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Original paper



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## **Rostov Armed Uprising (November 26 — December 3, 1917)**

### **Abstract**

In the historiography of the Russian Civil War, the Rostov armed uprising of November 26 — December 3, 1917, remains a little-studied episode, although it was the first major clash between the Bolsheviks and organized forces of the counterrevolution in southern Russia. This article attempts a comprehensive analysis of the conflict based on a comparative study of Soviet and modern historiography, critical analysis of archival documents, the press, and newly introduced testimonies of participants. Particular attention is paid to a detailed reconstruction of events, which makes it possible to reconsider the established interpretations of the causes and dynamics of the uprising. The authors refute the widespread thesis that the uprising was provoked by a “Bolshevik ultimatum” to Ataman Kaledin, demonstrating that the armed action was a response to coercive measures by the Cossack authorities. The study shows that the harsh policy of Ataman Kaledin — expressed in the imposition of martial law, disarmament of units, and arrests — served as a catalyst for the consolidation of diverse revolutionary forces (Bolsheviks, Left Socialist Revolutionaries, and part of



the Mensheviks) into a unified Regional Military-Revolutionary Committee. The article also analyzes the military-political reasons for the defeat of the insurgents, including the weakness of the Red Guards, the passivity of the garrison, tactical miscalculations by the command, and the destructive role of moderate socialists. The uprising is considered an important turning point that revealed divisions within the Cossack community and accelerated the formation of opposing camps at the beginning of the Civil War.

**Keywords:**

Rostov Uprising of 1917; Russian Civil War; Don Region; Ataman Kaledin; October Revolution; Red Guard; Cossacks

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## Introduction

On the night of November 25-26, 1917, in Rostov-on-Don, on Big Sadovaya Street, at the Mars Theater, the Soviet and headquarters of the Red Guard were attacked by the people under the command of General D.N. Pototsky — the commander of the Cossack forces of the Rostov District<sup>1</sup>. The goal was to arrest the Military-Revolutionary Committee, but by that time its session had ended and the delegates had dispersed. At the same time, the building of the Rotunda in the Public Garden, where the Bolsheviks' newspaper *Our Banner* was located, was ransacked. This event

<sup>1</sup> Вольный Дон. № 197. 2 декабря 1917 г.

served as the catalyst for the Rostov armed uprising of November 26 — December 3, 1917.

Although this event became one of the first acts of the Civil War in Russia, it has been insufficiently studied. Mainly, these were works by Soviet historians from Rostov-on-Don — Yu.K. Kirienko, K.A. Khmelevsky, and a number of collective overview works<sup>2</sup>. Among the modern researchers who touched on individual aspects of this topic, we can name specialists in the Civil War A.V. Venkov, O.M. Morozova, T.V. Shchukina<sup>3</sup>. A certain amount of information on this account is contained in some collections of documents and memoirs, published in Soviet<sup>4</sup> and modern times<sup>5</sup>. Unfortunately, there are no comprehensive studies, except for Kirienko's monograph, and even the most complete overview works are not without errors, unresolved questions and inaccuracies. This is especially true of the reasons for the defeat of the uprising and the behavior of the opposing sides. In this connection, the purpose of this work is to reconstruct the events of the uprising based on historical literature, archival sources and newspapers of that time.

Methodologically, the research is based on a comparative analysis of Soviet and modern historiography, with an emphasis on critical study of archival documents and the press of that time.

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<sup>2</sup> *Кириенко Ю.К.* Крах калединщины. М.: Мысль, 1976. 246 с.; *Хмелевский К.А.* Буря над Тихим Доном. Ростов-на-Дону: Ростовское книжное изд-во, 1984. 176 с.; *Октябрь на Дону и Северном Кавказе.* Ростов-на-Дону: Ростовское книжное изд-во, 1977. 302 с.; *Революция на Дону. Революция на Дону (Ростовское восстание, с 15-го ноября по 2-е декабря 1917 года).* Таганрог, 1930. 24 с.

<sup>3</sup> *Венков А.В.* Бои за Ростов в ноябре — декабре 1917 года // *Донской временник.* Год 2017-й. Вып. 25. Ростов-на-Дону, 2016. С. 99–105; *Разиньков М.Е., Морозова О.М.* Социально-политический диалог в России (1917–1918 гг.): тенденции, механизм, региональные особенности. М., 2021. 712 с.; *Шукина Т.В.* Социал-демократия осенью 1917 года // *Донской временник.* Вып. 15. Ростов-на-Дону, 2006. С. 87–91.

<sup>4</sup> *Октябрь 1917 г.: сборник статей и воспоминаний.* Ростов-на-Дону: Гос. изд-во. Донское отд., 1921. 79 с.; *Пролетарская революция на Дону.* Вып. 2. Ростов-на-Дону: Гос. изд-во. Донское отд., 1921. 140 с.; *Незабываемые годы.* Ростов-на-Дону: Ростовское книжное изд-во, 1957. 416 с.

<sup>5</sup> *Дон в годы революции и Гражданской войны. 1917–1920.* Сборник документов. Т. 1: март 1917 — май 1918. Ростов-на-Дону: Альтаир, 2017. 458 с.

## Main Part

First, let us describe the configuration of power in Rostov. In the fall of 1917, the formal power in the city belonged to the mayor, Kadet V.F. Zeeler, a representative of the Provisional Government. In reality, power was shared between the Duma of Rostov and Nakhichevan, the Rostov-Nakhichevan Soviet of Workers' Deputies (as well as Soviets of Military and Peasant Deputies), garrison commander Major General D.V. Chernoyarov and the Regional Military Committee (hereafter — RMC). The RMC consisted of 60 delegates of military units of the Don region, half from Cossacks, half from infantry<sup>6</sup>. Initially, it was part of the local authority, the Don Executive Committee, created from public representatives after the overthrow of the tsar. But in July 1917, by a decision of the army congress, the RMC became independent and often opposed Ataman A.M. Kaledin of the Don Cossack Host.

Learning of the October Revolution in Petrograd, the Bolsheviks, who had gained a majority in the Soviet presidium, set up a Military-Revolutionary Committee. On October 28, its first meeting took place, as well as a separate meeting of the Soviet, trade unions and the Nakhichevan Duma. At it, the Mensheviks, the leading force in the Dumas, spoke against the Council of People's Commissars, stating that the Bolsheviks would violate democratic unity. However, both sides were forced into unexpected cooperation after Kaledin had proclaimed martial law on November 2 in the Donbass, and then in the Rostov, Taganrog, Novocherkassk districts and in Azov<sup>7</sup>. This showed the public the threat of a right-wing dictatorship. It is not surprising that virtually all local authorities, including the Soviets, both sections of the RMC and even the Dumas, opposed the Ataman. Moreover, Kaledin violated the promise given to the Duma by his deputy M.P. Bogaevsky that important actions of the Army Circle would be made with their consent. Chernoyarov, loyal to the Ataman, tried to convince him to repeal the decision, but failed. Soon Kaledin appointed General A.P. Pototsky in his place, which the newspapers reported

<sup>6</sup> Приазовский Край. №172. 19 июля 1918 г.

<sup>7</sup> Вольный Дон. №173. 3 ноября 1917 г.; №174. 4 ноября 1917 г.

on November 9. A week later, General A.N. Nazarov was appointed to Taganrog for the same purposes<sup>8</sup>.

Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks of Rostov were intensifying the work of the MRC (Military Revolutionary Committee), which recognized the Council of People's Commissars and began a series of meetings of soldiers and workers to recognize the power of the Soviets. On November 5, at a conference of delegates of Soviets, trade unions, factory committees and miners' committees, the MRC was declared a "regional authority" in the struggle against the Host Government. Even before this, on October 31, the MRC, in alliance with regimental committees, had created a commissariat to conduct its orders in the garrison. In response, the factions of Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, together with the Duma, created a Committee for the Salvation of the Fatherland and Revolution and proposed that the MRC form an intermediate authority "for the protection of democracy"<sup>9</sup>.

The Bolsheviks eventually agreed to this, which was partly explained by the sentiments and views of their leadership, especially S.I. Syrtsov, and partly by the weakness of the MRC forces. Much evidence suggests that the garrison was not inclined to consciously participate in the confrontation. Delegates of soldiers were scattered in various bodies, even officers were part of the regimental committees, and in voting on October 7 moderate socialists were elected. More reliable were the Red Guards. But their formation began only in mid-November, and even then it was only 250 poorly armed workers<sup>10</sup>. Moreover, even among part of the proletariat, the Bolsheviks lost to the Mensheviks, especially at the Aksay plant and in the railroad workshops. So the power support of the MRC was equal to Pototsky's forces, who held in Rostov only two hundred Cossacks of the 6th Don infantry battalion: the 4th hundred was with him in the hospital building at Rostov station,

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<sup>8</sup> Воспоминания Д.В. Черноярова // State Archive of the Russian Federation (ГАРФ). Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 30–32; Приазовский край. №266. 9 ноября 1917 г.; Дон в годы революции. С. 144, 149.

<sup>9</sup> Выписки из газеты «Наше знамя» // Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (РГАСПИ). Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 572. Л. 27, 127, 10–11.

<sup>10</sup> Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 60–62, 56. Незабываемые годы. С. 29, 37.



Сергей Иванович Сырцов, председатель Ростовского ВРК. Фото 1930-х гг.  
*From open sources*

the 3rd was stationed in the Nautical School in the port. Neither side wanted bloodshed.

Therefore, the plan of the Mensheviks passed after negotiations on November 12–14. The Bolsheviks took the project of the left Socialist-Revolutionaries as the basis of a unified platform: a socialist government, future Constituent Assembly, non-recognition of Kaledin. The new body was elected on November 16 as the Regional Military-Revolutionary Committee of United Democracy (hereafter — RMRC). It included former members of the MRC, as well as: from the Soviets — 15 members, the Dumas — 3, the infantry section of the RMC — 5, the trade unions — 1, the Council of Factory Committees, railroad and postal-telegraph unions — 3, one from four regimental committees each, from the yacht *Kolkhida* — 1, and from three parties — 1 each. It was a total of 39 people<sup>11</sup>. Thus, the MRC became coalitional. Its official task was to “mobilize and organize all the forces of democracy to fight counterrevolution... in Novocherkassk”<sup>12</sup>. In general, this worked to the advantage of the Bolsheviks. Especially since on November 16, it became known that in

<sup>11</sup> Дон в Годы революции. Т. 1. С. 178; Приазовский край. №274. 17 ноября 1917 г.; Копии приказов ВРК, обзоры и др. материалы // Center for Documentation of the Contemporary History of the Rostov Region (ЦДНИРО). Ф. 12. Оп. 5. Д. 89. Л. 163.

<sup>12</sup> Выписки из газеты «Наше знамя» // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 572. Л. 2.



Генерал Алексей Максимович Каледин.  
*From open sources*

the elections to the Constituent Assembly in Rostov, they won, collecting 33.4% of the votes<sup>13</sup>. Together with the left Socialist-Revolutionaries and Menshevik-internationalists, this was almost half the votes — this showed that the Bolsheviks had quite broad support in the city.

At the same time, on November 20, Kaledin in Novocherkassk disarmed unreliable soldiers, which further aggravated the situation. Even on November 14, the infantry section of the RMC, consisting mainly of left Socialist-Revolutionaries, moved from Novocherkassk to Rostov, declared itself the Military Committee of Infantry Non-Cossack units and began cooperating with the MRC. Kaledin then forbade the distribution of MRC orders and the RMC section, and also banned the newspaper of the Don Bolsheviks *Our Banner* in Rostov<sup>14</sup>. Pototsky sent Cossacks to the printing house, who confiscated the print run. On November 14, the editorial office addressed workers and soldiers in a reduced issue. In response, the newspaper received many resolutions of support and soon moved to the Soviet, where Pototsky did not dare to send Cossacks<sup>15</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> Приазовский край. № 272. 16 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>14</sup> Вольный Дон. № 198. 3 декабря 1917 г.; Дон в годы революции. С. 173; Вольный Дон. №174. 4 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>15</sup> Приазовский край. № 264. 7 ноября 1917 г.; Мартыненко К.М. Большевицкая печать в борьбе за власть Советов на Дону и Северном



Генерал Дмитрий Николаевич Потоцкий.  
*From open sources*

The situation gradually escalated. Several incidents occurred in late November. On November 19, on Big Sadovaya by order of the Host Government, N.M. Golubov, a member of the RMC and RMRC and a fierce opponent of Kaledin, was arrested (interestingly, the head of the RMC Arnautov was not, although he was with Golubov). At night he was taken to Novocherkassk<sup>16</sup>. The MRC rated this “as a direct and rude challenge to revolutionary democracy”<sup>17</sup>. Almost simultaneously, on November 20, at the village of Gnilovskaya near Rostov, Pototsky arrested the evacuated convoy of a train of tractor units and tried to send it to Novocherkassk, but railroad workers resisted<sup>18</sup>. Pototsky personally came to their congress, but they booed him and, at the request of the soldiers, dismantled the tracks and opened the bridge<sup>19</sup>. In response, two companies of the 41st Cossack regiment and a machine gun team from Aksay were

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Кавказе (март 1917 — декабрь 1920). Ростов-на-Дону: Ростовское книжное изд-во, 1986. С. 45–46.

<sup>16</sup> Вольный Дон. № 188. 21 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>17</sup> Наше Знамя. №101. 21 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>18</sup> Приазовский край. № 276. 21 ноября 1917 г.; Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 36.

<sup>19</sup> Воспоминания В.Ф. Болтручука «О выступлении юнкеров в Ростове на-Дону» // Центр документации новейшей истории Ростовской области (ЦДНИРО). Ф. 12. Оп. 3. Д. 116. Л. 2.

sent to Rostov. Pototsky tried to draw together the entire regiment — its 4 companies, mounted machine gun team and communication team were transferred to the village of Olginskaya until the arrival of the 30th battery, with the 2nd company left in Kagalnitskaya for cover<sup>20</sup>.

The RMRC on that day was holding a meeting where, in the struggle with the “moderates” (14 for, 12 against), Order No. 1 was confirmed, which declared it the regional authority<sup>21</sup>. Immediately after that, Cossack senior sergeant Smagin came to the RMRC from the advancing Cossacks with an offer of peaceful negotiations. The MRC in response demanded to lift martial law and stop the advance. Its delegates visited Pototsky too, but he gave no concrete promises, and before repealing the martial law he asked to first disarm the Red Guards. At the same time, the RMRC sent out soldiers. The clash could have occurred in the Nakhichevan station area, but after negotiations the companies withdrew to the village of Aleksandrovskaya. On November 22, it turned out that both sides established a joint guard at the station. It seems that negotiations between the RMRC and the Cossacks, convinced that all was quiet in Rostov, played a role in this. On the same day, at the RMRC meeting, the majority voted in favor of changing the demands to lifting martial law throughout the Don region and not interfering with evacuating units, as was the case with the tractor school. At the same time, they promised to transfer the Red Guards to a peaceful position and partially disarm them<sup>22</sup>.

The situation in Rostov changed drastically with the arrival of sailors. From November 6–19, 1917, the 1st All-Black Sea Congress of Navy Sailors took place in Sevastopol. At it, a delegate of the MRC I.D. Chentsov, sent to obtain artillery parts, spoke with a request for help. The Congress sent a telegram to Kaledin demanding the repeal of martial law in Rostov, to which he did not respond<sup>23</sup>. Then, on November 12, an entire flotilla departed from Sevastopol, which included the destroyers *Gnevny* and *Kapitan Saken*, minesweepers *Feodor Feofani* and *Roza*, and two patrol boats. They had a landing party of 150 people. Also, the fleet sent the 1st Black

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<sup>20</sup> Дон в годы революции и гражданской войны. С. 150.

<sup>21</sup> Рабочее дело. 1917. № 158. 23 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>22</sup> Приазовский край. № 278. 24 ноября 1917 г.; Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 36.

<sup>23</sup> Вольный Дон. №180. 11 ноября 1917 г.



Бои слева направо: 1 Бой на вокзале. 2 Расположение театра «Марс».  
 3 Баррикада на Нахичеванской меже. 4 Вверху, место боя в 1-й  
 Балабановской роще.  
 5 Бои в Кизитериновской балке.  
*From open sources*

Sea Revolutionary detachment of 2500 men by trains to Rostov. However, en route, it came under the command of V.A. Antonov-Ovseenko and did not arrive in Rostov<sup>24</sup>. Learning of the ships, Pototsky tried to prevent them from entering the city harbor on November 16, for which he extinguished the lighthouse at the canal and destroyed the fairway markings. One ship owner even gave a barge with poor coal to be sunk in the navigable part of the Don. But the Red Guards headquarters took control of the port and the barges, and a day before the ships arrived, confiscated weapons at the port office — 19 Smith and Wesson revolvers<sup>25</sup>.

Meanwhile, a delegation from the MRC that went to Taganrog, found the flotilla, albeit with difficulty. Under the threat of Nazarov's artillery, the *Kapitan Saken* remained on the roadstead near the shore. Some ships had been left on the way to Rostov. So on November 23, only three ships came: *Roza*, *Feodor Feofani* and *Yakov*. They stood right across from the Nautical School, where the Cossacks were. Pototsky's preventive actions proved use-

<sup>24</sup> Телеграмма из сборника материалов об истории красногвардейских отрядов // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 240. Л. 6.

<sup>25</sup> Приазовский край. № 278. 24 ноября 1917 г.; № 279. 25 ноября 1917 г.

less, as the flotilla had captured a merchant steamer to use as a pilot<sup>26</sup>. The Council of Five that managed it joined the RMRC, sharply strengthening the Committee position. The Committee later moved to the military yacht *Kolkhida*, next to which the ships stood. The yacht itself had been in Rostov for repairs since 1916, and its sailors were fully on the side of the RMRC<sup>27</sup>. Good relations were established between the sailors and the Cossacks. As a newspaper correspondent wrote, they sang songs, exchanged tobacco, cigarettes, decided to go fishing, etc.: “The general impression of everyone is that there will be no military action between the sailors and the Cossacks. The sailors saw that the Cossacks were not committing abuses and not shooting anyone. The relations between sailors and Cossacks are very friendly”<sup>28</sup>. Also, on November 24, a delegate of the sailors visited Kaledin and reported that they were not going against the working Cossacks, but arrived because of rumors that he “introduced martial law, does not allow coal” to be delivered for the fleet “and (does not want) to settle the conflict peacefully”. Alas, but in the end the negotiations led to nothing<sup>29</sup>. Externally, the tension began to subside. But the impression was deceptive — there were three days left before Pototsky’s attack.

It is difficult to speak confidently about the reasons for it. However, in many, if not all studies, it is mentioned that the attack occurred in response to an ultimatum from the MRC to Kaledin, adopted on November 25. We dare to assert that on November 25, the MRC did NOT issue an ultimatum<sup>30</sup>. This is a delusion that has lasted for more than a hundred years. The literature does not provide either the text of the ultimatum or any such demands. According to newspapers, there was an attempt by the MRC to adopt an ultimatum on November 24, but it

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<sup>26</sup> Октябрь 1917 г. С. 26.

<sup>27</sup> Воспоминания С.И. Сырцова «Революционная борьба на Дону» // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 632. Л. 29.

<sup>28</sup> Приазовский край. № 279. 25 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>29</sup> Вольный Дон. № 192. 26 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>30</sup> Революция на Дону. Таганрог, 1930. С. 10; Очерки истории партийных организаций Дона. Ч. 1. Ростов-на-Дону: Ростиздат, 1973. С. 392; Кириенко Ю.К. Ор. cit. С. 88–90; Хмелевский К.А. Ор. cit. С. 11; Дон советский. Ростов-на-Дону: Ростовское книгоиздательство, 1986. С. 17; Разиньков М.Е., Морозова О.М. Ор. cit. С. 268; Дон в годы революции и Гражданской войны. С. 11.

was unsuccessful. The ultimatum with a demand to Kaledin to repeal martial law and renounce power in 24 hours received 14 votes in favor and 15 against. Therefore, milder conditions were put forward. On the issue of lifting martial law, a formula by Menshevik P.S. Petrenko was adopted, providing for preserving protection at the mines, issuing weapons of infantry regiments of Novochoerkassk to the staff of non-Cossack troops, of the Red Guards — to regimental committees. The Red Guards received the right to train in “military art”. Moreover, the majority voted for the flotilla to withdraw. It is clear that these conditions, suggested by the Mensheviks, meant almost one-sided disarmament<sup>31</sup>. These conditions were probably transmitted to Pototsky in the evening of November 24<sup>32</sup>. The Bolsheviks in response brought representatives of the sailors to the RMRC meeting on November 25. Thanks to them, by a margin of one vote (20 for, 19 against), it was adopted that the MRC “empowers its representatives only to listen to representatives of the Host Government, but does not empower them to conduct negotiations”. At that, the Socialist-Revolutionaries and Mensheviks become enraged and left the RMRC, issuing an indignant appeal<sup>33</sup>. The latter did not disturb the Bolsheviks, and they were happy to get rid of the burden of compromisers.

The same was relayed by Pototsky’s assistant, Cossack senior sergeant S.G. Elatontsev. At the Grand Military Circle (Cossack Assembly) on December 3, he reported that on November 25 at 8:30PM, he had met in the Rostov Duma with a representative of the MRC I.V. Reshetkov in the presence of Pototsky, Zeeler and Petrenko. Reshetkov reported that the MRC had not made a decision, and a meeting for this was planned for the next day. Elatontsev replied that the Host Government was ready for certain concessions, provided certain concessions were guaranteed by the MRC, otherwise it would transfer the demands to the Circle, which would convene in five days<sup>34</sup>. Notably, the Bolsheviks’ report in *Our Banner* fully confirms Elatontsev words, but notes: “According to observations of one of the delegates of the Military Revolutionary

<sup>31</sup> Наше знамя. № 106. 26 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>32</sup> Приазовский Край. № 279. 25 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>33</sup> Приазовский Край. № 281. 28 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>34</sup> Вольный Дон. №193. 28 ноября 1917 г.; Дон в годы революции и гражданской войны. Т. 1. С. 176–177.

Committee, representatives of the host gov[ernment] strive to protract the negotiations”<sup>35</sup>. The latter seems to have been true.

In any case, there is nothing resembling an ultimatum here. There were four hours left before the attack on the Soviet, and it occurred during a period of peaceful negotiations. The Bolsheviks clearly stated this in *Our Banner*: “An ultimatum was not presented”<sup>36</sup>. Kaledin also said nothing about an ultimatum. On December 3, at the Circle, he stated that Pototsky had attacked to prevent the arrest of officers by the Bolsheviks<sup>37</sup>. In this regard, he repeated Pototsky himself. He adhered to the same version during interrogations by the Bolsheviks and referred to some publications about it in the press. However, nothing like this appeared in the newspapers, and Pototsky was clearly lying. Incidentally, we are able to refute another myth: Pototsky, contrary to all historical references, did not flee from Soviet captivity in Petrograd. According to his file, by a decision of the Investigative Commission of the Petrograd Soviet, he was officially released on March 22, 1918, with his adjutant on his own recognizance (with a written undertaking to appear if required). And soon the case was closed altogether<sup>38</sup>.

Where did the version of the ultimatum come from? It is possible that it arose following the speech of the Menshevik B.S. Vasiliev, Head of the Rostov Duma. After the suppression of the uprising, he was in Novocherkassk at the Grand Circle in the evening of December 3. Striving to show loyalty, he said that the attack had taken place on the initiative of military cadets, while Pototsky “due to his chivalrous attitude to the matter only covered the attack with his name”. Then Vasiliev suddenly declared that the Bolsheviks had issued an ultimatum with a threat to open military operations in 24 hours. In essence, he presented the failed November 24 draft of the resolution as allegedly adopted on November 25. Meanwhile, at a Duma meeting on November 26, Vasiliev called for demanding from the Host Government to remove Pototsky for the attack on the Soviet<sup>39</sup>.

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<sup>35</sup> РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 572. Л. 19–21.

<sup>36</sup> Наше знамя. № 108. 29 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>37</sup> Дон в годы революции. С. 180.

<sup>38</sup> Следственное дело Д.Н. Потоцкого и М.А. Бонкевича // ГАРФ. Ф. 336. Оп. 1. Д. 367. Л. 30, 33, 1.

<sup>39</sup> Вольный Дон. №199. 5 декабря 1917 г.; Приазовский Край. № 282. 1 декабря 1917 г.



Семен Филиппович Васильченко.  
 Председатель Ростово-Нахичеванского комитета РСДРП(б).  
*From open sources*

Immediately after his speech, to correct “certain inaccuracies of the previous speaker”, Elatontsev took the floor, setting forth the information presented above. Not only did his version clearly not coincide with Vasiliev’s words, Elatontsev also declared: “Despite such a statement, the Bolsheviks, several hours after this, proceeded to active action”. Since this accusation was too absurd, Vasiliev conveniently “corrected” it: “Mr. Vasiliev again makes a short remark, confirming that the destruction of the Soviet premises ... gave the Bolsheviks an external pretext for open action, while the Military Revolutionary Committee itself, even before that, took an intractable position against the Cossackry: war until the victory”<sup>40</sup>. Despite all these glaring contradictions, Vasiliev’s report has since been used by researchers<sup>41</sup>. This may have happened because the document they found in the archive of the Center for Documentation of Modern History of the Rostov Region had no publication details and looked like an excerpt from memoirs, without any mention of Elatontsev’s speech. We were able to establish its origin only by comparing the

<sup>40</sup> Дон в годы революции. С. 181.

<sup>41</sup> Разиньков М.Е., Морозова. Опр. cit. С. 268.



Театр «Марс» в 1917 г.  
*From open sources*

text with the transcript of the Grand Circle meeting published in the newspaper *Free Don*.

Another source of the ultimatum version may be the recollection of a Bolshevik V.M. Botvinov. In his 1922 memoirs, he reported that the MRC had two wings — the moderate (under Syrtsov’s leadership) and the radical, personified by M.P. Zhakov and S.F. Vasilchenko. The latter, literally a few hours before the attack, won by general party vote with a margin of 3–4 votes<sup>42</sup>. What exactly the “radicals” demanded, however, Botvinov does not say in his vague recollections. However, it was on this fragile basis that the version of advancing attack slogans by the “radicals” was established, since it fit well with the later split of these two parts of the Bolshevik leadership in early 1918<sup>43</sup>. Notably, the version was established as early as 1923, when V. Tolmachev, Head of the Rostov Istpart, wrote about the ultimatum in his review article *The Beginning of the Great Struggle*<sup>44</sup>. Meanwhile, no other evidence of the meeting that Botvinov spoke about has been found, it is not mentioned in the recollections of the members of the MRC, and checking this claim still awaits its time.

<sup>42</sup> Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 41–42.

<sup>43</sup> Кириенко Ю.К. *Op. cit.* С. 89.

<sup>44</sup> Трудовой Дон. № 683. 7 ноября 1923 г.



Кунда — член ВРК, убит в театре «Марс» отрядом Потоцкого  
 в ночь на 26 ноября 1917 г.

*From open sources*

More credible is the mention of Chernoyarov that the attack was initiated by the local organization of the Volunteer Army, which became its striking force<sup>45</sup>. In any case, on November 25, Pototsky, through Captain Stanislav Zakharevich and other officers, spread rumors of an imminent Bolshevik attack. By his order, Zakharevich gathered officers and cadets at 11 p.m. in hospital No. 13 for the arrest of the MRC. About fifty people set out at 1:15 a.m., passed through Krepostnoy and Nakhichevansky alleys and surrounded the “Mars”. The attack began at 1:30 a.m. Pototsky and Zakharevich themselves were not there, although they promised to arrive soon, and also talked about the imminent arrival of a train of cadets in support<sup>46</sup>.

First, the headquarters was fired at by the cadets from the garden of the Commercial Club, which was across the road. Then a group led by Lieutenant Fisenko burst into the building. The newspaper Free Don wrote that he and two other cadets had been wounded, then the rest had given a volley and killed all seven people. Fisenko himself died two hours later<sup>47</sup>. However, all Soviet recollections claim that the rioters hunted down and finished off the victims. After breaking the windows

<sup>45</sup> Воспоминания Д.В. Черноярова // ГАРФ. Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 35.

<sup>46</sup> Вольный Дон. № 197. 2 декабря 1917 г.; Наше знамя. № 109. 30 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>47</sup> Вольный Дон. № 197. 2 декабря 1917 г.



Ротонда городского сада, в которой находился комитет РСДРП в 1917 г.  
*From open sources*

and shooting from revolvers, the fugitives jumped into the courtyard but were stopped by shots and bayonets. Of the seven people, the Red Guards Kunda, Kazberuk, (high school) student Vvedensky and anarchist Evgeny Strizhakov were killed. The building was searched and plundered. Before that, 30–40 Cossacks had ransacked the Bolsheviks' committee premises at the Rotunda and the printing house. The newspaper distributors Tatishchev and Shvets and also the committee coachman were taken away<sup>48</sup>. Less than an hour later, the MRC learned of the attack. Chernoyarov wrote that he had immediately sent a training unit of the 187th regiment to help, and the Cossacks at the Nautical School had refused to help the officers, who “scattered, leaving several corpses”<sup>49</sup>. The Red Guards occupied the “Mars” and the Rotunda building. They managed to capture Pototsky’s car, who had personally driven to the “Mars”, but not a single prisoner<sup>50</sup>. According to Syrtsov: “That same night I had a conversation with General Pototsky, whom I asked whether he was the organizer of the attack on the Soviet, and received an affir-

<sup>48</sup> Воспоминания красногвардейца Жоржа Яковенко // ЦДНИРО. Ф. 12. Оп. 3. Д. 1296. Л. 1–2 об.; Наше знамя. № 107. 28 ноября 1917 г.; Дон в годы революции и Гражданской войны. Т. 1. С. 316.

<sup>49</sup> Воспоминания Д.В. Черноярлова // ГАРФ. Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 36.

<sup>50</sup> Дон в годы революции и гражданской войны. Т. 1. С. 316.



Разгромленное помещение ВРК после нападения генерала Потоцкого.  
 ЦДНИРО. Ф. Р-3619. Оп. 2. Д. 5. Л. 1

mative answer and a statement that he would report to us. The show-down began. The next day was spent in the final military preparations”<sup>51</sup>.

Researcher A.V. Venkov writes: “That same day, the sailors engaged in combat with Kaledin’s men”<sup>52</sup>. In reality, November 26 passed without battles. Instead, both sides were gathering forces. The MRC arrested Mayor Zeeler and sent him to the *Kolkhida*; Reshetkov was appointed in his place. The head of the Soviet of Soldiers’ Deputies V.V. Blum became commander of the garrison. The head of the RMC, officer Arnautov, was appointed to lead the military department<sup>53</sup>. The Red Guards were mobilized. Their squad under the command of staff member Tulak occupied the mouths of the Don with machine guns. On November 26, the Duma asked the MRC to release Zeeler and recognized the “recall” (!) of Pototsky as desirable. However, the Duma and Produprava announced that they would maintain neutrality. The MRC disarmed the cadets in hospital No. 72 and confiscated 2 machine guns and 175 rifles from infirmary No. 13.<sup>54</sup> The Cossack guards were also disarmed and re-

<sup>51</sup> Пролетарская революция на Дону. Ростов-н/Д., 1922. С. 51.

<sup>52</sup> Венков А.В. Ор. cit. С. 102.

<sup>53</sup> Кириенко Ю.К. Ор. cit. С. 97.

<sup>54</sup> Наше знамя. № 107. 28 ноября 1917 г.

leased from the city, weapons were taken from officers in hotels. There was only a delay with the 3rd company occupying the post and telegraph office, which was surrounded by MRC soldiers. After lengthy disputes and threats, a joint guard was established, and then the Red Guards occupied the telephone station. Sailors came to negotiations and to the 3rd company at the Nautical School, but in the evening the Cossacks left to join Pototsky, destroying a machine gun crew of 4 people on the bell tower on the way. Pototsky himself, with his hundred men, was stationed at the evacuation point and the infirmary near the railway station; on both floors of the infirmary there were two machine guns placed<sup>55</sup>.

According to Chernoyarov, he also had an officer detachment of the local Volunteer Army under the command of Zakharevich and Panchenko and a “shock company” of young people (“mainly alumni of the Rostov Maritime Classes”), which had been formed by non-commissioned officer Kostryukov, “who headed the organization of volunteer detachments for the front of the active Army”<sup>56</sup>. But there were clearly less than a hundred of them, considering that they scraped together exactly that many people for the raid on the “Mars”. Therefore, in the morning of November 26, Pototsky called in from Aksay the 29th battery and the 46th Don regiment of three incomplete companies (hundreds), and also sent the 41st regiment to Aksay and Aleksandrovskaya. But the demoralized Cossacks refused to move out. From the 46th regiment only a machine gun team, the officers and a few Cossacks arrived. The 41st regiment sent to Aksay, only presented headquarters, signalmen and machine gunners, the 4th company (hundred) and 38 people from the 1st company (hundred)<sup>57</sup>. The MRC ordered, but did not have time to dismantle the tracks, as the railroad workers themselves convinced the Cossacks not to participate in bloodshed<sup>58</sup>.

Pototsky’s only reinforcement (the Kiev School of Cadets stationed in the girls’ gymnasium) did not take action and was disarmed on November 27. Syrtsov recalled: “... all it took was 2 artillery blank shots ... and the sight

<sup>55</sup> Приазовский край. № 282. 1 декабря 1917 г.; Вольный Дон. № 282. 1 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>56</sup> ГАРФ. Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 34–35.

<sup>57</sup> Дон в годы революции и гражданской войны. С. 159–160, 150–152.

<sup>58</sup> Наше знамя. № 107. 28 ноября 1917 г.



Газета «Приазовский край». №30. 12 декабря 1917 г.  
 Баррикады красногвардейцев между Ростовом и Нахичеванью.  
*From open sources*

of our machine guns”<sup>59</sup>. At the same time, the Red Guards disarmed the Nautical School. Everything that remained for Pototsky was to hope for help from the Host Government. It hastily convened a Circle and on November 26 turned to Alekseev for help. Thanks to him, several hundred cadets, officers and Cossacks under the command of General Orlov were sent to Rostov suburbs that same day<sup>60</sup>.

In the morning of November 27, the units arrived at the Nakhichevan station<sup>61</sup>. Having approached Rostov, they occupied positions in the 1st Balabanovskaya Grove between the Nursery and Sofievsky Cemetery and opened fire on the barracks of the 252nd infantry regiment. A battle began. Soon reinforcements from the Red Guards joined the soldiers. One of them wrote: “... on Monday ... at 4 a.m., a unit of Kaledin’s forces in the number of 500 people landed at the Nakhichevan station and moved in a dense column towards the garrison barracks and tried to capture them unawares, but was met by heavy fire from the garrison and withdrew behind the nearby grove and occupied a trench ... opposite the barracks,

<sup>59</sup> Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 51.

<sup>60</sup> Венков А.В. *Op. cit.* С. 103.

<sup>61</sup> Приазовский край. № 282. 1 декабря 1918 г.

**Первые жертвы.**

Въ ночь на субботу, 25 ноября, назначено было особое торжественное заседание совета рабочих и солдатских депутатов и моряковъ въ „Марсъ“. Кроме того, было собрание въ „Ротондѣ“ городского сада.

Ген. Потоній рѣшилъ дѣйствовать и приказалъ захватить вожаковъ большевистскаго движенія. Для этого были посланы: въ „Марсъ“ — рота третьей вѣсковой подготовительной школы и 40 чл. кѣстной команды, а въ Ротонду — около 30 человекъ.

Цома собралась, заседание окончилось. Въ „Марсъ“ находилось 7 красногвардейцевъ, которые при входѣ ординара при гежарад. Подонкомъ, поручика Фасанко оказали сопротивление. Одинъ изъ нихъ вкопался въ Фасанко въ упоръ и смертельно его ранилъ (тѣло черезъ два дня окончилось въ госпиталѣ), а другіе ранены двумя юнкерами. Тогда дали залпъ и убили всѣхъ семерыхъ.

Газета «Вольный Дон». №197. 2 декабря 1917 г. Первые жертвы.  
Сообщение о нападении на «Марс»  
*From open sources*

another unit ... landed beyond Nakhichevan, occupied the station, dug in and opened fire”<sup>62</sup>. Without movement, the firefight lasted almost two days. The cadets were often fired at from the ships, but the flotilla stood three kilometers behind a rise, and the sailors fired, apparently, at random. The cadets themselves recalled that shells were flying, but fell behind them, in the Don and even on the left bank<sup>63</sup>. The cadets also shelled Nakhichevan, with the same result. Cossacks were sent to help the cadets, but they did not want to fight and sabotaged the order. Even fraternization began, with the Cossacks saying: “What is this? We sought peace at the front, but now we have to fight here!” Such sentiments were carefully maintained by the Mensheviks. On November 27, they convened a meeting of regimental committees and the RMC, where they passed a resolu-

<sup>62</sup> Доклад красногвардейца П.П. Зудеца командующему 2-м Минским революционным отрядом // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 621. Л. 56.

<sup>63</sup> Венков А.В. *Op. cit.* С. 103

tion demanding an end to the fighting and threatened that responsibility would fall on those who refused negotiations. They proposed the same to Kaledin, openly admitting that they counted on the “moral defeat” of the MRC. The Ataman, without hesitation, refused. This did not stop the Mensheviks: it is known that they distributed among the soldiers Kaledin’s order about releasing them on furlough<sup>64</sup>.

Other battles took place at Rostov Station, where Pototsky was entrenched. Here the firefight began around 4PM on November 27 and continued until morning. Soldiers surrounded the station, but did not dare to assault, and the workers themselves had to storm it repeatedly. In one assault, they tried to approach along the rails, but lost 15 people and retreated. Then the ship *Roza* from 4 to 6AM fired 60 shells at the station from three-inch guns<sup>65</sup>. This had no effect — only the station clock and neighboring stalls were damaged. At midnight, an armored car with machine guns arrived at the station square, but the exposed position had to be quickly abandoned. The Red Guards attacked the station at least three more times and even entered it, but were driven out. The Cossacks also chanced upon a police arms depot at the station with two machine guns. But finally, the Cossacks realized the hopelessness of resistance, and between 9 and 10AM on November 28, Pototsky surrendered<sup>66</sup>.

After promises of non-violation, he gave up his epaulettes and sash and was taken to the *Kolkhida*, where Zakharevich also ended up. Most of the officers were taken to the “Mars”. When in Novocherkassk, the Cossacks E.P. Ermakov and P.M. Isaenkov described the surrender as allegedly due to shortage of ammunition and food — and, surprisingly, peaceful treatment of prisoners. The Red Guards took 220 Cossacks to the Temernik theater, and even released them for lunch to local residents on parole. The next day, the sailors took them to the “Mars”, and soon transferred them to the barracks near Nakhichevan, the very ones where the battles had been held. The soldiers met the Cossacks in a friendly manner, no one held them back, and by morning there

<sup>64</sup> Приазовский край. № 282. 1 декабря 1917 г.; Дон в годы революции и гражданской войны. С. 181; Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 66.

<sup>65</sup> Вольный Дон. № 197. 2 декабря 1917 г.; Приазовский край. № 282. 1 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>66</sup> Наше знамя. № 108. 29 ноября 1917 г.; Вольный Дон. № 196. 1 декабря 1917 г.

remained 80 of them. In the morning, they were offered tea and escorted out of Rostov. Such treatment appears to have been applied to all those who had surrendered. Thus, on the same day, November 29, at 4AM, a train of the Kuban Cossacks was stopped at the village of Gnilovskaya. When it turned out that the Cossacks were going home, they were allowed through<sup>67</sup>. Even Chernoyarov confirms: “Six days of local Bolshevik rule passed without terrorist acts; the “imprisoned” officers were not shot, houses and shops not robbed or plundered”<sup>68</sup>.

Clearly due to Pototsky’s defeat, in the morning of November 29, the cadets left the grove and the station and withdrew along the railway, leaving an armored car, weapons, 8 dead and wounded. The respite made it possible to count the losses. In these battles, the MRC lost dozens of people: “in three days, November 27–29, 73 people were brought to the morgue, of them 2 women, 1 cadet and 70 workers”<sup>69</sup>. As for the losses of the Whites, A.V. Venkov writes: “Over two days, 5 killed and 28 wounded were put out of action (according to other data, 5 cadets were killed, 5 officers and 29 cadets wounded)”. But it seems that there were more victims. Venkov himself mentions that the entire 1st platoon of Khovansky cadets was killed in the very first battle. Bolsheviks also recalled a successful hit of a shell at a unit of cadets. Also, in the press of Novocherkassk, there is a mention of the arrival in the city of 120 wounded and killed. This makes one believe the opinion of the MRC leader Zhakov, who assumed that about 200 people died during the battles<sup>70</sup>. In any case, further battles took place in the area of the next station Kizerinka, closer to Novocherkassk, from where Kaledin brought reinforcements to the village of Aleksandrovskaya. A major oversight of the MRC was that it did not dare to attack Kizerinka and gave the enemy time to gather forces.

<sup>67</sup> Наше знамя. № 109. 30 ноября 1917 г.; Вольный Дон. № 196. 1 декабря 1917 г.; Excerpt from the newspaper «Известия Ростово-Нахичеванского Совета». №115. 30 ноября 1917 года // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 652. Л. 35.

<sup>68</sup> Воспоминания Д.В. Черноярлова // ГАРФ. Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 39.

<sup>69</sup> Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 102; Приазовский край. № 283. 2 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>70</sup> Венков А.В. Op. cit. С. 103; Пролетарская революция на Дону. С. 103; Вольный Дон. № 196. 1 декабря 1917 г.; Октябрь 1917 г. С. 30.

Nor was it easy for Kaledin, as no Cossack unit agreed to participate in the assault. He had to, as he himself said, “compose detachments from pieces, torn from various units”. The Duma members also kept interfering. On November 29, a delegation of the Mensheviks from Rostov visited Kaledin with a proposal for negotiations, and on the next day arrived a delegation from the Duma and organizations of Novocherkassk. However, he replied that he was ready to discuss only after the suppression of Bolshevism and refused to stop the fighting<sup>71</sup>. Even part of the Host Government was dissatisfied that he was ignoring “peaceful means”. and some submitted their resignations (V.Ya. Biryukov, M.E. Generalov, I.T. Semenov, S.V. Makarov and M.P. Ageev)<sup>72</sup>.

Nevertheless, this moral pressure had no concrete significance. The Host Circle, convened on November 26, on the whole supported the suppression of the uprising, and Kaledin managed to complete detachments. On the same day, he gathered his forces in Aleksandrovskaya: the 46th and 48th Don regiments, the 5th Don battalion, officers, cadets, old Cossacks, etc.; in total, by some estimates, 4526 bayonets, 2117 sabers, 12 guns, 4 armored cars and 400 soldiers from the Volunteer Army<sup>73</sup>. There is some evidence, though, that the core was from the Volunteer Army. For example, one eyewitness reported: “Among the train sent to Rostov, there were very many cadets and officers, there were few Cossacks; the cadets and officers were dressed in soldier overcoats”<sup>74</sup>. Thus, the Volunteer Army showed itself for the first time in the Rostov region and would soon completely emerge from the “underground”.

It is impossible to estimate the MRC forces, but apparently, they had less. Zhakov believed that Kaledin had 5000 people, of whom only 1500–2000 actually fought: “We had somewhat more, but there were never more than 1000–1200 people on the front line. Artillery on both sides played almost no role. ... The Whites had an advantage in machine guns and leadership”. According to him, no more than 200–300 soldiers from the garrison fought<sup>75</sup>. There were practically no reinforce-

<sup>71</sup> Вольный Дон. № 200. 6 декабря 1917 г.; № 197. 2 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>72</sup> Ростовская речь. № 284. 8 декабря 1918 г.

<sup>73</sup> Венков А.В. *Op. cit.* С. 104.

<sup>74</sup> Наше знамя. № 109. 30 ноября 1917 г.

<sup>75</sup> Октябрь 1917 г. С. 28;

ments sent to Rostov; apparently, the largest was the Bataisk detachment of 300 people<sup>76</sup>. On the night of November 30, 250 Red Guards came from Tikhoretskaya, the next day — a small unit of soldiers from Azov<sup>77</sup>.

A huge disadvantage of the Red Guards was a complete lack of experience and discipline. Many accounts say that they considered positions like a work shift, from 8–9AM to evening with a lunch break. The MRC did not exert proper pressure on them. As a result, as the Red Guard Zudets wrote, “...among the Red Guards there was complete chaos, whoever wanted went to the position, but most took rifles and sat at home or walked around the streets”<sup>78</sup>. At the same time, all Soviet participants noted the high dedication of the battle participants. Commander Arnautov wrote with regret: “If circumstances had allowed this mass to be given the proper organization, it would have withstood any combat test”<sup>79</sup>.

From November 30 to December 1, a battle began between Nakhichevan and Aleksandrovskaya, separated by a shallow but wide Kizerinka ravine. On the side of the MRC, ships were firing — but, as before, unsuccessfully. The Whites had 300–400 cadets and Cossacks, a machine gun team, a cadet battalion of the Volunteer Army, an officer detachment, etc. The MRC forces quickly realized that the situation was not in their favor. Among them, demoralization and desertion began to increase, taking on an almost open form. By the evening of December 1, only a minority remained at the positions. Even the seamen on the ships “several times stopped firing and discussed at meetings the issue of returning to Sevastopol”. The Mensheviks also contributed to this. On December 1, they convened a “democratic conference” of deputies of military organizations and the Soviet of Peasant Deputies, at which they called not to participate in the fighting and passed a resolution demanding that both sides enter into negotiations<sup>80</sup>. The

<sup>76</sup> Выписка из газеты «Социал-демократ». №227. 7 (20) декабря 1917 г. // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 632. Л. 2.

<sup>77</sup> Кириенко Ю.К. *Op. cit.* С. 102.

<sup>78</sup> Октябрь 1917 г. С. 28; Доклад красногвардейца П.П. Зудеца командирующему 2-м Минским революционным отрядом // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 621. Л. 56.

<sup>79</sup> Рабочее дело. № 167. 5 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>80</sup> Венков А.В. *Op. cit.* С. 103; Октябрь 1917 г. С. 34, 30, 16–17.



Похороны рабочих, павших в боях с казаками Каледина  
и отрядами Добармии в декабре 1917 г. под Ростовом-на-Дону. 13 декабря  
1917 г.

*From open sources*

next day, the Mensheviks passed a similar resolution in the Vladikavkaz railway workshops<sup>81</sup>.

Of course, the forces of Kaledin did not care about these resolutions. Their decisive success was the attack by cadets on Nakhichevan early in the morning of December 2 along the ravine, under a cover of fog<sup>82</sup>. The unit easily occupied the city, cut off the escape route of the Red Guards at the Aksay positions and defeated them. This was the result of demoralization of the Guards and poor work of the MRC. For example, they had a crude armored train that could have been used to guard the ravine, but it appeared on position only 2 times, once firing at a balka near Nakhichevan. Kaledin had also secured the mood of the Nakhichevan soldiers, who did not participate in the battles. The newspaper of the Mensheviks claims that this happened because the 46th Cossack regiment unexpectedly violated the neutrality and disarmed the soldiers. It seems they were promised Kaledin's order for furlough. The soldiers indeed, after two days, began to disperse "on furlough", although this was quickly stopped<sup>83</sup>. However, such dereliction of duty by the garrison

<sup>81</sup> Кириенко Ю.К. *Op. cit.* С. 102.

<sup>82</sup> Революция на Дону. Таганрог, 1930. С. 21.

<sup>83</sup> Октябрь 1917 г. С. 29–30, 35; Excerpt from the newspaper «Социал-демократ». №227. 7 (20) декабря 1917 г. // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 632. Л. 2.

had already been taking place. According to Chernoyarov, the 252nd regiment “... seeing that it came to bloodshed, began to scatter: soldiers left for home not in ones, but in whole parties; other reserve regiments began to follow their example”. Even the “garrison commander”, soldier Blum, did not show initiative and actively contacted the colonel<sup>84</sup>.

After this breakthrough, one could expect resistance on the other side — on the Nakhichevan border, between Rostov and Nakhichevan. According to Kaledin, he knew that barricades were being built there, but they turned out to be abandoned and apparently not completed. At the same time, a Cossack detachment of 1100 easily broke through to Rostov from the side of Olimpiadovka<sup>85</sup>. The city began to be taken by noon. On December 2, at 3PM, Kaledin was already driving along Big Sadovaya in a car<sup>86</sup>. He appointed General A.M. Nazarov as commander of the Rostov District, who began to carry out disarming activities and arrests.

The passage of the Whites was aided by the very members of the MRC. Learning early in the morning of the breakthrough, they arrived at the Red Guard headquarters at the “Mars” and, realizing the hopelessness of the situation, called the troops to retreat towards Tikhoretskaya — Azov. It was planned to retreat by train to Taganrog. The gathering place was appointed on the embankment at the *Kolkhida*. However, Kaledin’s forces prevented this. From Taganrog at the village of Gnilovskaya on December 2, a battery of A.M. Nazarov was stationed with a machine gun team of the 51st Don regiment (2 guns and 900 fighters), which cut off the exit to the Sea of Azov. The battery took shelter in a depression behind the railroad, and observers stood on the embankment itself<sup>87</sup>. After being fired upon, the ships immediately left downstream to the Koluzaev pier<sup>88</sup>. The MRC members arriving around two o’clock found an almost empty embankment and dispersed to escape from the city by themselves. By evening, cadets from Nakhichevan entered Rostov. The *Kolkhida* also left with the ships, but ran aground eight miles from the city near Gnilovskaya<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>84</sup> ГАРФ. Ф. 5881. Оп. 2. Д. 731. Л. 37, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Вольный Дон. № 199. 5 декабря 1917 г.; Венков А.В. Оп. cit. С. 104.

<sup>86</sup> Приазовский край. № 284. 3 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>87</sup> Венков А.В. Оп. cit. С. 104.

<sup>88</sup> Приазовский край. № 284. 3 декабря 1917 г.

<sup>89</sup> Октябрь 1917 г. С. 18, 30, 35.



Ростовская филармония, бывший театр «Марс». Современный вид.  
 Фото автора

The crew transferred to the ships, blowing up the engines. Pototsky and Zeeler remained in the hands of 7–8 sailors (apparently, members of the Council of Five), who after negotiations released them in exchange for 14 of their men<sup>90</sup>. Soon Nazarov boasted at the Circle meeting: “He, Zeeler, guaranteed them life. In general, the sailors trembled for their skin. From this we can conclude that the Bolsheviks are hooligans. You need to use fists, the only truly effective means against them. And that is how they were treated”<sup>91</sup>. However, in fact, Nazarov could not but take into account the strength of the flotilla and allowed it to pass into the Sea of Azov — as well as the sailors of the *Kolkhida*. True, the Menshevik newspaper wrote that when these 5 sailors went to Novochoerkassk, they were “tortured on the way: arms were twisted, tongues cut off, etc.”<sup>92</sup> This is doubtful, although there was a lot of evidence of the “volunteers” killing the Red Guards in the city, including in the Menshevik press<sup>93</sup>.

<sup>90</sup> Раенко Я.Н. Хроника исторических событий на Дону, Кубани и в Черноморье. Вып. 1: Март 1917 г. — март 1918 г. Ростов-на-Дону: Ростиздат, 1939. С. 103.

<sup>91</sup> Transcript of the meeting of the Military Circle (Cossack Assembly) of December 3, 1917// РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 568. Л. 57.

<sup>92</sup> Excerpt from the newspaper «Социал-демократ» // РГАСПИ. Ф. 71. Оп. 33. Д. 632. Л. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Ратьковский И.С. Белый террор. Гражданская война в России. СПб.: Питер, 2021. С. 133.

In connection with the rampage of terror, almost all units were withdrawn from Rostov within a few days. The uprising thus ended.

However, in the city there was still a long period of passive resistance by workers against the counterrevolution, expressed in peaceful forms of protest (strikes, complaints in the press, demonstrations at the funerals of victims of the White Terror) as well as in illegal underground struggle. Part of the Red Guards retreated to Tikhoretskaya, where they continued fighting and blocked routes to Tsaritsyn. Moreover, the uprising objectively contributed to delaying officer and Cossack forces on the Don, giving the Bolsheviks in the north time to assemble military detachments. As a result, it became the first act of struggle in which the counterrevolution's victory proved fragile and temporary. In this regard, the commander of the detachments Arnautov wrote in a Menshevik newspaper: "1) the role of the Rostov Red Guard has not yet been played out; 2) the first episode of the Civil War on the Don has just ended"<sup>94</sup>. These words proved prophetic.

## Conclusions

The Rostov uprising of 1917 became a key stage in the struggle in southern Russia, revealing both the weaknesses and the potential of the Bolsheviks. On the one hand, they had a number of shortcomings that led to the uprising's defeat: poor preparation of the Red Guards and naval artillery, chaotic command, passive defense, and dependence on unreliable allies. The passive behavior of the garrison is especially noteworthy — yet a decisive seizure of control over it, with the removal of moderate elements, would have made it possible to allocate at least part of the volunteers for the struggle.

On the other hand, the RMC had significant support from workers and soldiers, it employed political flexibility (as demonstrated by the coalition through the RMRC), and used the Cossacks' pacifism. The defeat also had strategic advantages, as it exposed Kaledin's weakness, united the Donbass workers, and accelerated the creation of revolutionary forces in the north.

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<sup>94</sup> Рабочее дело. № 167. 5 декабря 1917 г.

It is extremely difficult to assess unequivocally the RMC's policy of uniting democratic elements in opposition to Kaledin: how correct it was under the circumstances and whether it would have been better for the insurgents to declare a decisive break with moderate elements, as the Bolshevik leaders in Petrograd did. This question came up as early as the 1920s, when the left-wing opponents of M.P. Syrtsov (Zhakov and S.S. Turlo) accused him of political opportunism and responsibility for the defeat<sup>95</sup>. It seems that a reconstruction of events shows that, regardless of the RMC's intentions, the situation made such a course objectively difficult to implement. In Rostov, workers and soldiers at that time were not sufficiently motivated and radicalized for such a step; democratic sentiments toward unification were still relatively popular among them. The inertia of mass consciousness, which rejected bloodshed, also played a major role. The radicalization of society, which would lead it into civil war, had to become the result of a demonstrably objective and irreconcilable contradiction between socio-political forces, and the RMC was not yet capable of producing this.

Therefore, the main conclusion of our study is that the uprising, although not accidental, was nevertheless a forced measure; it was a response to Kaledin's military actions, accelerating the polarization of society. The victory over the RMC, meanwhile, was largely secured by officer volunteers, while the Cossacks remained more passive, indicating the temporary nature of the success. The significance of the uprising thus extends beyond local boundaries: it should be seen as an important milestone in the formation of opposing forces in southern Russia, clearly demonstrating the impossibility of maintaining a "third way" under conditions of escalating civil confrontation.

The events of November–December 1917 in Rostov, therefore, became not only the first major armed clash of the Civil War in the region, but also an illustrative example of the dynamics of the revolutionary process in Cossack areas, where the military factors were closely intertwined with the socio-political ones.

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<sup>95</sup> *Кислицын С.А.* Вариант Сырцова. Из истории формирования антисталинского сопротивления в советском обществе в 20–30-е гг. Ростов-на-Дону, 1992. С. 25.

### Authors' contributions

Definition of the aims and objectives of the study; work with archival sources; work with historiography; editing, proofreading and formatting; formulation of the introduction and conclusions of the study; verification — N.A. Zayats (author's contribution share — 1/3).

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### Conflict of interests

The authors declare no relevant conflict of interests.



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