The Karabakh Conflict: Legacy of The Soviet Power?

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Two months have passed since Azerbaijan successfully defeated the self-proclaimed Republic of Artsakh, created by Armenian population of the Nagorno Karabakh region. Just like in other former Soviet countries, the nationalists of both sides blame communists for this conflict. Is it really true? We translated an article from our Armenian section, explaining this problem.

Questions regarding the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have been continually asked for years, but these queries became more frequent after the start of the recent hostilities between Azerbaijan and the Artsakh Defense Army (Republic of Artsakh). Now, this issue again has been thrust into the public spotlight.

Many are misled to believe that the conflict in Karabakh first appeared near the end of the USSR's existence. This point of view is especially popular in Russia. Others suggest that the roots of the conflict lie in the national policy carried by the Bolsheviks – this opinion is mostly popular in Armenia.

On the other hand, we believe that any interethnic and territorial conflict has its own objective and, to a lesser extent, subjective factors. First of all, one needs to search for the causes of the conflict in the objective factors that provoked the conflict.

Within this article, we do not seek to fully reveal all the causes of this conflict, but we'll only try to dismantle the established mainstream opinions and myths that claim the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was created by the national policy of the Soviet government.

It is commonplace to hear from both political figures and ordinary people that, if the Bolsheviks' policy towards Nagorno-Karabakh was different, there would have been no conflict, let alone hostilities and war.

In fact, we can clearly see how nationalists and the bourgeoisie are trying to blame the communists and the Soviet system for the outbreak of the Karabakh war. It resembles the behavior of a criminal who, intending to evade responsibility, shifts his guilt onto another person just like the proverb "whoever smelt, it dealt it".

By examining the history of Transcaucasia, we can easily refute the speculations of nationalists on the role of communists in the Karabakh conflict.

Armenian nationalists believe that if Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred to the Armenian SSR in 1921, there would be no prerequisite for the Karabakh conflict that arose in the late 1980s.

There is a rational grain in this idea, since after the collapse of the USSR the borders of most CIS states were established in accordance with the administrative boundaries of the former Soviet Republics. Perhaps the conflict wouldn't have happened (at least in the form that it did), but history took a different path. The events that transpired did so in the way that they did (most likely, given the background of the conflict, it could not have turned out differently) and we cannot know exactly how everything would have turned out if Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred to the Armenian SSR in 1921.

However, the ardent critics of the Bolsheviks miss the background and factors that contributed to the transfer of the Nagorno-Karabakh region to Azerbaijan in 1921.

The Karabakh issue did not arise in 1988, let alone in 1921. This issue has its own causes and effects that eventually contributed to the aggravation of the Karabakh conflict.

The nationalists, from their high horse, discuss the reasons for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Azerbaijani SSR, while unaware about the situation at the time. In 1921 the Bolsheviks received a difficult and bloody inheritance. In fact, they had to quickly, and because of that not always correctly, solve the problems that arose due to the activities of nationalists during their period in power in the region.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Transcaucasia was a motley ethno-confessional formation, where Armenians, Tatars (Azerbaijanis), Georgians, Russians and Jews lived compactly and nearby to one another. The population was mostly mixed. In addition to ethnic and religious factors, there was social and cultural stratification.

The Armenian-Tatar (Azerbaijani) massacre of 1905-1906 can be considered the forerunner of the future Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. There was a series of clashes between Armenians and Tatars (Azerbaijanis) in the cities of Baku, Nakhichevan, and Shusha, which led to the death of 3 to 10 thousand people. The Tsarist authorities took virtually no action to suppress the unrest.

The Tsarist regime did not particularly try, or rather, it did not have the goal, to raise the cultural development of all peoples to one level.

Pogroms and national hostility between Armenians and Azerbaijanis were beneficial to both Tsarism and the national bourgeoisie on both sides. They fought the strike movement with the help of nationalism and ethnic conflicts. We wrote about this in more detail in the first chapter of our article The Birth and Death of the Baku Commune.

National enmity is an ideal tool for dividing workers from different nations into small groups along ethnic, religious or cultural lines; The proletariat, due to hostility and mistrust will not be able to unite in a joint struggle against the exploiters.

The nationalists on both sides did not set a goal to overcome national hatred; each side looked at the situation from their own ivory tower. The rhetoric and actions of Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalists only worsened the already complex interethnic relations between the two peoples. The nationalism of some gave rise to and fueled the nationalism of others - hatred can only give rise to counter-hatred. Modern Armenian and Azerbaijani nationalism is, among other things, a product of mutual influence; they are two sides of the same coin.

After the overthrow of the Tsarist autocracy in Transcaucasia, the new authority of the Provisional Government took shape in the form of national councils and committees. These government bodies began to be formed from representatives of bourgeois-nationalist parties.

On November 28, 1917, with the participation of the Georgian Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, the Armenian Dashnaktsutyun party and the Tatar (Azerbaijani) Musavatists, a coalition government was created – the Transcaucasian Commissariat, and then the Transcaucasian Seim (parliament).

The Transcaucasian Seim, torn apart by internal contradictions, soon collapsed into three independent states led by representatives of the bourgeoisie: the Georgian, Azerbaijani and Armenian republics.

The newly formed Transcaucasian republics independently chose their foreign policy. Contradictions and squabbles between the national councils of the

Transcaucasian Seim continued with the acquisition of independence, but only at a qualitatively new level.

The Transcaucasian republics immediately filed territorial claims against each other. An armed conflict took place between Armenia and Georgia over the ownership of the Armenian-populated border areas. Territorial disputes also arose between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, Nakhichevan and Zangezur.

The Republic of Armenia conducted military operations against some Azerbaijani strategic targets in Nakhichevan, Surmalin, Sharur-Daralagez, and Erivan districts which earlier were provinces of the former Russian Empire. The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic opposed the formations of the Armenian National Councils in Karabakh and Zangezur. At the same time, the republics did not enter into direct military conflict with each other, yet.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic almost immediately established administrative control over Karabakh, which worried the Armenian population of the region.

In August 1919, the National Council of Armenians of Karabakh was forced to recognize Azerbaijan's jurisdiction over the mountainous part of Karabakh pending the decision of the Versailles Conference. For the Musavatist government in Baku, this was a step towards the final entry of Karabakh into Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the territorial and ethnic conflict in Zangezur grew. The Armenians living in this region were moving towards an anti-Azerbaijani uprising, while the Musavatist government was increasing its military presence in Karabakh.

Against the background of growing tensions around Zangezur and Karabakh, the Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Armenia Alexander Khatisyan, in letters to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Mammad Yusif Jafarov, proposed holding an Armenian-Azerbaijani peace conference to discuss the temporary demarcation of borders, the refugee issue, trade and transit agreements and other questions.

The conference resulted in nothing more than a half-baked agenda during three closed sessions. Already at the first closed meeting, it became clear that the position of both sides had not changed. The negotiations on the final establishment of borders led to no agreements.

It should be noted that previously the British mission in Karabakh took some measures to resolve the interethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis. However, all attempts were in vain.

The bloodiest and most active phase of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict continued until the Sovietization of the Transcaucasian republics. Moreover, the Sovietization of Azerbaijan as well as the disputed territories (including Karabakh) occurred earlier than the Sovietization of the Armenian Republic, which could not but affect the course of resolving the territorial dispute.

In the question of the causes of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, it is necessary to take into account the above. Of course, this is not a complete chronology of the conflict's prehistory, but only a condensed retelling of it. But even from this retelling, it is clearly seen that the Karabakh conflict of the late 80s and the Karabakh war of 2020 is not the work of the Bolsheviks’ hands.

From the above, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The ethnic conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis has deep historical and social roots, and mutual territorial claims arose before the Bolsheviks came to

power;

2. The conditions of foreign intervention and the absence of clearly established borders of Transcaucasia during their separation from the Russian Empire as well as the declaration of independence by the three republics could only lead to mutual territorial claims and wars;

3. The nationalist governments that seized power in Armenia and Azerbaijan and their unwillingness or inability to reach an agreement played a large role in inciting the ethnic conflict.

It is worth mentioning separately about the cessation of Transcaucasia from Russia. Given the colorful ethno-religious makeup of the region, any attempt to create national states could only lead to wars. Before the events of 1918, the Dashnaktsutyun party did not demand cessation from Russia in its programs. Instead, within Russian Armenia, Dashnaktsutyun noted in its program that the Russian Transcaucasus was supposed to become a democratic republic, part of Russia on a federal basis.

The Armenian Bolsheviks also opposed the separation of Transcaucasia from Russia, realizing that the creation of national states in the current conditions would not lead to anything good. The Bolsheviks turned out to be more consistent than the Dashnaks.

If we turn to the "Manifesto of the Union of Armenian Social Democrats" from 1902, it suggested the following:

"wide development of local self-government..."; "...the establishment of a federal republic is necessary in a future free Russia." The author of this text, Stepan Shaumyan, also wrote about the Caucasian peoples need for "autonomy regarding cultural life, that is, freedom of language, school, education, etc."

The nationalists, through their short-sighted actions, unleashed the demons of chauvinism and interethnic conflicts.

Thus, the Soviet leadership inherited a difficult legacy in the form of famine, devastation, interethnic conflicts, mutual resentment and enmity between different ethnic groups and the anti-Soviet activities of half-dead nationalists. The Bolsheviks had to clean up all this mess that the nationalists created.

After the Sovietization of Armenia and Azerbaijan, the Karabakh military conflict turned into an internal territorial dispute between two subjects of the Transcaucasian Federative Soviet Republic (TSFSR), which was no longer resolved on the battlefield, but at the negotiating table.

Naturally, after Armenian-Azerbaijani relations had become so bitter (due to the actions of nationalists on both sides), resolving the Karabakh issue was not an easy task. Mutual grievances and claims, which did not disappear with the establishment of Soviet power, only acquiring a more moderate and harmless character, did not allow for some kind of quick and easy compromise.

Since Soviet power in Azerbaijan and the disputed territories was established earlier (except for Zangezur) than in Armenia, the Azerbaijani Bolsheviks believed that Karabakh should become part of Soviet Azerbaijan. In addition, the weakness and precariousness of Soviet power in Armenia (in February 1921, Soviet power in Armenia was temporarily lost during an uprising organized by the Dashnaks) pushed the Azerbaijani communists to think about quickly securing these territories under Baku, where Soviet power managed to gain a stronger foothold.

The interethnic issue is a complex one, the resolution of which requires a compromise. The difficulty in resolving such issues is that a compromise will most likely not satisfy either party. In any case, it is impossible to satisfy nationalist ambitions, these ambitions are like a bottomless barrel - the nationalists will always ask for more, and their national egoism will never allow them to be satisfied.

This is what happened later. In the nationalist mythologies of these three Transcaucasian republics, there is a claim against the Bolsheviks for allegedly transferring their ancestral territories. Armenians, for obvious reasons, believe that the Bolsheviks allegedly gave Mount Ararat and Nagorno-Karabakh to the Turks and Azerbaijanis, while the historical context and the entire background of these events are ignored; Azerbaijanis believe that the transfer of Zangezur to Armenia is a hostile act on the part of the Soviet government towards the Azerbaijani people.

Even Georgians have complaints: modern Georgian nationalists believe that the Soviet authorities seized and transferred to the Armenian SSR the “original” Georgian territories of Southern Georgia (Kvemo Kartli) – the regions of Lori and Tashir (Lori region of Armenia).

It should be noted that the political and national situation after the Sovietization of Transcaucasia put the communists who led Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in a difficult position, so territorial disputes between the leadership of the Transcaucasian republics after the Sovietization of the region should not be surprising.

You can often hear nationalists reproach the communists that, when they came to power, they were not guided by the principles of internationalism and friendship of peoples. Yes, at first glance, the communists of the three Transcaucasian republics tried to expand or retain the territories of their republics, however, for a fairer view, one must understand that any territorial concession in the eyes of the masses exposed the leadership of the republic, that agreed to this, as traitors to national interests. Undermining the authority of the communists among the population could lead (and did) to counter-revolutionary uprisings.

Nationalist parties in all countries, when fighting the communists, have always played tunes on the string of “patriotism”, presenting the latter as a force acting to the detriment of the so-called national interests. This was the case in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and, of course, in Russia.

The communists had to use counter-propaganda in order to debunk such allegations and not to give nationalists any real ground for such accusations.

Each republic had its own major nationalist opposition seeking to seize power. Partly for this reason, the Communists were reluctant to make territorial concessions to their neighbors, since such concessions would put them at a disadvantage to the nationalist opposition in their own republics.

Many will rightly note that nationalists were in a similar position. This is not entirely true. The communists received republics after the rule of the nationalists and they had to resolve interethnic conflicts that occurred due to the nationalists. The communists sought to resolve and did resolve interethnic conflicts and territorial disputes, even if not in the best way they wanted. The Soviet system itself allowed these disputes to be resolved at the negotiating table, and not on the battlefield.

The nationalists, in turn, sought to resolve these national contradictions only through the complete destruction of the enemy. In addition, while the communists were afraid of the influence of nationalist propaganda on the masses, the nationalists were more relaxed in this regard since it was unlikely that the communist opposition would use nationalist rhetoric in the fight against them.

In any case, after Sovietization, the Karabakh issue and other territorial disputes in Transcaucasia began to be resolved at the negotiating table, within the framework of meetings of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b), and not through mutual extermination of each other, which was certainly good and progress for the peoples of the region who were exhausted by endless wars.

The following territories were disputed between the three Transcaucasian republics; The Lori region, the Akhalkalaki and Khram regions, which were claimed by Armenia and Georgia, as well as Nakhichevan, Zangezur and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Lori region and Zangezur went to Soviet Armenia [1], and Nagorno-Karabakh and Nakhichevan received the status of autonomous regions within the Azerbaijan SSR. At the beginning of 1921, a referendum was held in Nakhijevan, as a result of which the majority of those participating in the referendum expressed a desire to be part of Azerbaijan as an autonomous republic, which is not surprising since the Armenian population in this area was in the minority.

As mentioned above, the Karabakh issue was resolved within the framework of meetings of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) - the body representing the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in the Caucasus region.

Thus, on July 4, 1921, a plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) was held, which adopted a resolution on the inclusion of Nagorno-Karabakh into Soviet Armenia. The plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) issued a resolution: “Include Nagorno-Karabakh into the SSR of Armenia, and hold a plebiscite only in Nagorno-Karabakh.”

The transcript of the plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) is available below:

FROM THE MINUTES OF THE EVENING MEETING OF THE PLENARY OF THE CAUCASIAN BUREAU OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE RCP

July 4, 1921

Present: Member of the Central Committee of the RCP Stalin, members of the Caucasian Bureau: vol. Ordzhonikidze, Makharadze, Narimanov, Myasnikov, Kirov, Nazaretyan, Orakhelashvili and Figatner; Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the Komsomol Breitman, members of the Central Committee of Georgia: Tsintsadze, Mdivani and Svanidze.

Listeners: The Karabakh issue. During the discussion of this [90-91] issue, two points of view emerged and the following questions were put to vote: a) Karabakh should be left within Azerbaijan. b) Conduct a plebiscite throughout Karabakh with the participation of the entire population of Armenians and Muslims. c) The mountainous part of Karabakh should be included in Armenia. d) Hold a plebiscite only in Nagorno-Karabakh, i.e. among the Armenians.

Statement by Comrade Narimanov: In view of the importance that the Karabakh issue has for Azerbaijan, I consider it necessary to transfer it to the final decision of the Central Committee of the RCP.

Resolution: Votes for proposition a): Narimanov, Makharadze, Nazaretyan; Vote against: Ordzhonikidze, Myasnikov, Kirov, Figatner.

Votes for b): Narimanov, Makharadze.

Votes for c): Ordzhonikidze, Myasnikov, Figatner, Kirov.

Votes for d): Ordzhonikidze, Myasnikov, Figatner, Kirov, Nazaretyan.

So it was decided: Nagorno-Karabakh should be included in the SSR of Armenia, a plebiscite should be held only in Nagorno-Karabakh. Due to the fact that the issue of Karabakh has caused serious disagreement, the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP considers it necessary to transfer it to the final decision of the Central Committee of the RCP. Comrade Orakhelashvili was absent during the voting on the Karabakh issue. Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP Figatner [91-92].

Source

However, at the insistence of Nariman Narimanov, the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) agreed to transfer the issue of Karabakh for a final decision to the Central Committee of the RCP(b). However, the issue of Karabakh did not end up transferred to the discretion of the Central Committee of the RCP(b).

On July 5, 1921, another meeting of the plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) took place. The Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) canceled the previous decision and decided: “Based on the need for national peace between Muslims and Armenians and the economic connection of upper and lower Karabakh, its constant connection with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh should be left within the Azerbaijani SSR, giving it broad regional autonomy with its administrative center in the city Shusha, which is part of the autonomous region."

The text of the protocol is given below:

FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE PLENARY OF THE CAUCASIAN BUREAU OF THE CENTRAL COMMITTEE OF THE RCP

July 5, 1921

Present: Member of the Central Committee of the RCP Stalin; members of the Caucasian Bureau: vol. Ordzhonikidze, Makharadze, Kirov, Nazaretyan, Orakhelashvili, Figatner, Narimanov and Myasnikov; People's Minister of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic Huseynov:

Hearings: Ordzhonikidze and Nazaretyan are raising the issue of revising the resolution of the previous Plenum on Karabakh.

Resolutions: Based on the need for national peace between Muslims and Armenians and the economic connection of Upper and Lower Karabakh, and its constant connection with Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh should be left within the Azerbaijan SSR, giving it broad regional autonomy with its administrative center in the city Shusha, part of the autonomous region.

Votes: 4 for, 3 abstained.

b) Instruct the Central Committee of Azerbaijan to determine the boundaries of the autonomous region and submit it for approval to the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP.

c) Instruct the Presidium of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee to negotiate with the Central Committee of Armenia and the Central Committee of Azerbaijan about a candidate for the Chechen Committee of Nagorno-Karabakh.

d) The scope of autonomy of Nagorno-Karabakh will be determined by the Central Committee of Azerbaijan. and submit it for approval by the Caucasian Bureau of the

Central Committee.

Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP Figatner

Source

In the current situation, when the Karabakh issue turned out to be fundamental for the two republics, and also given that the territorial dispute was resolved within the framework of a single state with common borders (TSFSR), the adoption of such a decision, namely the creation of an autonomous region, was a compromise. That's at least what the participants in those events may have thought.

The decision is controversial, given that in the mountainous part of Karabakh the majority of the population are Armenians. Many believe that Joseph Stalin, who was present at the plenum on July 5, influenced the decision. However, while Joseph Stalin was present at the plenum on July 4, (as can be seen in the transcript above), this did not in any way influence the decision made. In addition, based on the above transcript, Stalin did not speak out, much less vote. There are no documents or eyewitness accounts of this event confirming the assertions regarding Stalin's influence on the decision of the plenum of July 5th.

As we said above, Armenian nationalists believed that if Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred to the Armenian SSR in 1921, there would be no prerequisites for the emergence of the Karabakh conflict, which flared up in the late 1980s.

However, these nationalist gentlemen forget that Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred to the Azerbaijani SSR for a reason. The decision was made with difficulty, as can be seen from the above documents. There was a heated discussion and the Bolsheviks approached the issue with full responsibility. Such a decision was not spontaneous or rushed, and certainly not intended to infringe on someone's rights or national feelings.

We cannot know exactly what would have happened if Nagorno-Karabakh was transferred to the Armenian SSR. Could things have turned out differently? To answer this question, it is necessary to take into account the circumstances that occurred before the Caucasion Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b) made the decision to transfer Nagorno-Karabakh to the Azerbaijan SSR.

The following must be clearly understood:

• The territorial conflict appeared in the region long before the establishment of Soviet power;

• The nationalists on both sides only worsened the situation with their actions;

• After the rule of Dashnaktsutyun, Armenia was on the verge of becoming a Turkish satellite;

• Dashnaktsutyun concluded the Treaty of Alexandropol with Turkey, according to which Armenia's territory was reduced to 12 thousand square km;

• After Sovietization, the communists did not recognize the provisions of the Alexandropol Treaty, Soviet Armenia managed to return the city of Alexandropol and the Lori region under its sovereignty, and the issues of the Akhalkalaki and Khram regions were resolved.

That is to say, if the task was to infringe on the national pride of the Armenian people, then Armenia would remain within the borders established by the Treaty of Alexandropol.

The conflict and territorial disputes arose before the Sovietization of Transcaucasia. Armenia, after the rule of Armenian nationalists, was on the verge of destruction. Considering this, the situation that the leadership of Soviet Armenia inherited was extremely difficult. It would have been futile for them to agitate for the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh's annexation to the Armenian Republic, and especially to appeal to the Baku communists, whose positions were comparatively strong.

The uprising of the Dashnaks in February 1921 and the temporary loss of Soviet power in Armenia did not in any way contribute to strengthening the position of the Armenian communists in the political field of Transcaucasia. The position of Soviet Armenia, namely its political sway, to put it mildly, was not remotely comparable to the political weight and significance of Soviet Azerbaijan. The Armenian nationalists, with their adventurous policies, which ultimately led to nothing, contributed to the relative weakness of Soviet Armenia, meaning they largely led to Nagorno-Karabakh not being transferred to Soviet Armenia.

There is no point in talking now about the correctness or incorrectness of this decision since what happened happened and the decision itself was constrained by the historical conditions in which it was made.

The nationalists had their chance to solve the problems, but after winning power they demonstrated their incompetence and inability to solve problems of this kind. It is easy for modern nationalists who criticize the Bolsheviks to talk about those events, however, they do not understand and do not want to understand that the Bolsheviks in 1921 were faced with such intense interethnic, territorial and social problems that the current ruling class of the Transcaucasian national republics would not have been able to cope. We have the misfortune to observe firsthand how Armenian nationalists solved problems of this nature for 30 years now, and today's problems in Armenia are not comparable in magnitude to those that the Bolsheviks faced in Transcaucasia.

Iin the end, the Bolsheviks managed to come to at least some kind of compromise and establish a peaceful life for the people of Transcaucasia. Nagorno-Karabakh was not donated to Azerbaijan, as nationalists are trying to present it, but was only transferred under the jurisdiction of the neighboring republic within the framework of a single united state. The population of Nagorno-Karabakh was not subject to ethnic cleansing, the region had autonomous status, and the Armenians of the NKAO lived in peace in their small homeland.

This is not a justification for the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh to the Azerbaijani SSR, but only a statement of facts. Yes, we repeat once again, the decision was not the most ideal, but what do we have now, after 30 years of independence? How many Armenians currently live in Azerbaijan? How many Armenians are left in Armenia itself? Most of the territory of Artsakh was lost during the last Karabakh war and the blame for what happened lies with everyone involved; there is no need to shift all the blame solely onto Nikol Pashinyan. Pashinyan is just a natural result of the establishment of capitalism in Armenia. After this happened, it is clear that it was not the Bolsheviks who harmed the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh in 1921. While the situation of the Armenians of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast since 1921 had hardly changed, now they are forced to live on a small piece of territory in constant fear under the supervision of Russian peacekeepers.

The communists were able to ensure peace between Armenians and Azerbaijanis for almost 70 years. This does not mean that nationalism and interethnic contradictions had been completely eliminated, since the material prerequisites for these phenomena in society had also not been completely eliminated.

No matter how nationalists try to gloat, citing as examples local manifestations of everyday national conflicts between Armenians and Azerbaijanis during the USSR,

the facts remain clear. Interethnic conflicts were of an everyday nature and could not, in principle, turn into an open military conflict with the use of lethal weapons, as was happening before the Sovietization of Transcaucasia and during the Karabakh wars after the destruction of the USSR.

Despite the interethnic incidents that did occur within the Soviet republics, there was a real, and not ostentatious, friendship of peoples, a manifestation of internationalism, mutually beneficial cooperation of Transcaucasian peoples and interethnic marriages.

Why has the Karabakh issue been revived in the late 1980s?

Socialism is a socio-economic formation which has birthmarks and some tendencies reflective of the previous capitalist society. The goal of socialism is to suppress and eliminate these birthmarks on the way to building communism. If the course of strengthening socialism in the USSR continued, commodity production was being overcome, development of productive forces and, accordingly, the improvement of the well-being of the entire society was being carried out, then interethnic and nationalist contradictions, such as “who owns Nagorno-Karabakh?”, would eventually fade into the background.

The re-emerging Karabakh issue in the late 80s is a consequence of the political and economic crisis that occurred due to capitalist restoration processes and the curtailment of the socialist course.

That is, we can identify both objective and subjective reasons. Objective reasons include bourgeois tendencies that were not completely eliminated in Soviet society and economic reforms carried out by the country's leadership (e.g. Kosygin's reforms and Gorbachev's perestroika), which eventually led to the restoration of capitalist relations in the USSR.

The activities of nationalists who have not yet vanished completely can be classified as subjective factors. There were also nationalists in the party apparatus, who joined the party for career or other reasons. Many such party leaders quickly "changed their shoes" and settled well in the new capitalist realities after the destruction of the USSR.

As we said above, perestroika and economic reforms of the revisionist CPSU led society on the path of restoration of capitalism. These processes, in turn, led to an economic crisis, which revived the half-forgotten conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

Nationalists on both sides were in the vanguard of inciting ethnic conflict. In Armenia, nationalist forces were able to turn the Karabakh issue into a battering ram against socialism and the Soviet system to seize political and economic power in the republic.

As market relations were established in the USSR and socialism was destroyed, the Karabakh conflict moved from the stage of a local domestic conflict into a full-scale war between the two new "independent" republics.

Conclusion

The current situation in the post-Soviet space does not surprise us. After the counter-revolution of the late 80s. The post-Soviet republics merged into the world capitalist system as dependent and semi-dependent countries. Many social

problems that Soviet citizens could not even conceive of became a harsh reality after the establishment of market relations.

Armenia, as a state, has rolled back to the times (so dearly loved today by the Armenian bourgeoisie) of the First Republic of 1918-1920. Degradation can be traced in almost all spheres of public life. The rollback consists not only in the same economic and social degradation that all former Soviet republics experienced, including Armenia but also in a return to a situation where the Republic is squeezed on all sides by large regional imperialists. After 1991, the Republic was led by incompetent people, and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan became the periapsis of incompetence and adventurism.

This is what the national hero of modern Armenia, Monte Melkonian, wrote, who accurately described the old symbol of “independent” Armenia, pointing out the connection with the First Republic, predicting Armenia’s rollback to those times:

“Mass famine, ferocious epidemics, massive corruption and incompetence of officials, mass unemployment, exploitation, war and vulnerability to genocidal invasion - this was the wonderful Disneyland of “independent” Armenia. And this is what the Tricolor symbolizes today. It is therefore absolutely stunning to hear that this flag - a reminder of the most bitter period of our three-thousand-year history - is now raised above the Freedom Square. This action can only indicate an astonishing ignorance of our history - ignorance or misunderstanding, or both.”[2].

Of course, we would not like to compare Pashinyan with the leaders of the Armenian First Republic, such a comparison would be incorrect, however, for that historical era and in that specific situation, Dashnaktsutyun political figures, having taken power in Armenia, turned out to be absolutely incompetent in state matters, the adventurism of modern Armenian politicians is in no way inferior to their adventurism.

Just as the logical result of the 29-year so-called independence of Armenia is the rule of Pashinyan and the concluded agreement of November 10, 2020, the result of the two-year rule of Armenian nationalists was the Treaty of Alexandropol of December 2, 1920.

From the point of view of territorial losses and the terms of the above agreements, historical parallels can easily be drawn. In addition to all this, Azerbaijan is trying to challenge the established borders in the Syunik region. Both Turkish and Azerbaijani capitalists have plans for Syunik; control over this territory would allow the establishment of a land connection between Turkey and Azerbaijan.

We will also mention that during the time of the Armenian First Republic, the ownership of Zangezur by Armenia was disputed by the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, created in 1918 by the Musavatists.

If the failures of the Dashnaks can, with a great stretch, be justified by the fact that they inherited a ruined republic, then the current Armenian elite and their nationalist servants have no excuses. The Armenian Third Republic, after the collapse of the USSR, received a country with a population of almost 3.5 million highly educated people, with ready-made infrastructure, entire branches of production, factories, a nuclear power plant, its own scientific institutions and technical schools, etc. Yes, with the collapse of the USSR and the destruction of socialism, Armenia lost markets and sources of raw materials, but these circumstances once again confirm the dead end of the path chosen in 1991.

Before the events of November 2020, when the communists cited the achievements of Soviet Armenia as an argument in disputes with nationalists, the latter, as a counterargument, talked about the Karabakh movement and the results of the

Karabakh war of 1994, when the Armenians, almost on their own, were able to not only achieve the separation of the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous region from Azerbaijan but also to capture seven of its districts and create a buffer. This, according to the Armenian bourgeoisie and nationalists, was the main achievement of modern Armenia.

The truth is that the victory in this war was won by people and personnel raised by the Soviet system, which the nationalists hate so much.

However, for 29 years the ruling oligarchy has done nothing to somehow resolve the Karabakh issue, however, this is the joint fault of both the Armenian and Azerbaijani oligarchs.

In Armenian society, talk about compromises and concessions was not tolerated, just like in Azerbaijani society. Anyone who hinted at the possibility of transferring 7 regions to Azerbaijan in exchange for the independence of Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh Republic) was branded a traitor to the nation. Now, as a result, these 7 regions were lost and a small piece of Artsakh is all that remains; everyone has already forgotten about the recognition of independence.

We would like to ask the nationalists: what can you boast about now? Having a national elite, that regardless of which person is in power, will continue to push the country towards disaster? Armenia now has a disappointing opportunity to become a sales market and supplier of raw materials for Turkish capital. If Armenian entrepreneurs benefit from this situation; if it promises them a profit of 100-150%, then undoubtedly, they will be all for it.

For almost 30 years there were no hated communists, and no one interfered, however, control over Artsakh was lost. The worst thing is that the Karabakh issue remains unresolved.

Answering the question posed, we can say with confidence that the communists and the Soviet government are not to blame for the outbreak of the Karabakh war. Oligarchs from Azerbaijan and Armenia sow enmity between peoples, and nationalists cultivate the poisonous roots of war and live like parasites on them.

Author: Edgar Sahakyan

Endnotes:

[1] From the protocol No. 13 of the meeting of the Plenum of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee of the RCP(b): “July 7, 1921.

Present: member of the Central Committee of the RCP Stalin, members of the Caucasian Bureau t.t. Ordzhonikidze, Makharadze, Kirov, Narimanov, Myasnikov, Nazaretyan, Orakhelashvili, Figatner, Commissar of the SSR of Georgia Comrade Svanidze, Commissar of the SSR of Armenia Mravyan.

Listened: On the annexation of the neutral zone to Georgia or Armenia. Resolved: 1. The entire neutral zone is part of the Armenian SSR (6 votes for, 1 abstained).

Listened to: 2. On the annexation of the Akhalkalaki and Khram regions to Armenia.

Resolved: To submit for consideration to the Central Committee of Georgia, the conclusion of which will be submitted to the next Plenum...Secretary of the Caucasian Bureau of the Central Committee Figatner" (RGASPI. f. 64. op. 1. d. 1. l. 131-131 vol.);

[2] “National self-determination or national suicide?” p. 165. The article was originally written in Armenian and dated October 24, 1988, and sent from Poissy prison in France. It was first published in the first edition of “Right to Fight” in 1990.

Original article