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The Formation of the All-Union Extraordinary Commission

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Abstract: This article examines the formation and early activities of the All-Union Extraordinary Commission (VChK), highlighting its evolution into a powerful punitive body under Soviet rule. The study explores the roles of V. Lenin and F. Dzerzhinsky in its establishment, emphasizing the Commission's primary focus on identifying and suppressing "counter-revolutionaries" opposed to the regime. Despite its initial operational and investigative mandate, the VChK rapidly expanded its authority by 1918 due to internal political unrest and external threats, assuming unlimited powers to arrest, investigate, judge, and execute. Addressing a gap in understanding the sociopolitical impacts of this institution, this research employs a historical-analytical method to trace its transformation into an elite organization with unchecked influence. The findings reveal the VChK's central role in consolidating Soviet power and its implications for governance and civil liberties during this period.

Keywords: Bolshevik policy, Neo-Nazi statehood, "dictatorship of the proletariat", Provisional Government, Bourgeoisie and landowners, Soviet government, Information department, Organizational department, Struggle department, Administrative apparatus, Administrative organization.

1. Introduction

Since the second half of the 20s of the 20th century in the country of the former Soviet Union, the mass political repressions that began under the leadership of I.V. Stalin were in fact a social catastrophe that came from the internal situation of this despotic regime and existed in its nature. Repressions were an integral part of the Communist Party and the Soviet government, and the Soviets themselves also took place through repressions. The Bolsheviks' rise to power was carried out on the basis of violence, invasions, massacres, and the use of force [1].

2. Materials and Methods

An important direction of the policy of strengthening neo-Nazi statehood, transforming the colonial structure of governance into an imperial-despotic structure, was the formation of the political system of the Soviet system. First of all, in accordance with the ideology of the organization of the state "dictatorship of the proletariat", the authorities were oriented towards the creation of repressive structures capable of forcibly ensuring the political interests of the center. It was for this purpose that "revolutionary" courts, the prosecutor's office, the Cheka bodies, "revolutionary" tribunals, and a "people's militia" were created in a short time according to the all-Russian scheme, which was supposed to become a ruthless "iron broom" for the "enemies of the revolution" [2].

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By 1918, due to the domestic political situation in the country and external threats, the scope of activities and powers of the State Committee of the Soviet Union expanded even more, with the help of this state body, the Soviet government maintained its power at the local level. and operated as an elite organization with unlimited powers to manage people. In addition, the Extraordinary Commission will soon receive unlimited powers to arrest, investigate, judge, sentence and execute [3].

3. Results and Discussion

One of these punitive organs of the Soviet power was the Cheka (All-Russian Extraordinary Commission), which appeared on the scene "as a state security organ of a new socialist type". By the fall of 1917, the Provisional Government could no longer govern the country. In the conditions of widespread discontent among the masses, unprecedented economic tension, unrest in the army, depression, and an extreme deterioration in living standards, Red Guard detachments occupied Petrograd on October 24-25, and on the night of October 26, they captured the Winter Palace. In December 1917, the situation in Petrograd became even more tense. It took more than a month for the officials to reject the newly formed government. To counteract this, the Bolsheviks decided to create a special commission [4].

On December 7 (20), 1917, to F.E. Dzerzhinsky, "the bourgeoisie, landowners and representatives of all the rich classes are zealously striving to destroy the revolution, protecting the interests of the workers, laborers and oppressor classes... Therefore, it is necessary to urgently take measures to combat the rebels and extortionists", V.I.Lenin addressed. The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (VChK) under the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR for the fight against counterrevolution, speculation and crimes committed in office was created on the initiative of Lenin on the same day, that is, December 7 (20), 1917. At Lenin's suggestion, F.E. Dzerzhinsky was appointed. F.E. Dzerzhinsky himself wrote about this: "On December 7, 1917, I was appointed chairman of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission, i.e., the VChK, and I was also instructed to compile its composition" [5].

Indeed, on the same day the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission was formed, with F.E. Dzerzhinsky as its chairman, and its board included D.G. Yevseyev, N.A. Zhidel, I.K. Ksenofonov, and Ya.Kh. Peters. Later, prominent figures of the Soviet government and the Communist Party served at various times on the board of the Cheka: V.A. Avanesov, G.I. Boki, I.P. Zhukov, M.S. Kedrov, M.Ya. Latsis, V.N. Mancev, V.R. Menzhinsky, I.S. Unshlikht, S.G. Uralov, V.V. Fomin and others. Many of Lenin's supporters hoped that the creation of the Cheka would protect the "revolution" and help establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. This is how the Cheka was organized. Obviously, its functions were not limited to conducting operational and investigative activities.

It was also allowed to carry out urgent investigative actions necessary to identify persons participating in counterrevolutionary activities, promptly suppress any of their actions against the newly established regime and quickly identify all persons with counterrevolutionary sentiments, as well as their accomplices. Naturally, in these cases, immediate arrests, searches and preliminary interrogations were required. The duties of the Cheka again included not only conducting a full preliminary investigation, collecting evidence revealing the guilt of the accused, preparing indictments and the like. Perhaps the Cheka should have focused all its attention on exposing counterrevolutionaries who spoke out against the existing system [6].

M.I. Latsis writes about the Council of People's Commissars' resolution of December 7, 1917: "This decision was more of a draft and was not a Decree on the establishment of the Cheka. In those days there was no time to fully develop a decision. It was necessary to act quickly". Indeed, M.I. Latsis noted that the text of the resolution was hastily adopted

in draft form. Because such representation was necessary for the Bolsheviks to maintain their power from opposing forces. After December 7, 1917, the apparatus of the Cheka began to form. While the initial number of the commission consisted of several employees, it later turned into an entire army [7].

In the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars on the formation of the Cheka (as stated above in 1917), it was decided to call this organization the "All-Russian Extraordinary Commission" (VChK) under the Council of People's Commissars for the fight against counter-revolution, speculation and crimes committed in office. The following tasks were assigned to the commission:

1. Pursuit and destruction of all counter-revolutionary and sabotage actions and attempts, regardless of who commits them anywhere in Russia.
2. Identification of all saboteurs and counter-revolutionaries, their capture and transfer to the court of "revolutionary" tribunals and development of measures to combat them.
3. The Cheka Commission carries out only preliminary investigative actions, designed, if necessary, to prevent counter-revolutionary and sabotage actions.

The following departments will operate within the commission:

1. Information department.
2. Organizational department (for organizing the fight against counter-revolutionaries throughout Russia) and a department for monitoring the activities of its branch divisions in the regions.
3. It was shown that it will consist of a department for the fight.

During the formation of the Cheka, members of one party were formed, consisting of Bolsheviks. From January 7 to July 6, 1918, the leading positions in the Cheka were occupied by representatives of the Left Socialist Revolutionary Party. The administrative apparatus of the Cheka was under the jurisdiction of the board. The Main Directorate, on the other hand, ensured document flow with the help of two deputies and two personal secretaries. The Presidium of the Cheka was headed by the Chairman [8].

Initially, as we have already noted above, in the first days of the creation of the Cheka in December 1917, the following tasks were assigned to it: the fight against deserters (saboteurs) and counter-revolutionaries; identifying the guilty and handing them over to the "revolutionary" tribunal and conducting a search. Later, the scope of its powers, as well as its functions, expanded. F.E. Dzerzhinsky noted that the competence of the organization included the confiscation of the property of those arrested, their eviction from housing, and the deprivation of trade cards, and the compilation and publication of lists of enemies of the people [9].

Initially, as we have already noted above, the apparatus of the Cheka consisted of three main departments: information (collection of political and operational information), organizational (organization of the fight against counter-revolutionaries), combat (fight against immediate counter-revolutionaries and deviators). However, a few days later, on December 11 (24), 1917, a department for the fight against speculation and extortion was created as part of the Cheka [10].

"By February 1918, due to the domestic political situation in the country and external risks, the scale and powers of the Cheka had expanded even further. On February 21, 1918, the decree of the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars V. I. Lenin "The Socialist Fatherland is in Danger!" was published. The decree ordered "to shoot foreign agents, speculators, robbers, counter-revolutionaries, German spies at the scene of the crime". Thus, from February 1918, the Cheka, seeing nothing but the task of fighting counter-revolutionary and other free-thinking forces, decided to brutally suppress crimes on the spot, using execution. The Cheka was the Bolsheviks' "shield and sword". With the help of this same state body, the Soviet government retained its power at the local level and established the dictatorship of the proletariat [11].

On March 18, 1918, the city's organizational department was reorganized into an intercity department. And on March 20, a department for combating crime was created in positions in the Soviet bodies. The number of personnel was initially in short supply: for example, in Petrograd there were 23 people, and in Moscow in March 1918 - 120 people. On January 14, 1918, in accordance with the resolution of the Council of People's Commissars, the scope of activities and members of the Cheka was expanded, local units were created in the field, as well as their detachments. These detachments of the Cheka in June 1918 numbered 35 battalions (40 thousand fighters). They were sent to the regions bordering Europe and remote areas of Russia [12].

In April 1918, 5 companies of the Cheka were formed in Moscow, each consisting of 125 fighters. The Cheka appeared on the scene as an elite organization of Bolshevik communists with unlimited powers to establish control over people. Their monthly salary was constantly increased by a salary (the salary of a member of the Cheka board was 500 rubles, equal to the month of people's commissars, an ordinary Cheka officer in February 1918 received 400 rubles per month; during this period, a Red Army soldier received 150 rubles, a married soldier - 250 rubles), as well as food and industrial goods in the form of free rations [13].

In order to activate the organization of local Chekas at the local level and define their functions, the Cheka made an important decision on March 22, 1918. The resolution stated the following:

1. The Soviets in each region and district are ordered to organize emergency commissions.
2. The emergency commissions will also organize the fight against insurgents, speculators, and professional criminals through the press.
3. Both in Moscow and in other regions, from now on all actions related to crimes, such as arrests, searches, registration, and confiscation of property, are carried out by emergency commissions [14].

The Extraordinary Commission soon received unlimited powers. The Extraordinary Commission itself makes arrests, conducts investigations, trials, passes sentences and ensures execution. In a word, the Extraordinary Commission had such extensive powers for its activities that neither the police nor the gendarmes had such powers. Dissatisfaction with the activities of the Cheka was already growing among government leaders. As a result, in 1918-1920, for some time, some of the powers of the Cheka were transferred to "revolutionary" tribunals. However, after some time, all powers were returned to the Chekists [15].

By the second half of 1918, the structure of the Cheka and local Cheka bodies began to form in stages. At the initial stage, the territorial departments for combating counterrevolution, speculation and embezzlement were called emergency committees. With the increase in personnel, as well as the staff and the emergence of new departments, these committees also began to be called emergency commissions (ChK) [16]. In 1918, there were 40 provincial (the so-called GubChK) and 365 district emergency commissions. During this period, five main departments operated in the provincial Cheka:

1. Counter-insurgency unit;
2. Anti-Speculation Unit;
3. Crime Control Unit;
4. The department that conducts intercity activities of the Cheka, as well as the activities of local Chekas in rainy areas;
5. Railway Control Department.

And from August 1918, the border, railway and water transport bodies of the Cheka began to operate. At large railway stations, provincial and district emergency commissions (ChK) were created, which were subordinate to the provincial emergency commissions [17].

At the same time, the counter-revolutionary movement could be interpreted in two ways, since this term was not clearly defined. On November 6, 1918, it was implemented in the resolution of the cassation department of the Supreme Council of the National Economy. "Any actions, regardless of their causes, against the Soviets, their executive committees or individual Soviet institutions are considered counter-revolutionary", - the resolution stated [18].

The Cheka organs in the Red Army were formed at the end of 1918 to organize the fight against insurgents, espionage in the army and espionage work in the enemy rear. The Cheka organs also operated at the front and in the army until February 21, 1919. From this period they were transformed into special units for espionage and counterintelligence in units and departments of the Red Army, these units were formed to organize counterintelligence within the army, espionage in the army, and espionage behind enemy lines [19].

During the military actions of 1919, military Cheka officers were active, including district and provincial Chekas. In the first half of 1920, according to the statistics of the punitive activities of the Special Department of the Cheka on the Turkestan Front, 3,140 people were arrested, including 960 and 58 people for espionage and counterrevolution, respectively, of whom 170 were shot. During this period, representatives of the common population, as well as large zamindars, considered all employees of the special forces to be drunkards, rapists, bribe-takers and torturers. Despite the fact that historians of that time, including A.S. Iosilevich, touched upon the activities of this organization, although they gave a positive assessment [20].

In addition to the main directorates, the Cheka also had an agricultural department, a financial department, and other service departments. The Chekas in the provinces were organized in a similar manner. However, in less important cities of the province, the tasks of combating insurgents and official crimes could be combined in one department. According to the Cheka instructions, local Chekas were also required to have sections for combating contributions, which would not include sections in the composition of any departments or divisions [21].

The district Chekas, on the other hand, had a simpler structure. They did not have a department that would control the activities of the Cheka in other cities, and the work of combating insurgents and crimes at the local level was necessarily combined in one department. Counterintelligence departments were retained in the districts [22]. In late December 1918 - early January 1919, questions about some of the powers of the Cheka, which had been excessively delegated to it, were discussed at meetings of the Cheka and in the press. On January 30, 1919, at the General Meeting of the Moscow City Conference of the RCP(b), N.V. Krilenko gave a speech on limiting the powers of the Cheka, arguing that it was necessary to "put an end to the activities of the Cheka, uncontrolled, secret." Dzerzhinsky responded to Krilenko that the Cheka justified the scale of its activities: "where the proletariat uses mass terror, we see high treason," "the Cheka must have the authority to apply punishment in the form of emergency dismissal" [23].

F.E. Dzerzhinsky's idea was supported by the Cheka employees Ya.Kh.Piters and G.S. Morozov supported it, saying that Krylenko was a Soviet worker, a member of the "Revolutionary" tribunal, and therefore he wanted to limit the activities of the Cheka. At the end of the discussion, Krylenko expressed his opinion, stating that "the Chekists remain as monopolists saving the revolution." In accordance with Krylenko's proposal, the meeting decided that the right to make decisions that have a legal basis would be granted to the "revolutionary" tribunals, and the Cheka was tasked with "collecting information about criminal investigations and about them, warning the government." In accordance with the Cheka's resolution of February 17, 1919, the Cheka retained the right to ensure the execution of sentences locally, declare martial law, suppress counterrevolutionary uprisings, and prevent them [24].

On June 15, 1918, the Cheka troika was created for the first time to sentence people to death by firing squad. By decision of the same Cheka board, representatives of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) and the Left Socialist Revolutionaries were included in the troika. Dzerzhinsky, Latsis, and Aleksandrovich were elected to the troika. Fomin, Peters, and Ilyins were elected as deputies of the troika. The punishment by firing squad was applied to people who participated in acts against the Soviet government and the governments of the republics whose "crime" was proven. The troika had to deliver a unanimous verdict.

On January 17, 1920, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars adopted a resolution on the abolition of the use of capital punishment (execution) without resolutions of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission and the city, provincial Chekas and the Supreme Tribunal, and was signed by V. I. Lenin and F. E. Dzerzhinsky. However, even before this resolution came into force, the Petrograd and Moscow All-Russian Extraordinary Commissions illegally shot prisoners at night. The abolition of this right to execute did not last long; on January 28, 1920, Dzerzhinsky even sent a secret telegram to all front-line All-Russian Extraordinary Commissions, in which he permitted "direct execution for crimes provided for by the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of June 22, 1919, that is, "execution". Also on February 12, 1920, Mr. G. I. Bokiý instructed the Turks not to apply this cancellation, and when the Polish intervention began, on March 6, a special telegram was sent to Belarus, in which the right to execute was returned to special departments of the front and the army, as well as to civil tribunals.

At one time, the Cheka widely used remote surveillance, recruitment of secret agents (secret agents), inclusion of its people in the ranks of those arrested and "counter-revolutionary" organizations, unauthorized opening and reading of letters, international communications and other methods of espionage. At the same time, instructions were created on who should be sentenced to death by firing squad. These were former police and gendarme officers, unauthorized bearers of weapons and active members of the Cadet, Octobrist and Socialist Revolutionary parties living under forged documents. A representative of the RCP (b) was required to be present when considering the case of the execution of a convicted person. The representative specified who could be considered a member of a "counter-revolutionary party".

V.I. Lenin called for full support and protection of this department, and at his suggestion, the Central Committee of the RCP (b) on December 19, 1918 adopted a resolution prohibiting any criticism of the activities of the Cheka: "There should be no unacceptable criticism of the activities of the Cheka in the Soviet press. Their work continues under difficult conditions," the organization said in a statement. Radical critic N.I. Kibalchich, calling the Cheka "an office carrying out secret missions," said that its dissolution was the main demand of the Mensheviks [25].

V.I. Lenin insisted on renaming the Cheka so that the emergency body of the Civil War would not be associated with the new peacetime office. On January 23, 1922, the Politburo made a decision to transform the Cheka into the State Political Directorate (GPU) under the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. Based on this resolution, on February 6, 1922, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee issued a decree "on the liquidation of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (VChK) and the rules for search and arrest."

4. Conclusion

Thus, by the second half of 1918, the structure of the Cheka (Extraordinary Commission) and local Cheka organs had been formed. In the structure of the Cheka, the main tasks were defined as the fight against counter-revolution, speculation and official crimes. However, in practice, this organization played a key role in concealing the forces that were in opposition to the Soviet power. The organization consisted of central and local

departments, which also included various service units. However, in the districts, the structure was much simpler, and some departments were merged. In 1922, the Cheka was officially liquidated, and its functions were transferred to the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) of the RSFSR. After this, the State Political Directorate (GPU) was created, which operated at the central and local levels, playing an important role in ensuring the security of the country. These structures had great power and authority in the fight against counter-revolutionary actions in the Soviet state, as well as criminal actions against the state, and became one of the main repressive organs in the political system.

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