

The Provisional Government, the State Duma, and the Birth of Dual Power

Rodzianko's Attempt to Elevate the Duma Committee as Supreme Power

From 27 February to 2 March, the Duma Committee functioned as a quasi-revolutionary power. But on 2 March the Duma Committee decided to establish a provisional government, separate from itself. Why did the Duma Committee decide not to declare itself as the provisional government? How did those who established the provisional government see its relationship with the Duma Committee and the State Duma? These questions were closely connected partly with the power struggle within the Duma Committee between Miliukov and Rodzianko, but more importantly with the different conceptions each held about the revolutionary power to be established.

Rodzianko believed that the Duma was the only representative body at the moment that should play a crucial role in the new parliamentary system that was to be created after the revolution until the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Although the State Duma was created under the old regime, the Duma had served as the bastion of opposition to the tsarist government during the war. Moreover, during the revolution, the Duma was the magnet of insurgency. The insurgents marched to the Tauride Palace not merely as a physical gathering place, but because the Duma became the symbol of their revolution. The Duma Committee implemented a series of revolutionary actions, and served virtually as a revolutionary power. The revolution thus changed the nature of the State Duma.

Although the creation of the provisional government, separate from the Duma Committee, was a serious setback for Rodzianko, he still believed that the provisional government that grew out of the Duma Committee should function only as the executive power responsible to the Duma as the legislative power. The Duma would revise and rewrite the Fundamental Laws or approve revisions proposed by the provisional government to fit the post-revolutionary situation. The disappearance of the monarchy made the presence of the Duma all the more important as a guarantor of the smooth transition from the old regime to the new revolutionary order to be determined by the Constituent Assembly.

Thus, even after the Duma Committee decided to establish the provisional government, Rodzianko engaged in a campaign to elevate the Duma and the Duma Committee as a parent body of the provisional government. Rodzianko sent a telegram to General Alekseev at the Savka as well as General Brusilov and General Gurko, stating that the Duma Committee had to take power for restoration of order, but that ‘at the present moment power is transferred *by the Provisional Committee of the State Duma* to the Provisional Government headed by Prince G.E. L’vov [italics by TH].’¹ Rodzianko here underscored that it was the Duma Committee that created the provisional government. Furthermore, this telegram requested that the Stavka appoint General Kornilov to be the commander of the Petrograd Military District. It was the Duma Committee and not the provisional government that made this request.²

This telegram was immediately followed by another circular telegram to the heads of the provincial zemstvos and city mayors:

Power has finally been transferred into the hands of *the Provisional Committee of the State Duma*. The members of the old government were arrested and detained in the Petropavlovsk Fortress. The provisional government is being formed, whose composition will be notified to all places and to all persons in the provinces and counties [*oblasti*] of Russia [italics by TH].³

In addition, Rodzianko sent a special telegram to Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolaevich in the Caucasus, informing him that ‘power has been transferred to the Provisional Committee of the State Duma’ and that ‘the provisional government is being formed’. This telegram specifically asked the grand duke to give his complete cooperation to the ‘Provisional Committee’, and ‘take immediate measures to remove all conditions that are hindering direct contacts of the Committee with the power and institutions that are subordinated to you.’⁴

1 Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1927b, p. 9; ‘Protokol sobytii’, Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1996, pp. 136–7; ‘Protokol zasedanii’, Niklaev 2012, pp. 269–70.

2 ‘Protokol sobytii’, Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1996, pp. 136–7; Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1927b, p. 9; ‘Protokol zasedanii’, Niklaev 2012, pp. 269–70. Incidentally, it was in response to this telegram that Alekseev requested that Nicholas recall General Ivanov back to Mogilev.

3 ‘Protokol sobytii’, Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1996, p. 137; ‘Protokol zasedanii’, Nikolaev 2012, p. 270.

4 ‘Protokol sobytii’, Fevral'skaia revoliutsiia 1996, p. 137; ‘Protokol zasedanii’, Nikolaev 2012,