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Rethinking the Purposes of A. I. Guchkov's Trip to Emperor Nicholas II in Pskov in the Days of the February Revolution of 1917

Abstract

The question the role of Alexander Ivanovich Guchkov, the leader of the Octobrists, in the events of the eve of and during the monarchy overthrow in February 1917 remains relevant in

the modern historiography of the Great Russian Revolution. Most researchers come to the conclusion that Guchkov was induced to participate in the revolutionary events by his desire to oust Nicholas II from power in order to deliver the throne to his heir, Alexei, under the regency of his brother Michael Aleksandrovich. A. I. Guchkov's trip to Pskov on March 2, 1917, which he undertook intending to persuade the emperor to abdicate, is predominantly considered as practical realization of this plan of the "great master of the revolution." However, the author has discovered a certain document drafted in the days of the February Revolution in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (specifically, in the fond 97 "Office of the Palace Commandant of the Ministry of the Imperial Court", file captioned "Correspondence and telegrams of the last days of Nicholas II's reign"). This document, which has been introduced to the scholarly discourse for the first time, can significantly clarify the historiographic picture. The document is a typescript containing a list of presumptive members of the Cabinet of Ministers to be headed by the "Prime Minister" A. I. Guchkov. The source analysis permits to conclude that the document was created by A.I. Guchkov himself or by someone quite close to him in the period from February 28 to March 2, 1917. This text contains a request for Nicholas II to appoint the oppositionist to the high governmental post. By examining the second part of the document, we can deduce that this request was in fact an ultimatum, as it contains information about the arrest of prominent state dignitaries and ministers and about 18 regiments (up to 75,000 people) joining the revolution. Thus, Guchkov went to Pskov not only to ensure the emperor's abdication, but also to become the head of the government. Although it is generally agreed that Guchkov had no political ambitions and simply provided a "mechanism of the revolution," analysis of his political activities in 1915-17 allows the author to conclude that, contrary to the popular belief, he strove to take the helm of state. It is common knowledge that the attempt of the Octobrists' leader to head the Cabinet of Ministers was a fiasco; and yet the identified document expands our understanding of A. I. Guchkov's personality and of the political struggle at the highest political and administrative level of the Russian Empire in the days of the February Revolution.

### Keywords

Historical source on the February Revolution of 1917, Emperor Nicholas II, A. I. Guchkov, responsible ministry, Provisional Government, source studies.

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