

# Autonomous Siberia in Russia's Reorganization Projects at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

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**Abstract:** The article investigates the projects for creating a self-governing system in Siberia between the revolution of 1905–1907 and the Russian Civil War of 1918–1920. Analysis of original newspaper articles and archival material shows that these projects shared an aspiration for the establishment of a democratic system of self-government. The Siberian intelligentsia (the *oblastniks*) believed that Siberian autonomy would promote the economic and cultural development of the region, while serving All-Russian interests. It was only during the deep social upheavals and crisis of power in 1917 when separatist tendencies became dominant among the Siberian political elite. Anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia considered the Siberian outskirts to be a “territory of salvation” for the future democratic non-Soviet Russian state.

**Keywords:** anti-Bolshevik governments, local self-government, *oblastnichestvo*, Siberia

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The early twentieth century was marked by the active inclusion of society in the development of projects of social and political reorganization of the empire. It was at that point that local self-government became one of the central issues on the agenda of Siberia's progressive-minded intellectuals and business people. This issue was rather acute, as the vast region consisting of two provinces—Tobol'sk and Tomsk—and of two governorate-generals—Irkutsk (including the provinces of Irkutsk and Ienisei and the regions of Transbaikalia and Yakutsk) and Amur (including the regions of Amur, Kamchatka, Primor'e, and Sakhalin)—still did not have the local self-government (*zemstvo*) system that had been introduced in the European provinces of Russia in 1864 during the period of the Great Reforms.



What was special about the new round of struggle for the right to organize zemstvos was the public's aspiration for substantial expansion of local self-government powers. The growing wave of political reforms led to raised social expectations across the country. It seemed quite natural that local self-government reform be conducted in line with the general trend toward modernization of the political system. The establishment of representative bodies on the state level was perceived as a sign of the growing decentralization of the country's system of governance as a whole. Against this backdrop, Siberia's autonomy projects appeared to be an organic part of broader public reorganization projects.

The idea of introducing local self-government originated from an understanding that effective control of the country's vast territory from a single center was impossible. The colossal potential of Siberia could only be fully fulfilled if the region's climatic, natural, social, economic, and cultural characteristics were taken into account. That is why Siberia's autonomy projects stipulated that greater powers were to be handed to local self-government bodies in terms of local lawmaking. An autonomy resting on the regional authorities' right to put forward and adopt laws concerning Siberia's specific problems was to help overcome the unequal status of the region within the country. This made Siberia's governance more similar to the governance system of other regions of the empire and created a single political and socioeconomic space that corresponded to the values of the local intelligentsia. The fact that some public figures consistently upheld the principle of the economic and political equality of the region—which promised good prospects of free entry to the national markets and the representation of its business interests in local and central self-government bodies—helped them to be seen in a positive light by entrepreneurs as well as ensured them support on the part of the business community.

As a result, the local self-government problem was behind all the projects of public reorganization of Russia. In searching for this problem's optimal resolution, it gradually became clear that a balance between national and regional interests needed to be struck.

The Siberian intelligentsia (*oblastniks*) took the initiative in preparing for discussion of the Siberian self-government issue. In 1905, the Irkutsk businessman Vladimir Sukachev (who was a chairman of the Irkutsk City Duma in 1885–1897) and the historian Petr Golovachev founded a journal called *Sibirskie voprosy* (Siberian questions). The journal's title itself implied that Siberia was an independent region with its own interests and problems. The journal was launched in

St. Petersburg, relieving editors and authors of the censorial and administrative pressure of the Siberian authorities. *Sibirskie voprosy* published a series of articles titled “Kakoe zemstvo ozhidaetsia Sibir’iu?” (What kind of self-government does Siberia expect?) that described the powers that the Siberian self-government bodies were to have.<sup>1</sup> Local zemstvo assemblies at different levels of the region (*volost’*, *uezd*, or province) were supposed to be consolidated into one Siberian regional body (*duma*)—a supreme zemstvo body that would include representatives of the provinces of Tobol’sk, Tomsk, Enisei, and Irkutsk; of the regions (*oblast*) of Yakutsk and Baikal; and of the Stepanoy and Amur Governorate-Generals. This regional zemstvo was to have broad powers—for example, to manage all the regional lands, communications, and public security, and to issue regulations with which the local population would have to comply. Zemstvo assemblies, councils, and commissions constituted the administrative bodies of the self-government system.

The first Russian revolution of 1905–1907 forced the Russian autocracy to make concessions to the liberal and revolutionary opposition not only on the issues of the convocation of the first Russian parliament—the State Duma—but also in establishing local self-government in Siberia. In April 1905, Emperor Nicholas II ordered Governor-General Pavel Kutaisov to form commissions affiliated with city dumas and social associations for the institution of local self-government bodies. But the local intelligentsia flatly rejected that proposal—the city dumas, the professional societies, and the cultural and outreach organizations refused not only to discuss the projects prepared by the provincial administration but even to participate in joint meetings with it. Such a position can be explained by the intention to prevent bureaucratic interference in the process of the organization of self-government and by the unacceptability of the terms and conditions offered by the local authorities for the participation of the society in this work. For example, the deputies of the Minusinsk Duma in Enisei Province were displeased with the fact that Kutaisov reduced his participation in discussions of Siberian self-government only to submitting letters with their proposals, instead of organizing a wide discussion among the local citizens and a public exchange of opinions.<sup>2</sup>

The projects proposed by the Siberian liberal intelligentsia to the national government in 1905 went beyond the frameworks of the zemstvo reform and aimed not just to build a system of self-government in the Siberian provinces but also to establish a broad all-Siberian autonomy based on universal suffrage within the Russian Empire.<sup>3</sup>

The authority of the Siberian zemstvos was not supposed to be limited to administrative and economic functions, as the government had offered.<sup>4</sup> The project proposed by Ivan Popov, the chairman of the commission on zemstvo reform in Irkutsk and the editor of the radically oriented *Vostochnoe obozrenie* (Eastern review), suggested empowering all the Siberian zemstvos to petition for new laws. Moreover, it was not the national government but the Siberian zemstvos that made the final decision on laws “specifically concerning Siberia.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the zemstvos played a key role in the field of local legislation. The annual congress of the representatives of all provincial zemstvos was to elaborate a common position on the status of Siberia and its development within Russia. According to Popov’s project, the implementation of the congress’s resolution and the interaction with the government were to be carried out by a permanent bureau consisting of representatives of all provinces and regions.<sup>6</sup>

“Proekt osnovnykh nachal Polozheniia o zemskikh uchrezhdeniiakh v Sibiri” (The project of the basic principles of the Statute on zemstvo institutions in Siberia) approved by the council of six Tomsk societies (the Law Society, the Agricultural Society, the Industrial Society, the Society for the Guardianship of Elementary Schools, the Mutual Aid Society of Students and Teachers, and the Society of Medical Practitioners) also insisted that the zemstvo councils had the right to issue laws and to hold preliminary discussion of bills.<sup>7</sup> The elected representatives to the Siberian Regional Duma were empowered to govern all lands of the region, to manage lines of communication, and to be in charge of public security.<sup>8</sup> The Minusinsk City Duma’s deputies joined the project and made the suggestion to emphasize that the Siberian Regional Duma would have the right of preliminary discussion of the bills prepared not by the government but by the duma itself.<sup>9</sup> The participants of the Krasnoiarsk medical society’s meeting suggested creating an All-Russian duma endowed with the power to decide the issues of land use, resettlement, communication lines, secondary and higher education, and sanitary and medical practice.<sup>10</sup>

With slight nuances in the amount of power given to the zemstvo institutions in Siberia, the leitmotif of these projects was the autonomy of the region, with “the right of the local elective bodies to issue local laws and therefore to exercise not only executive, but also legislative power.”<sup>11</sup> The ground for granting Siberian autonomy was the acknowledgment that, on the one hand, “its necessity was the logical consequence of the new parliamentary system in Russia,” and on the other hand, autonomy was useful as a guarantee of establishing a

system of administration that would respect the local peculiarities of the provinces. Besides, the desire to extend the powers of the zemstvo institutions shown by Siberian public figures was connected with the hope of ensuring Siberia's equal status with other Russian regions. It was not a coincidence that the projects of the zemstvo institutions contained urgent demands for Siberia to abolish separate institutions and oversight bodies for peasants as well as to institute *krest'ianskie nachal'niki* (land captains) who would be subordinated to the zemstvo police, and to establish magistrate courts and jury trials.<sup>12</sup>

In August 1905, the Siberian Regional Union, which gathered various political forces opposed to autocracy, was created to achieve Siberian autonomy and to form a local self-government. At the same time, the claim of the necessity of Siberian autonomy that was declared in the Union's platform was followed by the acknowledgment that Siberia was an inseparable part of Russia.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Siberia's self-government issue was dealt with as part of the Russian transition from a unitary to a federal state where the country's regions were to receive autonomy.

The Manifesto on the Improvement of the State Order issued by Emperor Nicholas II on 17 October 1905 led to the creation of a parliament and political parties in Russia. The adherents of the idea of Siberian autonomy leaned toward different political parties. Even though the main leader of Siberian *oblastnichestvo* (regionalism), Grigorii Potanin, defined himself as "non-party" and *oblastnichestvo* as an "above-party" movement, the defense of the Siberian people's interests became a "master card" in the struggle for Siberian voters. The idea of Siberian self-governance was proclaimed in the platforms of local branches of the Constitutional Democratic Party (the Kadets) and the Socialist Revolutionary Party (the SRs).<sup>14</sup> At the end of 1905, the Krasnoiarsk Kadets' newspaper *Golos Sibiri* (Voice of Siberia) wrote in its platform article: "Siberia's remoteness from the center of Russian state life and its distinctive geographic and ethnographic characteristics brought about the question of decentralization of the state legislation system with regard to Siberia" and of the creation of an independent legislative body in the region.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the idea of the creation of the Siberian Duma was developed in a leading article of the Tomsk newspaper *Sibirskii vestnik* (Siberian journal), whose editorial board consisted of members of the SR party and the *oblastnichestvo* movement. The editorial board declared that granting the right of political self-determination to Siberia was an integral part of renewing Russia: "In such a case our region and other regions of the Russian state would be connected by the state needs common to all regions."<sup>16</sup>

Siberian autonomy became a central question for the Siberian deputies of the State Duma in its first two meetings. In the first State Duma, which ran for 72 days (27 April–9 June 1906) before it was dissolved by Nicholas II, Siberia was represented by 15 deputies: one from the moderate-liberal centrist party Union of October 17; one from the liberal Party for Democratic Reforms; six from the oppositional liberal Constitutional Democratic Party; five members of the Trudoviks, the Duma's revolutionary faction; one from the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party; and one nonpartisan deputy.<sup>17</sup>

The official newspaper of Tomsk Province, *Tomskie gubernskie vedomosti* (Tomsk provincial broadsheet), was quick to say that five peasant deputies who were elected to the first Duma from Tomsk Province “were not and are not members of any party” and “are genuinely loyal to their Tsar.”<sup>18</sup> But four of them supported the Constitutional Democratic Party, and only one more moderate deputy supported the Union of October 17.<sup>19</sup> In the second Duma, which ran for 102 days (from 20 February to 2 June 1907), Siberia had 20 representatives: two SRs, three Popular Socialists, three Social Democrats, three Trudoviks, four Kadets, one member of the Party for Democratic Reforms, and four nonpartisan deputies.<sup>20</sup> Despite support from the authorities and aggressive political propaganda, the monarchist Union of the Russian People lost in the elections. In the following Dumas, the majority of the Siberian deputies represented the Constitutional Democratic Party (five deputies in the third Duma, six in the fourth Duma) or had even more leftist views.<sup>21</sup> The journal *Sibirskie voprosy* stated, “An ordinary Siberian is an oppositionist to the Government by his nature. In spite of being politically indifferent, he would never choose a genuine Russian monarchist to be his friend or a speaker of his cherished thoughts and desires.”<sup>22</sup> Though “apparently the oppositional moods in Siberia were mostly fed not by the local patriotism, but by the rejection of the autocratic political system as a whole.”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, in the State Duma, the question about the future of Siberian self-government was to be decided by the deputies from the Kadet party. The liberal newspaper *Sibirskaiia zhizn'* (Siberian life) became the unofficial printing arm of the Kadets in Tomsk. From November 1905 to September 1910, two professors from Tomsk State University, Ioannikii Malinovskii and Mikhail Sobolev edited the newspaper. The Tomsk Kadets announced that the newspaper *Narodnye nuzhdy* (People's needs), which from 1906 was supplemented by *Sibirskaiia zhizn'*, was to be the official printing arm of the party. The St. Petersburg journal *Sibirskie voprosy* received and commented on information about the

Duma's meetings and accepted responsibility for consolidating the Siberian deputies. In its first issue in 1906, the journal published Petr Golovachev's article "Sibirskii vopros v Gosudarstvennoi dume" (The Siberian question in the State Duma), which stated, "Being practical and having abundant common sense, the Siberians expect real political action from their representatives, and only then the citizens of Siberia's numerous backwater districts will feel that 'the dawn of new days' has come for them and that the State Duma is a real and great power that replaces the old Government that caused so much harm."<sup>24</sup> The future Siberian constitution was supposed to be based on "Proekt osnovnykh nachal Polozheniia o zemskikh uchrezhdeniakh v Sibiri" (The project of the basic principles of the Statute on zemstvo institutions in Siberia), which was elaborated in Tomsk and was sent to all regions for discussion and proposals. *Sibirskie voprosy* pictured the local administration as a force of reaction holding back the progressive development of Siberia. It was not set against the progressive national government (as it was in Russian periodicals at the end of the 1850s–1860s, at the beginning of the Great Reforms) but was described as "the treacherous insinuations of the bureaucracy," the doings of "the enemies of the constitution" and "demoralized officials of all ranks." The national (or "Petersburg," as the Siberian opposition called it) government was considered to be the main culprit of all negative features of the Siberian reality and the main obstacle for the development of Siberian society.

Before the dissolution of the first Duma, the Siberian deputies managed to sign an application to include Siberian representatives in the Agrarian Commission. Without the creation of a registry of property for populated and unpopulated lands, peasant resettlement from the central provinces to the east of the country led to conflicts between old residents and migrants. With intensification of the resettlement policy, this issue became the second most important after the question of Siberian self-government. In the Duma and in the newspapers, there was an idea that the vision of Siberia as an enormous land with untouched natural sources was incorrect. To protect long-term residents and indigenous peoples from losing land, it was offered to suspend peasant resettlement to Siberia and to transfer the right to allocate land for migrants from official (i.e., the national government) to local self-governance bodies. The Siberian deputies of the second Duma formed the "Siberian parliamentary group," which was in opposition to the government. From election to election the number of peasants in this group decreased, while the number of intelligentsia and businessmen went up.

After the end of the first Russian revolution in 1907, the possibilities for Siberian autonomy were again narrowed to the extent of the 1864 statute on the provincial and district territorial institutions of Siberia. The new electoral law of 3 June 1907 led to the reduction of the number of representatives from the outskirts of the Russian Empire. In the third Duma, the Siberian delegation was halved. One of the initiators of the Siberian parliamentary group and deputy from the Siberian Cossack Army, Innokentii Laptev, instructed the small group of Siberian deputies, "In the Duma they should represent not only their province but all Siberia, all its lands; they should fight for the restoration of its usurped electoral rights."<sup>25</sup> On the issue of autonomy, the demand was made to create a united, all-Siberian regional дума or a few regional dumasy with legislative powers, "as the national Duma turned out to have no time or opportunity to deal with Siberian needs that are urgent for this faraway land due to its own numerous All-Russian questions that require immediate discussion and resolution."<sup>26</sup> However, the majority of the Siberian deputies abandoned the project of Siberian autonomy, finding it impossible to fulfill under the changed political circumstances.<sup>27</sup> On that subject I. Malinovskii wrote: "It is better to have any zemstvo than no zemstvo at all."<sup>28</sup>

The task of protecting the interests of Siberia and expressing the requirements to the government was imposed on the Society for Siberian Studies and Living Conditions Improvement, which was organized in St. Petersburg in 1908 and had branches in 16 Siberian cities.<sup>29</sup> In 1908, Siberian deputies presented a bill on extending to Siberia the application of the statute on the provincial and district territorial institutions that was in force in the European part of Russia. In 1912, the State Duma approved the bill, but the State Council blocked it.<sup>30</sup> The State Council Commission wanted the question of establishing the zemstvo in Siberia to be worked on by the government.<sup>31</sup> In practice, this meant that the deputies were excluded from participation in zemstvo reform implementation. Bitter sarcasm can be heard in the letter that Stepan Vostrotin, the deputy from Ienisei Province, wrote to Grigorii Potanin: "The Siberian zemstvo was carried through the Duma as if it had been a dear deceased person, in front of whom everybody had to take their hats off, asking not to give any funeral speeches."<sup>32</sup>

The national government's obvious resistance to granting Siberia the status of self-governing region encouraged the resurrection of ideas of broad autonomy. The group of Siberian deputies gave a pronouncement from a nostrum of the third Duma in which they stated their disappointment in "the ability of the current Government to carry out



a somewhat rational policy toward Siberia" and voiced their "vigorous protest against any further postponement of the establishment of the zemstvo in all Siberian territories."<sup>33</sup>

The experience of parliamentary work gained in 1912 strengthened Siberian civil society's opinion of the necessity of creating specific legislation and decentralizing the system of governance. One of Siberia's most outstanding public figures, the leader of the local Kadets and the deputy of the State Duma from Tomsk Province, Nikolai Nekrasov, wrote in 1912, "One national parliament for the whole enormous Russia naturally cannot keep an eye on all the local needs of all parts of the state; the only thing that can be done in this situation should be based on the principle of broad decentralization and on the inclusion of local legislative issues in the sphere of regional institutions' competence."<sup>34</sup> It should be noted that Nekrasov was talking not about "low-level provincial zemstvo institutions" but about the "more powerful Regional Duma" that was aimed at relieving the State Duma and the State Council of so-called "legislative vermicelli" and guaranteeing the interests of distant provinces.<sup>35</sup> Nekrasov's statement that "the point of view according to which the regional questions should be solved based on the principle of decentralization is becoming almost common among the Siberian intelligentsia" suggests that he was not alone in his beliefs.<sup>36</sup> It is symptomatic that the main argument of regional autonomy's protagonists was that it served national interests. In their interpretation, the demand for political equality for Siberia was determined by a "healthy idea of statehood" because there is "no policy that fragments the country more than the policy of giving preferences to one part of the county over another."<sup>37</sup> The core of the Siberian project of autonomy was to ensure economic independence of the region and its right to cultural self-determination.<sup>38</sup>

The idea of cultural autonomy did not imply any separatist intentions, which was unambiguously confirmed by its adherents on more than one occasion. The deputy of Ienisei Province, Vasilii Karaulov, in a speech made to the Siberian group at a meeting of the State Duma in 1909, emphasized, "We are not infected by separatism. The Siberian people and their representatives in the Duma think of Siberia as an integral part of the Russian Empire and therefore cannot allow so much as an opposition of All-Russian interests to Siberian ones."<sup>39</sup> The newspaper *Sibirskii golos* (Siberian voice) underlined: "It is not separation from the All-Russian state that the best representatives of the provinces strive for but the strengthening of the Empire through the increase of its prosperity by the efforts of all free citizens."<sup>40</sup> Nekrasov elaborated

his position on the issue of the Siberian autonomy: “The *oblastniks*’ demands are not aimed against the unity of the state. To me, Siberian autonomy is one of the major steps toward solving the entire national problem in Russia, which due to its size and composition cannot have a centralized government.”<sup>41</sup>

With the beginning of the First World War, the issue of establishing self-government in the region gained new dimensions. In the autumn of 1914, the idea of organizing a regional union of cities was brought into focus in the Siberian society’s discussion. The creation of these structures was considered essential for “territorially enormous, multi-ethnic and disorganized Siberia” due to its “extreme remoteness” from the center and the peculiarities of the way of life in the region. The confidence in the project’s success was built on its initiators’ belief that people were ready to support the idea of a regional union that would be “easily accepted by everyone and for which the Siberians’ public consciousness constituted fertile ground.”<sup>42</sup> In April 1915, at a congress of the representatives of 12 cities that took place in Omsk, it was decided to establish the Western Siberian Regional Organization of the All-Russian Union of Cities. A year later the regional congress of the representatives of the Eastern Siberian cities in Irkutsk established two regional organizations in accordance with the administrative divisions: the Eastern Siberian organization within the boundaries of Irkutsk Governorate-General and the Far Eastern organization within the boundaries of Amur Governorate-General. At the same time, the congress supported the establishment of an all-Siberian organization “for the purpose of joint actions that equally affect all parts of Siberia.”<sup>43</sup> The founders of the regional organizations believed that their establishment would help to solve the specific problems of the region and provide a favorable environment for its socioeconomic, political, and cultural development. However, these hopes did not become a reality, not least due to opposition on the part of the authorities. The Ministry of Internal Affairs banned the second congress of Western Siberian cities, which had been planned to consider an expansion of the rights and powers of the Russian National Union of Cities organizations. Not recognizing the legitimacy of actions of the Russian National Union of Cities regional committees because of their intention to deal with issues not directly related to the needs of wartime and to continue their activity in the postwar period, provincial administration bodies and city councils refused to allocate the necessary funds. Administrative bans and restrictions aggravated inner organizational problems having to do with the diverse social composition and the conflict of party-

political attitudes of the Russian National Union of Cities' local division members.<sup>44</sup> As the country's national crisis worsened, accompanied by polarization of society and increased confrontation between different social strata, the idea of regional consolidation started to lose its appeal.

The fall of the Russian monarchy in February 1917 presented a real opportunity for the creation of a democratic system of local government in Siberia. After the February Revolution, the Tomsk Provincial People's Assembly adopted a resolution in May 1917, "On Local Self-Government," which discussed Siberian autonomy. Similar steps were taken in Irkutsk, Omsk, and other Siberian cities. In June 1917, the Tomsk Provincial People's Assembly made a decision to transform Siberia into an autonomous state and to create the United States of Siberia, where the supreme power was vested in the Siberian Regional Duma and a green-and-white flag was used as its own national banner. In June 1917, the Russian Provisional Government adopted "Polozhenie o vvedenii zemstvo v Sibiri" (The regulation on the establishment of the zemstvo in Siberia), but in these new political conditions the question of zemstvos was no longer acute. The regional congresses that took place in August, October, and December 1917 in Tomsk proclaimed autonomy for Siberia and formed regional authorities: a legislative body—the Siberian Regional Duma, and an executive body—the Siberian Regional Council.

After the October Revolution brought the Bolsheviks to power in 1917, an anti-Bolshevik bloc of SRs, *oblastniks*, and Kadets formed in Siberia. This bloc established new state bodies in opposition to the Bolsheviks: the Provisional Government of Autonomous Siberia, the Western Siberian Commissariat, and the Provisional Siberian Government. In March 1918, Grigorii Potanin launched an appeal, "Sibir' v opasnosti" (Siberia in danger), to the Siberian people:

We must loudly proclaim our right to independence and say that we want to be the masters of our own country. We must use all means to declare it to all our enemies and to all our friends, to all opponents of our self-determination and to all supporters of regional autonomy. . . . I encourage all Siberians to put their financial worries aside and to direct their thoughts to the protection of regional interests, for the time being to put aside the political slogans that divide us, and to join together on grounds of Siberian interests only.<sup>45</sup>

In January 1918, in Tomsk, the regional parliament—the Siberian Regional Duma—started its work. On 4 July 1918, in Omsk, the Provisional Siberian Government declared the independence of Siberia. However, as late as 3 November the Siberian Regional Duma decided

to voluntarily dissolve and adopted the declaration (On handing the supreme power over the territory of Siberia to the Provisional All-Russian Government), to turn over power to the government headed by Admiral Kolchak, the supreme ruler of Russia.<sup>46</sup> It was more important to consolidate all forces around Kolchak in order to free Russia from the Bolsheviks than to achieve independence for Siberia. In this regard, Nikolai Nekrasov's statement, made during a rally organized by the members of the regionalist "Potanin circle" in June 1918, in Tomsk, is symptomatic: "Autonomous Siberia can be a part of Russia. All forces must be used for the struggle. We should return from the white-and-green banner to the symbol of the national Russian state—the tricolor flag."<sup>47</sup>

After Kolchak's army was defeated in the Ural region in 1919 and the Red Army had come to Siberia, the *Irkutskie gubernskie vedomosti* (Irkutsk provincial broadsheet), one of the official newspapers of Kolchak's government, wrote in its appeal to the people not about Siberia's distinctive mission in the salvation of the country but about the immediate and direct threats coming from the center of Russia: "The Bolsheviks lead their bloody gangs of bandits to Siberia. They will give it for pillage to the hungry Red Army men, they are planning to feed and to grow strong here, they are going to bring the Siberian peasants and Cossacks to ruins and to continue their brutal war against order and honest labor. Siberia, rise up for your defense, Siberian citizens will not let the imminent and final defeat of Bolshevism be postponed again."<sup>48</sup> With the transition from an offensive to a defensive strategy, the White government appealed to the patriotic feelings of Siberians as if they were the citizens of an independent country: "The *Bolsheviks* that ravaged the country, hungry and drunk with blood, are marching to Siberia! Don't let them in! There, in Russia, they have destroyed all factories and plants, ruined peasant farms, deprived workers and peasants of bread and herded them into the Red Army like they were livestock. Don't let this happen in Siberia! . . . The bloody horror of the *Bolsheviks'* invasion threatens to destroy all of Siberia. The only way out that there is to stand up for our country and for our lives and to throw off the yoke of the commissars who have been killing the Russian people for two years."<sup>49</sup>

After Soviet rule was established in Siberian territory, the idea of the autonomy of the region became perceived as counterrevolutionary and anti-Soviet. Following these ideological changes, the new image of the Eastern outskirts—"Soviet Siberia," "Socialistic Siberia"—no longer needed the old ideologists and was built on the negation of autonomous

ambitions and peculiarities of Siberia's development. The issue of the expansion of the Siberian regions' powers became acute again only during the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, but that is a topic for a special study.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the political changes in the Russian Empire let Siberian society not only openly raise and discuss the question of autonomy for Siberia but also take practical steps in that direction. In 1905, with the increase in revolutionary actions, the autocracy promised to establish the same zemstvo self-government in Siberia that had been used in the European part of Russia since 1864. However, the projects proposed by the Siberian political and social organizations included the more resolute demand to form a Regional Siberian Duma based on broad suffrage and endowed with legislative powers. The establishment of local self-government bodies and their competences were thoroughly elaborated. In spite of the differences between these projects, until the Revolution of 1917 they all had a shared aspiration of establishing a democratic system of local government with no tendencies toward separatism. Moreover, it was state interests that were the main argument for Siberian autonomy.

The convocation and work of the State Duma of the Russian Empire in 1906–1907 gave the Siberian liberal intelligentsia the confidence that self-government would be established in the region upon the initiative and with the participation of its own elected representatives. Amid the concessions from the government to the revolutionary movement, the issue of Siberian self-government was considered to be irrevocably decided. Then, it seemed that the only question left was to elaborate the manner in which it would be done. The idea of a federative Russia was included in the platforms of the All-Russian political parties that had influence in Siberia—the Constitutional Democrats and the Socialist Revolutionaries. When the Siberian deputies worked in the Duma, the goals declared in the party platforms were replaced by Siberian regionalism. The resettlement issue clearly illustrates the center–periphery confrontation. Siberian society was not strong enough to sabotage the resettlement process during the Stolypin agrarian reform of 1906–1913, but the mere attempt to go against the line of the All-Russian Government was frightening for the “Petersburg bureaucrats.”

The voice of regional society was not heard by the tsarist authorities. Neither the all-Siberian nor regional dumas were formed. Even the statute on the zemstvo institutions in Siberia was not endorsed. The first serious attempt to demarcate the competences of the center and Siberia in a form of “local constitution” failed. After the revolution

of 1905–1907, the strengthened autocracy managed to hold on to the power that was slipping from its hands, and until the Revolution of 1917, Siberia remained a passive object governed from the center or by the appointed administration.

The October Revolution of 1917 and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks interrupted the evolutionary development of the Russian state. The ensuing chaos and the Civil War caused an unprecedented polarization of Russian society. In 1918, the issue of Siberian autonomy gained special significance in the context of overcoming the nationwide crisis. Execution of the regional autonomy project during the Civil War implied the formation of an anti-Bolshevik state in the east of the country and was considered to be a necessary tactical step to save Russia's unity and integrity. However, the centrifugal motif in the idea of regional autonomy for Siberia was momentary and situational. The essential and fundamental characteristics of the project of Siberian self-government were motivated by the aspiration to strengthen the Russian state.

Nevertheless, the well-founded and thoroughly thought-out local self-government projects did not receive support from the authorities. For the projects to be implemented, a constructive and equal “center–region” dialogue based on mutual interest was needed. In the meantime, the ruling circles' traditionalist consciousness, resting on the recognition of the “immutability” of the historical foundations of the state system, excluded the possibility of decentralization of control and legislation. On the other hand, the regional community had neither the levers nor enough power to uphold the right to autonomy and clearly demonstrated its inability to articulate its stance on this matter. The acute social polarization and different groups and social strata's multivector aspirations made a consolidated expression of will impossible and did not allow society to be an equal party in dialogue with those in power.

The failure of local self-government projects in Siberia in the early twentieth century indicated the falseness of hopes of striking a balance between the center and the periphery in the context of sociopolitical instability and of a state capable of adequately reacting to the signals from the regions and dealing with specific local problems alongside national interests.

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## Notes

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