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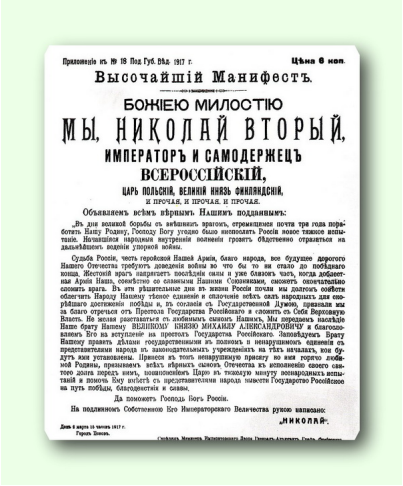
Unknown Documents on the History of the February Revolution of 1917 and the Circumstances of the Abdication of Nicholas II

Abstract

The question of actions of the Russian Emperor Nicholas II during the February Revolution, and in particular, of his willingness or unwillingness to make concessions to the Duma opposition is a controversial issue in the historiography. Thus, Soviet and ?migr? historians believed that the

tsar agreed to reforms under pressure of the military elite, which collaborated with the State Duma in those rebellious days. However, in modern historical science, an opposite opinion is gaining foothold, according to which in February – March 1917 the monarch showed a conciliatory attitude towards the opposition and was ready to agree to an actual limitation of his power by introducing a responsible ministry. The roadblock is assessment of sufficiency and reliability of the source corpus (mainly memoirs) for drawing the conclusion about the tsar's readiness for reforms. The lack of “documentary” evidence makes the narrative of the tsar’s desire to establish a “ministry of confidence” vulnerable. However, documents of the period of the February Revolution that have been identified in the State Archive of Russian Federation (fond 97 “Office of the Palace Commandant of the Ministry of the Imperial Court”) allow us to come nearer the end of this historiographical discussion. They are two typewritten paragraphs on a single sheet of paper, without a title or any additional information on its author, time, and place of creation. Source analysis has concluded that the documents are drafts of tsar’s telegrams prepared by the palace commandant V. N. Voeikov on March 1, 1917 to be sent to the ex-chairman of the State Duma M. V. Rodzianko. The content of these drafts clearly indicates that the tsar was ready to provide a “ministry of confidence” even before his arrival at the headquarters of the Northern Front on the evening of March 1, that is, de facto to establish parliamentarism in Russia. The author's reconstruction of the events has showed that the first draft of the telegram is tsar’s delayed response to the appeal of the Duma leader encouraging him to reform public administration (dated February 26-27, 1917). The second telegram is supposed to be sent to Rodzianko inviting him to Pskov for final decision concerning the head of the new “government of confidence.” Despite the fact that they for some reasons had never been sent to the addressee, these “messages,” nevertheless, are the “documentary” evidence of Nicholas II’s consent to a gradual introduction of parliamentarism in the country during the February Revolution.



Приложеніе къ № 18 Под. Губ. Вѣд. 1917 г. Цѣна 6 коп.

Высочайшій Манифестъ.

БОЖІЕЮ МИЛОСТІЮ

МЫ, НИКОЛАЙ ВТОРЫЙ,

ИМПЕРАТОРЪ И САМОДЕРЖЕЦЪ

ВСЕРОССІЙСКІЙ,

ЦАРЬ ПОЛЬСКІЙ, ВЕЛИКІЙ КНЯЗЬ ФИНЛЯНДСКІЙ,

И ПРОЧАЯ, И ПРОЧАЯ, И ПРОЧАЯ.

Объявляемъ всѣмъ вѣрнымъ Нашимъ подданнымъ:

„Въ дни великой борьбы съ внѣшнимъ врагомъ, стремящимся почти три года поработить Нашу Родину, Господу Богу угодно было ниспослать Россіи новое тяжкое испытаніе. Начавшіяся народныя внутреннія волненія грозятъ бѣдственно отразиться на дальнѣйшемъ веденіи упорной войны.

Судьба Россіи, честь геройской Нашей Арміи, благо народа, все будущее дорогого Нашего Отечества требуютъ доведенія войны во что бы то ни стало до побѣднаго конца. Жестокій врагъ напрягаетъ послѣднія силы и уже близокъ часъ, когда доблестная Армія Наша, совмѣстно со славными Нашими Союзниками, сможетъ окончательно сломить врага. Въ эти рѣшительные дни въ жизни Россіи почли мы долгомъ совѣсти облегчить Народу Нашему тѣсное единеніе и сплоченіе всѣхъ силъ народныхъ для скорѣйшаго достиженія побѣды и, въ согласіи съ Государственной Думою, признали мы за благо отречься отъ Престола Государства Россійскаго и сложить съ Себя Верховную Власть. Не желая разставаться съ любимымъ сыномъ Нашимъ, Мы передаемъ наслѣдіе Наше брату Нашему ВЕЛИКОМУ КНЯЗЮ МИХАИЛУ АЛЕКСАНДРОВИЧУ и благословляемъ Его на вступленіе на престолъ Государства Россійскаго. Заповѣдуемъ Брату Нашему править дѣлами государственными въ полномъ и ненарушимомъ единеніи съ представителями народа въ законодательныхъ учрежденіяхъ на тѣхъ началахъ, кои будутъ ими установлены. Принеся въ томъ ненарушимую присягу во имя горячо любимой Родины, призываемъ всѣхъ вѣрныхъ сыновъ Отечества къ исполненію своего святого долга передъ нимъ, повиновеніемъ Царю въ тяжелую минуту всенародныхъ испытаній и помочь Ему вмѣстѣ съ представителями народа вывести Государство Россійское на путь побѣды, благоденствія и славы.

Да поможетъ Господь Богъ Россіи.

На подлинномъ Собственною Его Императорскаго Величества рукою написано:

„НИКОЛАЙ“.

День 6 марта 15 часовъ 1917 г.
Городъ Псковъ.

Keywords

Historical source, State Archive of the Russian Federation (ГАРФ), February Revolution 1917, Russian Emperor Nicholas II, political reforms, responsible ministry, M. V. Rodzianko, Duma opposition.

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