vis other members of their social group who were not Russian. And access to positions of influence and power within the Russian state generally required a thoroughgoing Russification on the part of minority aspirants. In so far as Russian rule was perceived by minorities as a form of colonialism, it was understood that Russians of whatever social status had to be considered as members in good standing of the master nationality. In the colonial context certain nationalities, thus, were transformed into classes, and the relationships between ethnic groups took on aspects of class relationships.

At the same time it must be remembered that autocratic Russia was a society of estates (soslovie) in which rank based on birth or one's place in the Table of Ranks determined one's privileges, exemptions, and duties. Members of minorities could enter the Russian social hierarchy by service to the Romanov state, and several groups, notably the Baltic German nobility and the Georgian nobility, developed such a close association with the Russian authorities that they perceived themselves as a cosmopolitan rather than a national elite. Estate and class lines cut across the allegiances to nation-

ality for significant groups and even hindered the growth of ethnic nationalism. German businessmen in the Baltic cities and Armenian merchants in Tiflis and Baku were so intimately tied to the capitalist and industrial development of Russia that they proved to be the enemies of the nationalism spawned in their own native intelligentsias. Ethnic and class lines were sometimes blurred, sometimes reinforced by the peculiar way in which Russian autocracy promoted the advance of certain nationalities at the expense of others, e.g., the Baltic Germans at the expense of Estonians and Latvians; the Armenian bourgeoisie at the expense of Georgian peasants and workers; and late in the nineteenth century, the Georgian nobles at the expense of Armenian merchants and intellectuals.

Thus, no simple equation of class and nationality can be made in the Russian Empire; nor can one neglect without danger of oversimplification the complex manner in which nationality at times underlined class and at other times undermined it. One might go even further and argue that the perception of one nationality by another was affected by features which stem from a particular class structure. Ethnic stereotypes often reflect behavior of a visible class much more than activity of a whole people. Thus, the Armenian stereotype of the lazy, impractical but haughty Georgian is a reduction of the national characteristics of a nation to the traits of certain Georgian nobles seen parading along Golovinskii prospekt, traits imitated perhaps by the nobles' social inferiors but hardly the everyday habits of Tiflis factory workers or peasants eking a living out of their tiny vineyard in Kakheti. Likewise, the Georgian view of the Armenian as a hard-working, frugal, shrewd manipulator stems more from the familiar mokalake of Sololaki, the archetypal Armenian bourgeois, than from his less fortunate brethren in the mines of Allaverdi or the hills of Zangezur. Clearly the

dominance of the Georgian nation by the warrior nobility and the prominence among Armenians of the urban tradesmen created ideals based on the life patterns and culture of these elites in the rest of the national population, a kind of upward aspiration or cultural hegemony which affected members of every class. Thus, to a certain extent the stereotypes reflected a part of social reality and should not be too quickly dismissed, but my contention is that they tell us much more about the visible elites and cultural dominance than racial characteristics of different peoples.

This complex interaction of class and nationality has been noted by Eugene Genovese in his studies of slave society in America, and his perception might usefully be taken into account by historians of "autocratic" society:

It is no longer possible to believe that a class can be understood apart from its culture, or that most modern classes can be understood apart from their nationality.....It is impossible to make sense out of nationalism apart from national culture, and it is impossible to make sense out of either national culture or national interest apart from the particular confrontation of the class elements that determine them.¹¹

This question of the relationship and relative importance of class and nationality was raised early in the twentieth century by Russian Marxists. The national question, one of the most annoying and perplexing sources of dissension within the Social Democratic movement in Eastern Europe and Russia, seemed to defy an adequate understanding by intellectuals committed to an internationalist strategy based on class solidarity. The dispute over what weight to give to nationalist expression by a party claiming to represent members of the working class regardless of nationality at times alienated Lenin from his closest comrades. At one extreme were those, like Rosa Luxemburg or Piatakov, who rejected the relevance of national considerations. In

1917 the latter called for the slogan "away with frontiers" and branded self-determination as "simply a phrase without definite content." Lenin, on the other hand, consistently defended the notion of self-determination for all peoples to the point of separation and nationhood and met much resistance to this position from within his own party. But it was Stalin who raised the intriguing question of the circumstances under which self-determination would be made. Would feudal rulers or bourgeois nationalists decide for peoples who lived under their sway, or would the "objective" interests of the proletariat be the sole criterion? Once social content became important, the specific relationship of class and national factors had to be more carefully defined.¹²

The issue, then, of the relative weight of nationality and class in the revolution is more than a purely academic question. In a sense the legitimacy of Soviet justifications of their reintegration of minority nationalities into a single state are at stake. Not surprisingly Western denials of the class factor argue in favor of the validity of the nationalist claims that only separation from Russia and the formation of nation-states would have satisfied the real aspirations of the peoples of Russia's periphery, while Soviet writers play down separatist aspirations and argue that they reflected the interests only of bourgeois parties supported by Western imperialists. In my own work I have been focusing on the social forces in the revolution in Transcaucasia, particularly on the cities of Baku and Tiflis and the Georgian countryside. What emerges from a close look at these two multinational centers is a complex picture of overlapping class and ethnic loyalties and interests. The clear separation of class and nationality disappears, and one finds that groups and individuals act at different times in the revolutionary years with different intensities in response to these rival de-

terminants. In general, I would argue, class struggles -- economic and political conflicts between workers and the propertied classes -- were much more relevant in the year 1917 than ethnic conflicts; but in the years of Civil War (1918-1921) the reverse became true. Whatever the social base for the conflict in those years, it was conceived by participants as a national struggle in large part.

Having made these brief theoretical remarks, I would like now to illustrate the emergence of the social conflicts of 1917 and the shift from class to ethnic struggles between 1917-1918 from my own research on the revolution in Baku and in Tiflis, and at the end provide some tentative conclusions as to why this shift might have occurred.

In Baku the three major nationalities -- Russians, Armenians, and Azerbaijanis -- were not only divided from one another by language, religion, history and customs, but also economically. The Armenians and Russians in general had higher incomes and status and occupied positions of power, while the Azerbaijanis were almost completely excluded from political life and were the poorest element in the area. Even among the workers the Muslims made up the bulk of the drillers and field workers, while skilled workers, office employees, and administrators were Christians. "Nationality tended to accentuate differences of status within the working class. National animosities were thus coupled with social and economic antagonisms which led to tension and disunity in the working class rather than the cohesion which the Social Democrats tried to promote. At times class interests prevailed over national antagonisms, as in the great strikes of 1903, 1904, 1913, ... 1914 [and 1917]; at other times, notably in 1905 and in the "March Days" of 1918, proletarian solidarity disappeared in a frenzied inter-ethnic blood-letting."¹³

"Nationality reinforced class, but at the same time national loyalties cut across class lines. A poor unskilled Moslem worker had little in common with a skilled Armenian worker apart from their memories of the massacres of 1905, whereas he had the bonds of religion and custom tying him to a Moslem peasant and, indeed, to a Moslem capitalist. Moslem workers occupied the bottom of the labor hierarchy while at the same time Moslem industrialists experienced condescension from Armenian, Russian, and foreign capitalists. The Azerbaijani community did not participate as fully in the economic and political life of Baku as did their neighbors, though they made up an absolute majority in Baku uezd and considered eastern Transcaucasia as their historic homeland."¹⁴

Each ethnic community had its own organizations and parties: the Armenians as a whole centered around the vaguely socialist Dashnaktsutiun; the Azerbaijani peasants and many workers usually deferred to religious community leaders or wealthy liberal capitalists, and during the revolution developed some loyalty to the Musavat Party. The Russian workers were close to the Socialist Revolutionary Party, the Menshevik wing of the RSDRP, and increasingly gravitated in 1913-1914 and during the revolution toward the Bolsheviks. The Russian middle class and some Armenian professionals joined the liberal Kadet Party or its local equivalents.

The dual loyalty that many felt in Baku -- to their ethnic community and to their social class -- was severely tested in the years of the war, revolution, and civil war. During World War I social questions, such as food supply, the war itself, working conditions, were paramount in Baku. Food riots by women in February 1916 were supported by local soldiers. Workers suffered from a fall in real wages and resisted the deterioration in their condition with periodic strikes. But the increasing social and

economic distress was also reflected in a rise in national tensions. The Armenians enthusiastically supported the war against Turkey, a traditional enemy who in 1915 metastasized into a threat to the very existence of the Armenians as a nation. Hundreds of thousands of Turkish Armenians were massacred or deported from eastern Anatolia, and thousands of refugees fled to Transcaucasia, arriving in Baku with tales of atrocities at the hands of Muslims. At the same time the loyalty of local Muslims, who did not participate in the war since they were exempted from the draft by Russian law, was doubted by many. On the eve of the revolution rumors circulated in the city that the Armenians and the Muslims were arming for a showdown, a repetition of the 1905 Armeno-Azerbaijani massacres.

When the revolution came, however, it was not a national conflict which erupted in Baku but rather a classical class confrontation between workers and their employers. Political power fell almost immediately into the hands of the local workers' soviet and an Executive Committee of Public Organizations. This "dual power," like that in Petrograd, masked only temporarily the fact that real decision-making power was located in the soviet. It was the only authority which could call the people into the streets or issue effective orders to the garrison. As in Petrograd so in Baku the soviet was controlled until the fall of 1917 by moderate socialists -- the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) and Mensheviks -- who wanted to maintain the war effort, recognize the legitimacy of the Provisional Government, and restrain the workers from seizing power in the name of the soviet. For these moderates 1917 was a "bourgeois democratic" revolution, not a socialist revolution, and power had to remain in the hands of the bourgeoisie.

The one major party which opposed, first, the "dual power" and, later,

the Coalition Government, i.e., opposed the class collaboration of the workers and the tsentsovoe obshchestvo and called for a monopoly of power by the socialist parties in the Soviet, was the Bolshevik Party. At first somewhat isolated in Baku's political institutions, though their roots in the working class, both Russian and Muslim, were quite deep, the Bolsheviks were the principal beneficiaries of the deteriorating economic situation in 1917, the continuation of an unpopular war, and the de facto alliance of the moderate socialists with the propertied classes in the Coalition Government. Worker and soldier hostility to the middle and upper strata of society in Baku developed more slowly and less extremely than in Petrograd, where the social cleavage between upper and lower classes had already reached explosive proportions in 1914.¹⁵ In Baku the failure of the oil industry and moderate socialists to achieve a negotiated settlement of the workers' demands effectively radicalized workers around economic issues and led them to push for a general strike. The Bolsheviks, who at first opposed such a strike, feared that "the masses will go past us," and decided to lead the movement. The success of the general strike of September 1917 greatly enhanced the Bolsheviks' position, and they now became the dominant, though not majority, party in the Baku soviet, reflecting a radical trend throughout Russia. As the Bolshevik leader, Stepan Shaumian, put it in early October 1917: "Unrest is growing everywhere, and land is being seized, etc., our task is to stand at the head of the revolution and to take power into our own hands."¹⁶

For all their radical rhetoric the Baku Bolsheviks were reluctant to act alone and take power in 1917. They feared a potential ethnic backlash. Civil war in the context of Baku would mean an Armeno-Muslim reznia. Instead the Bolsheviks hoped for a peaceful transition to Soviet power. This

was probably mistaken caution, for the Baku garrison, then on the side of the Bolsheviks, would have guaranteed them easy success. Once the armistice was declared in December, the Caucasian Front disintegrated, and soldiers simply deserted and went home. By early 1918 the Baku Bolsheviks had no army on which to rely and were forced to undertake the tedious task of building up their own Red Guards units. As a result of their loss of dependable soldiers from the garrison, the Bolsheviks had no choice but to rely on the volunteer units of the Armenians, the armed forces of the Dashnaktsutjun.

In the general disintegration of political and social order in 1918 ethnic loyalties re-emerged in Baku with a new force. The Azerbaijani community, the most backward in terms of education and politicization, had remained quite cohesive. Never very active in the soviet, the Azeri poor looked to their national and religious leaders for guidance. Except for the effect on a handful of wealthy oil magnates, capitalist development had had the least influence on the Muslims of Eastern Transcaucasia. Workers were still largely peasant in outlook, remained close to the family in the village, and identified little with fellow workers of other nationalities who were usually much more privileged.

The Armenians were also a cohesive community, though much more involved in industry and business. Armenian industrialists very often hired only Armenian workers, and though class antagonisms did develop they were played down by the most active of Armenian political parties, the Dashnaktsutjun. Armenian society from the family to the church and community remained patriarchal and nationally-conscious. The recent genocide in Turkey could not help but create an anxiety about the possibility of survival in a hostile, Muslim-dominated world. Only the Russians stood between Armenians and

annihilation, and therefore the Russians became their allies against the perceived danger from the Muslims.

Thus, it was not surprising that when in March 1918 a shipload of Muslim soldiers arrived in Baku and resisted orders of the soviet to disarm, a spark was provided for a conflict which pitted Russians and Armenians against Muslims. The "March Days" began as a Muslim rebellion against the soviet, and the Armenians at first declared their neutrality. But within a day the Dashnaks joined with the soviet forces against the Musavat and its Muslim supporters. The fighting in the city lasted three days and resulted in over three thousand deaths. By the last day the Armenians used the opportunity to revenge themselves on the Muslims.

Soviet historians usually argue that the "March Days" were in essence a civil war, a class struggle; and, as I mentioned before, Western historians have argued that it was fundamentally a national conflict. My own view is that "neither the Western nor the Soviet interpretations of the 'March Days' are completely satisfactory. The counter-revolutionary thrust against the Baku Soviet was made by Muslims, aided by Russian officers, and they were defeated by a Soviet-Dashnak alliance. But the national aspect of the struggle became overt only after several days of battle. Only then did Armenians begin to slaughter Muslims. And after the shooting and burning stopped, neither national group was in control of the city, but the soviet. It may be more accurately said that the soviet defended itself against the national counter-revolution with the aid of an opposing national group."¹⁷

The national aspects of the "March Days" are undeniable, but the essence of the conflict was between Soviet Power, which emerged the victor thanks to its Armenian allies, and a very conservative Muslim military force which would have reversed the gains of the revolution had it succeeded in its bid

for power. Here most graphically are illustrated the overlapping aspects of ethnic and class interests and conflicts. The form of the confrontation was national, but the content was social -- between the organ of workers' representatives and the conglomerate of forces which opposed the socialist revolution.

As a result of the increasing identification of the Baku soviet with Armenian and Russian elements, the Azerbaijani population turned away from the new authority in Baku and sought allies among the routed Muslim forces to the west of the city. Their hopes now centered on the regular Turkish army units which had invaded Transcaucasia in February and by spring were advancing toward Baku. Isolated from the surrounding countryside and cut off from direct aid from Soviet Russia, the Baku Commune decided to risk a military campaign against the threatening Muslim counter-revolution rather than wait for "Versailles" to attack Baku. But the campaign proved to be a disaster, and when the ragged Armenian units fell back toward the outskirts of the city the soviet pondered the divisive question of whether to invite British intervention from Persia. The Bolsheviks, acting on orders from Moscow, rejected an alliance with the British and stepped down from their governmental posts when the vote in the soviet went against them.

By the summer of 1918 the struggle for Baku had become, not only a major front in the Russian Civil War, but a national confrontation between the Muslim forces converging on the city and the Armenian defenders of this outpost of Soviet Power. When Turkish troops entered the city in September, they found the local Muslims taking their revenge on the Armenians for the humiliations of the "March Days." Baku became the capital of the new Azerbaijan Republic, a fragile political artifice, first dominated by the Turks and later by the British. The nationalist principle of independent statehood

seemed, however briefly, to have triumphed, but its viability in the absence of foreign support could not be tested before the Red Army retook Baku in April 1920.

II

The same general pattern of intricate social hostilities taking on national forms can be seen in Tiflis. The Georgian capital had been the administrative center of tsarist Transcaucasia since 1801 and, until the expansion of the Baku oil industry in the last quarter of the century, the largest industrial producer in the territory. Though Georgians had steadily increased their demographic weight in the city, comprising 26.3% of the population by 1897, the municipal government and local economy were overwhelmingly dominated by the well-established Armenian middle-class. Georgians, the great majority of whom were small-holding peasants, had never been an urban people, but with the development of the market economy, the railroad system, and the introduction of some small factories, many of the poorest migrated into Tiflis and Batumi. This new urban working class remained closely tied to their fellow villagers back home in Guria or Kakheti, but the experience of industrial life and closer contact with Russian officialdom and the Armenian bourgeoisie shaped new attitudes toward the existing order. The traditional leaders of Georgian society, the landed nobility, were already by the last quarter of the nineteenth century in serious economic and political decline. Their nostalgic nationalism which longed for a harmonious and paternalistic society without class strife found no resonance among the workers. They turned instead to a small group of *déclassé* intellectuals who had returned from Russia converted to Marxism. By 1905 the Social Democrats,

now largely Menshevik in orientation, had developed broad-based support not only among workers but within the peasantry as well. The massive agrarian resistance in western Georgia on the eve of the first Russian revolution was inspired and led by Social Democratic workers and intellectuals. From 1905 to the second revolution, whether locally in workers' clubs or trade unions, or on the national level as elected deputies to the State Duma, the Georgian Mensheviks were to all intents and purposes the leaders of the national liberation movement of the Georgian people.

Unlike their Russian counterparts who took a rigorously anti-nationalist approach to the so-called "national question," Social Democracy in Georgia housed a variety of opinions on national autonomy, ranging from complete subordination of Georgian aspirations to the requirements of the all-Russian struggle against autocracy to various compromises with the desire for Georgian self-definition and self-rule. Yet the RSDRP in Caucasia never became as overtly nationalist as the Armenian Dashnaktsutiun or their minor rival, the Georgian Socialist Federalist Party. Rather, in their press and within the organization the Georgian Mensheviks attacked all forms of nationalism and separatism until 1911 and spoke of autonomy for the Caucasian peoples as possible only within a socialist Russian state. Although the party was overwhelmingly Georgian in ethnic composition, efforts were made, particularly in Tiflis, to include representatives of other nationalities on local party bodies. At national party congresses the Georgians were among the most vigorous opponents of introducing the Bundist principle of organizing along ethnic lines.

At the same time, the anti-capitalist thrust of the Social Democrats' propaganda had clear anti-Armenian implications in the Caucasian context, for the Tiflis Armenians represented the most visible bourgeois elements in

Georgia. The Social Democratic leaders denied any hostility toward Armenians and attempted to maneuver around the nationalist storms which swelled in Transcaucasia in 1905-1906. For the Social Democrats nationalism was identified with the upper classes and European reaction. Their brand of internationalist socialism promised to bring the cosmopolitan benefits of European civilization and industrialization to the Caucasus while going beyond the pain and tragedy of capitalism. While liberalism, capitalism, and political representation based on the tsenz had benefitted only the people of property, which in Tiflis meant the Armenian bourgeoisie, socialism would bring about the complete democratization of Georgian life. Thus, Georgian Social Democracy in the years up to 1917 was in its rhetoric and practice an integral part of the all-Russian struggle against autocracy, yet in its essential appeal to Georgian workers and peasants it represented the most effective strategy against Russian bureaucracy and Armenian economic exploitation. Intrinsically it combined the social and national grievances of the vast majority of the Georgian people.

The transfer of power in Tiflis in March 1917 was, not only a transfer from the tsar's viceroy to the workers' soviet, but simultaneously a transfer from Russian military governors and the Armenian middle class to the Georgian national leadership -- the local Social Democratic intelligentsia. Since the organ of the Provisional Government in Tiflis, the OZAKOM, never had any authority, from March on real power, as in Baku and Petrograd, lay with the soviet with its Menshevik leaders. As the Soviet historian, S. E. Sef wrote, "no sort of dual power was established" at the territorial level.¹⁸ The army supported the Socialist Revolutionary Party, which in turn supported the Menshevik concept of a bourgeois revolution and limited cooperation with the propertied classes. The Bolsheviks, who had little popular support

in the early part of the revolutionary year, opted to remain within the Social Democratic Party with the Mensheviks. The major issues confronting the revolutionaries were the preservation of recent gains. Fear of a military or royalist counter-revolution kept the various social and ethnic groups united behind the moderate, "revolutionary-defensist" approach of the Menshevik-SR soviet.

In one of his earliest speeches to the Tiflis soviet, Zhordania claimed that the "moving forces of the revolution" were the proletariat, the army, and the liberal bourgeoisie. "The unity of these three forces was essential."¹⁹ Zhordania's concern that the raising of divisive questions such as "Soviet power" or "the national question" was well-founded, for Tiflis, like Transcaucasia as a whole, housed potentially competing social and ethnic groups. The mass of Georgian workers were joined by the bulk of politically active workers of other nationalities in support of the soviet and the moderate socialist leadership. Though Armenian intellectuals, middle-class elements, and workers rallied to the Dashnaktsutun, they considered their interests consonant with the revolutionary defensist position of the Provisional Government and the soviets in Petrograd and Tiflis. Armenian leaders agreed with Zhordania that the "national question" be postponed in order to keep the revolutionary forces united.²⁰ Potentially more threatening to a united front were the attitudes of the Tiflis garrison and the soldiers at the front. The garrison numbered about 100,000 men, the great majority Russian, and their armed strength could easily decide the issue of power in the city. To the relief of the moderate socialists, the soldiers elected SRs to positions of authority in their soviet and on March 26 voted unanimously to accept the Petrograd Soviet's "Appeal to the People of the World."

In the stratified ethnic conglomerate of Tiflis Zhordania's three major revolutionary forces were at one and the same time three different social classes made up predominantly of three different ethnic groups and influenced primarily by three different political parties. The workers were Georgian and Menshevik, the peasant soldiers Russian and SR, and the "progressive bourgeoisie" Armenian and Dashnak. Every issue which arose in 1917 -- the introduction of the 8-hour day, the question of the war, the Coalition government, Georgian national autonomy, or Soviet Power -- was debated and decided by balancing and satisfying the competing interests and suspicions of these political actors. As in central Russia, so in Tiflis, soldiers were upset at the introduction of the 8-hour day by the workers and had to be persuaded that the needs of the front would be met despite the shorter working day. More ominously, early in April Georgian nationalists raised the issue of autonomy for Georgia and immediately provoked a bitter reaction from the soldiers who considered such agitation proof of Georgian disloyalty to Russia. The Social Democrats, alarmed by the soldiers' anger, took "extraordinary measures" against the nationalists, forcing them to cease their statements in favor of autonomy and disbanding their armed units. When the First Congress of the Caucasian Army met in late April, it resolved to postpone any attempt to settle the national question until the Constituent Assembly.²¹ Given the dangers posed to all by a possible collapse of the Caucasian Front and the imagined dangers from the Right, the political parties themselves worked to dampen any nationalist enthusiasms.

The fragile alliance of the Tiflis soviet parties was sorely tested by events in Petrograd. The inability of the Provisional Government to maintain any credibility without active participation within it of prominent members of the soviet led the Mensheviks and SRs of the capital to agree reluctantly

to the formation of a Coalition government. But the Mensheviks in Tiflis vigorously opposed socialists sitting in the same government with representatives of the propertied classes. Zhordania argued for a purely bourgeois government without Kadet leader Miliukov and those like him who favored an "annexationist" peace. He rejected both the option of a coalition and a government of the lower classes (the "democracy"). The issue of the nature of the government was a crucial one for the Marxists, for it not only would mean what social class would have its interests promoted by the state but also whether the revolution would continue as a "bourgeois-democratic" revolution or be transformed into a "socialist" one. For all Mensheviks the essential preconditions for a socialist revolution simply did not exist in Russia, and the only sensible strategy would be to preserve the present course and establish a firm government of the middle class. The Tiflis Mensheviks feared, however, that coalition would jeopardize the future viability of those socialist forces which joined with the bourgeoisie. As Gegechkori told the soviet: "If the socialist wing of the Provisional Government acts in the interests of the democracy but without a socialist outlook, then it will deserve the just protests of the proletariat; if it acts in the interests of the proletariat, then this will alienate the bourgeoisie from the other revolutionary strata of society, and this will be the beginning of the end."²²

At this point the tensions in the democratic front of workers and soldiers began to intensify. While the Menshevik-led workers' soviet opposed formation of a coalition government (April 29) and promised it only conditional support (postol'ku-poskol'ku) (May 6), the soldiers' soviet, led by the Socialist Revolutionaries, came out for unconditional support of the new government (May 16), defeating a motion by Zhordania. Here political, class, and national influences all played a role. The soldiers and their SR leaders

were much more conciliatory toward the bourgeoisie than the workers and Mensheviks of Georgia. Though patriotic sentiments influenced them, the soldier's principal aim was to end the war, and the Provisional Government seemed the instrument by which this could most quickly be accomplished. The Georgian Mensheviks doubted the bourgeoisie's commitment to the revolution much more than the Russian Mensheviks and late in May interpreted the resignation of the Moscow industrialist Konovalov from the government as a clear sign of the beginning of the large bourgeoisie's retreat from the revolutionary cause. The SRs, on the other hand, tried to reconcile differences between local policy and the positions of the central government.

In the late spring of 1917 the split between workers and soldiers began to deepen. The Mensheviks tried to hold the front together by merging the two soviets (May 26), and Bolsheviks who agitated among soldiers against the war were arrested. Menshevik efforts to keep the Bolsheviks within their common Social Democratic organization failed, however. The Bolsheviks formed their own party in early June and drew a sharp line between the position of the moderate socialists who supported, however tentatively, the coalition government and their own advocacy of "All Power to the Soviets!"

What support the Bolsheviks of Tiflis had came largely from the soldiers and, to some extent, from Russian workers. For the first two months of revolution the only social democratic paper in the Russian language was Kavkazskii rabochii, the organ of the Bolshevik faction; the Mensheviks' Bor'ba (Struggle) did not appear until May. Bolsheviks began to make serious inroads among the soldiers once it became clear that the government, instead of bringing the war to a speedy conclusion, was planning a major offensive

in the summer. Embarrassed by the so-called "Kerensky Offensive," the Tiflis soviet on June 23 adopted a luke-warm resolution which considered the offensive "one of the military episodes in the world war which in no way changes our aims in it."²³ The next day four thousand soldiers gathered in the Aleksandr Garden and adopted a Bolshevik resolution calling for the end of the offensive.²⁴ Following the lead of their comrades in Petrograd, the Tiflis Bolsheviks organized a protest march for June 25. As in Petrograd the moderate socialists tried to co-opt the demonstration by rescheduling it and providing their own slogans and orators, but the demonstrators, some ten thousand soldiers, shouted down the Menshevik orators and applauded only the Bolsheviks. This meeting too adopted a Bolshevik resolution opposing the Kerensky Offensive and added a call for a government dominated by the soviet.

The sudden radicalization of the Tiflis garrison was a great victory for the Caucasian Bolsheviks and a most serious threat to the Mensheviks. The army, the most potent force in the revolution, had moved from patriotic support for the war effort to an active opposition to any offensive action. Their enthusiasm for the Provisional Government on which they had based their hopes for an end to the war had simply evaporated with the June offensive. The Mensheviks feared civil war in the city and acted resolutely to head off a crisis. Refusing to have the soviet re-elected as demanded by the Left, they decided instead to organize a reliable military force and carry on their own agitation in the army. Mensheviks and Bolsheviks now began an intensive campaign for the loyalty of the Tiflis garrison. It was simultaneously a struggle for power in the city, the outcome of which would determine if the Georgian working class or the Russian soldiery would decide the political fate of central Transcaucasia.

Events in Petrograd in early July -- the ill-fated uprising of radical military units with the tentative support of the Bolshevik party, the subsequent suppression of the Bolsheviks, and the formation of a new government under Kerensky -- marked a temporary halt in the leftward drift of the revolution both in the capital and in Tiflis. For the first time the Tiflis soviet approved the Coalition government and warned of the danger of counter-revolution from the Left. Rallying behind the Central Executive Committee (TsIK) of the Petrograd soviet, the Tiflis soviet prohibited any further meetings of soldiers in the Aleksandr Garden.

By the late summer of 1917 the question of power, of the kind of authoritative government to be formed, was the central political issue both in Petrograd and Tiflis. Four possible solutions existed:

1. the continuation of the Coalition Government,
2. a Dictatorship of the Right, based on the army,
3. a "Homogeneous Democratic Government," i.e., a government of all the socialist, workers', peasants', and lower middle-class parties,
4. Soviet Power -- a government of the parties represented in the workers', peasants', and soldiers' soviets.

Despite the compounded difficulties of maintaining a government of all "the vital forces of the nation," the majority Mensheviks in Petrograd, led by Irakli Tsereteli, and the SRs backed Kerensky as he negotiated with representatives of the propertied classes. But significant political forces, including the major liberal party, the Kadets, had already concluded that compromise with the soviet would lead the country into anarchy and were conspiring with military leaders to establish a dictatorship headed by General Kornilov. The attempted coup in late August was thwarted by railroad workers, and the possibility for a dictatorship of the Right disappeared

as a realistic alternative until the Civil War. When news arrived in Tiflis of Kornilov's mutiny, the soviet came out once again against coalition with the bourgeoisie and this time called for a democratic socialist government (September 2).

Despite their attempts within the party to convince the leadership in Petrograd that Coalition must be abandoned, the Georgian Mensheviks were isolated, along with Martov's small group of Menshevik-Internationalists, in the Democratic Conference held to arrive at some solution of the power question. The majority of Russia's Mensheviks stubbornly held on to their position even as popular support for the Kerensky government all but evaporated. The major beneficiaries of the radicalization of the lower classes were the Bolsheviks, and on October 25 they seized power in the capital. The Mensheviks of Georgia refused to compromise with this "usurpation" of state power, and within weeks the deadly struggle over the Tiflis garrison was revived. The Mensheviks acted swiftly and disarmed the Bolshevik soldiers with the aid of their own Red Guards (November 29). As winter approached, the soldiers drifted northward, leaving the front bare and Georgia in the uncontested hands of the Mensheviks. With the soldiers in retreat, the Bolsheviks lost their last base of support outside of Baku.

Through much of 1917 the long-established demographic divisions of Baku and Tiflis into social classes had remained the primary objects of identification and the lines along which conflicts broke out. Economic pressures and the question of state power, along with the issue of the war, had relegated ethnic matters to the background. This is not to say that ethnic concerns had not existed; rather they had been intertwined with social issues or expressed in the terms of the political debates then

going on. Ethnic conflicts had appeared most volatily in the newly-elected municipal дума, an institution which had been consistently dominated by the Armenian bourgeoisie up to the revolution. With a fully democratic franchise the Georgian Mensheviks were swept to power in the дума, and they effectively excluded the Armenians from the city government. The Armenian mayor Khatsov was replaced by the Georgian Eliava. Within the ornate дума building the Dashnaks accused the Social Democrats of being "Georgian chauvinists," and serious debate was drowned out in mutual accusations of nationalism.²⁵ Muslims too complained through their representatives to the Transcaucasian Central Muslim Committee that the Islamic masses were being systematically ignored and demanded to be represented in the OZAKOM.²⁶

But as deeply felt as these ethnic tensions were, the hope persisted through the first revolutionary year that the process of democratization and the adoption of the principle of national self-determination would resolve them constitutionally. Only after the October revolution and the dispersal by the Petrograd Bolsheviks of the Constituent Assembly, the institution on which constitutional hopes had been pinned, did the overt expression and manifestation of nationalist feelings begin to dominate the political scene in Transcaucasia.

By the end of 1917 the political situation in Transcaucasia had changed dramatically as the Russian army "voted with its feet" against the war. A serious threat from the Turkish army faced the Caucasian peoples when early in February the Turks began moving across the prewar border. The only resistance came from irregular Armenian units. With the army abandoning Transcaucasia, the Russian national element was severely reduced in the territory. Inhibitions to discussing the national question and moving

toward separation from Russia were removed. Soldiers leaving the front met hostility from the local peoples, and in one case, at Shamkhor, they were forcibly disarmed and hundreds massacred. The central political issue now became self-defense, and in the context of Russian retreat and Turkish advance it inevitably took on an ethnic dimension. Since the actual, acting government in central Russia was Bolshevik and considered illegitimate and irresponsible by the Georgian Mensheviks and the Tiflis Dashnaks, a local organ of authority had to be created. None of the three major political parties were yet prepared to move toward separation, and the SRs particularly were suspicious of any separatist tendencies. But the need to create a united Transcaucasian political authority led first to the creation of the Transcaucasian Commissariat (ZAVKOM) and later to the establishment of a legislature, the Seim. Protest by Bolshevik sympathizers in the Aleksandr Garden to the opening of the Seim on February 23 was met by machine-gun fire. In response to the real separation from Russia and the advancing threat from Turkey, the distinctions between workers and industrialists ceased to be as relevant as one's relationship to the Muslim danger and the loss of Russian protection. Armenian and Georgian military units were now left alone to face a life and death struggle with a foreign ethnic enemy. The Azerbaijanis, who had long felt victims of the Christian overlords and bourgeoisie in Caucasia, welcomed the support and leverage offered by their Turkish brethren. Thus, within months of the October revolution, a total breakdown of the Caucasian political order had occurred along ethnic lines.

On April 22, 1918, the Seim voted to declare Transcaucasia independent of Russia. The pro-Turkish Musavat enthusiastically supported the degree of separation, but the Mensheviks and Dashnaks took this step reluctantly

and only under pressure from the Turks. The Kadets and Russian SRs of Transcaucasia opposed the declaration, and were joined in their feeble opposition by the Bolsheviks. The fragile Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia lasted only a month. The Turks delivered an ultimatum to the new republic demanding territory and extraterritorial rights.

While the Musavat openly sympathized with their Muslim allies, the Armenians were fighting a desperate battle with the Turkish army. No mutual interests held the three nationalities together, and the Georgians struck out on their own. With hope of support from Germany, the Menshevik leadership unilaterally declared Georgia's independence.

The shift from the social struggles of 1917 to the open articulation of national-ethnic conflicts in 1918 was the result of extremely complex domestic and international political processes. Key to understanding the shift was the role played by the Russian army in 1917 and its absence in 1918. The elimination of the Russian soldiery simplified the ethnic struggle, eliminated an element which had opposed forcefully the development of national conflicts. With the Russians gone, the international threat of Turkish intervention presented an immediate danger to some nationalities, particularly the Armenians, and a potential advantage for others, particularly the Azerbaijanis. Class distinctions became irrelevant as the lines of combat were established for or against the foreign invader.

But besides the international aspect of Transcaucasian politics, there were also domestic contributions to the shift from social to ethnic conflicts. The more strictly class struggles of the first year of revolution were in part the product of the urban environment in which these struggles took place. Within Baku and Tiflis the essential cleavages ran between

workers, soldiers, and tsentsovoe obshchestvo (the propertied classes). A long history of Social Democratic delineation of the mutually-exclusive interests of the urban classes had helped to create the conscious form of the conflicts in 1917. Workers thought in class terms and understood their plight as stemming from the rapacious nature of the bourgeoisie. This was particularly true in Baku where the level of capitalist development was highest. There the lines between oil workers in particular and the rest of society were drawn very clearly, and this line was much firmer than the ethnic lines within the working class. Secondly, the multi-national complexion of both the working class and the middle class, with Muslims at the bottom of both dominated by Christians, did not create the same ethnic-class dicotomy between workers and bourgeoisie that was found in Tiflis. In the Georgian capital the working class was largely made up of one nationality and the middle class of another. There class divisions were much closer to the ethnic divisions of society. Not surprisingly Baku's socialism never took on a pronounced ethnic coloration as did Tiflis'. In Baku the multi-party, multi-national soviet stood opposed to the Muslim nationalism of the Musavat and attacked the nationalism of the Dashnaktsutiun, even while depending on their armed units. In Tiflis it was the Mensheviks themselves who ultimately moved away from their internationalist posture toward a determined bid for Georgian national independence. In Baku the nationalist movement had to be imported on Turkish bayonets; in Tiflis it grew up from within.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Revised edition: Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964.
2. Pipes, p. 200.
3. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967.
4. New York: Philosophical Library, 1951.
5. Kazemzadeh, pp. 12-13.
6. Ibid., p. 14.
7. Ibid., p. 330. Hovannisian writes: "Fascinating for the student of the Georgian Mensheviks is the process that gradually transformed these international socialists into champions of the policies outlined by their National Democrat rivals. That metamorphosis was completed in May, 1918, when the Mensheviks declared the independence of the Republic of Georgia." (p. 72)
8. Kazemzadeh, p. 73.
9. Ibid., p. 75.
10. Karl Deutsch, Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1953, 1966), p. 102.
11. Eugene D. Genovese, "On Being a Socialist and a Historian," In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 21.
12. For discussions of Social Democratic views on the "national question," see H. B. Davis, Nationalism and Socialism: Marxist and Labor Theories of Nationalism to 1917 (New York, 1967); and Hans Mommsen and Albrecht Martiny, "Nationalism, Nationalities Question," in Marxism, Communism and Western Society: A Comparative Encyclopedia (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), vol. VI, 20-59.
13. Ronald Grigor Suny, The Baku Commune, 1917-1918: Class and Nationality in the Russian Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), pp. 13-14.
14. Ibid., pp. 14-15.
15. On the social unrest on the eve of the war, see Leopold H. Haimson, "The Problem of Social Stability in Urban Russia, 1905-1917," Slavic Review, XXIII, 4 (December 1964), pp. 619-642; XXIV, 1 (March 1965), pp. 1-22.
16. Kavkazskii rabochii (Tiflis), no. 170, October 11, 1917; Suny, p. 145.
17. Suny, p. 200.

18. S. E. Sef, Revoliutsiia 1917 goda v Zakavkaz'i (Tiflis, 1927), p. 10.
19. Protokoly Zakavkazskikh revoliutsionnykh sovetskikh organizatsii, I (Tiflis, 1920), pp. 116-118.
20. Orizon, May 7, 1917; S. M. Dimanshtein, Revoliutsiia i natsional'nyi vopros, III (Moscow, 1930), pp. 400-401; Kazemzadeh, p. 43.
21. Bor'ba, no. 8, May 14, 1917.
22. Ibid., no. 6, May 11, 1917.
23. Izvestiia (Tiflis), no. 72, June 25, 1917.
24. Kavkazskii rabochii, no. 86, June 28, 1917.
25. Bor'ba, no. 82, August 12, 1917; no. 85, August 17, 1917.
26. Kaspii (Baku), no. 207.