ALICE K. PATE (Columbus, GA, USA)

GENERATIONAL CONFLICT AND THE GURIAN REPUBLIC IN GEORGIA TO 1905

From 1902 to 1905, Georgian peasants and workers exercised political power reserved for few in the Russian empire. They boycotted Russian institutions, threatened privileges retained by the Georgian nobility, and voiced their demands through elected associations open to both genders and to members of all classes. The primary targets of their grievances were the Armenian bourgeoisie, Russian officials, and the traditional Georgian nobility. Arriving early in Georgia, the 1905 revolution linked Marxist ideology in its Menshevik variance with the goal of socialism rather than national liberation. By calling for an end to the tsarist autocracy, the “Gurian Republic” synthesized the revolutionary movement with that of the workers and peasants.¹

A rural region bordering the Black Sea in western Georgia, Guria produced many of the political leaders of the independent Georgian Republic from 1918-1921. Before the 1905 revolution, the region erupted into open revolt against the autocracy. Kutaisi, the largest city was connected to the southwest by rail to the industrial town of Batumi on the Black Sea. Today, Guria is divided into three districts: Chokatauri, Ozugeti and Lanchkhuti. Ozgereti was the historical name for the entire district at the turn of the century and Lanchkhuti was one of the largest villages located less than an hour from Batumi. The capital of Tblisi, formerly Tiflis, was about 100 miles to the east. The region’s geographical location between two large industrializing cities in an area with developing class and ethnic identities contributed to the radicalization of its population.

The history of the Georgian revolutionary movement and its relation to intellectual and party history has been treated with a wide brush by historians. General characteristics, especially from the point of view of the party émigrés, have been identified. Although fuller treatment of the peculiarities of the Georgian movement particularly in relation to the overarching theme of Bolshevik hegemony as well as a history of both rank and file socialist activ-

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ists and the peasantry deserve further treatment, the purpose of this discussion is an examination of generational conflict in Georgia.  

Karl Mannheim's seminal article, "Generations in Conflict" serves as the framework for this analysis. Mannheim proposes that rather than class, shared experiences, especially traumatic events, shape generations into oppositional groups. Individuals locate themselves in a particular place and time and this situational context shapes and molds an age cohort. Often intermediaries or those between two generational cohorts may also act as agents in the development of oppositional groups.

Analysis of this revolutionary movement from its origins indicates a growing generational conflict among revolutionary actors in Georgia. In terms of ideology, Georgian revolutionaries composed their place in the movement as generational; in fact, the Social Democrats perceived a third generation of activists responsible for the adoption of a Marxist program. Borrowing from the revolutionary framework of "fathers and sons" these revolutionaries saw themselves as grandchildren of the early Georgian intellectuals who popularized Georgian literature, songs and poetry. While the ancestors developed the nationalist framework, the younger revolutionaries identified capitalism as the enemy while also seeking a strategy specific to Georgia.

Additionally, students and workers experiencing rapid modernization and Russification in the late nineteenth century concluded that the Russian tsarist government and capitalism were to blame for hardships suffered by the Georgian peoples. These shared experiences formed an "age cohort" that can be traced through the imperial period and the post revolutionary Georgian republic. As agents of change, their experience often transcended class and led to a revolutionary movement specific to Georgia. Students and workers, along with peasants, impacted by forces of modernization and rapid change, participated in a revolutionary movement which produced an agrarian republic in Guria before the 1905 Revolution.

In addition to these intellectual generations however, there were the usual conflicts between parents and children. As intermediaries between these two generations, village teachers played a significant role in the development of strategies for agitation. Their resistance to Russian language instruction and the subordination of Georgian culture in the classroom as well as their dissemination of published propaganda contributed to a further split between the
