

DISCUSSION OF ARMENIAN NATIONAL-POLITICAL PROBLEMS IN THE PERIODICAL “THE FIGHT” (1897-1901)

Gegham Hovhannisyan

Senior researcher at the Institute of History, NAS RA

PhD in Historical Sciences, Associate Professor

e-mail: gegham.hovhannisian@mail.ru

Abstract

In 1887 the theoreticians of the Hunchakyan party, which was founded in Geneva, unlike other parties, believed that after the liberation of the Armenian people from Turkish and then Russian rule, a socialist social order should be established in democratic Armenia. Going ahead of the natural development of events, Hunchakyan were engaged in propaganda of socialism in Western Armenia in the late 1880s - early 1890s.

Keywords: *Hunchakyan party, “The Fight” newspaper, Arpiar Arpiaryan, Armenian Question, liberation of Western Armenians, Turkey, Russia, Europe*

Introduction

The main goal of the Armenian national parties that entered the political arena at the end of the XIX^h century was the liberation of Western Armenians from Turkish rule. Although the goals of the parties were common, their practical approaches were different.

In 1887 the theoreticians of the Hunchakyan party, which was founded in Geneva, unlike other parties, believed that after the liberation of the Armenian people from Turkish and then Russian rule, a socialist social order should be established in democratic Armenia. Going ahead of the natural development of events, Hunchakyan were engaged in propaganda of socialism in Western Armenia in the late 1880s - early 1890s. Time has shown, however, that Hunchakyan's actions as a whole, including the propaganda of socialism in Turkey, did not yield significant results. On this basis, the contradictions within the party intensified especially after the massacres of Western Armenians in the 1890s, when many party figures left Turkey and gathered in London to discuss the party's future course of action, but the deepening of disagreements led to its split.

Rejecting the previous practices of the party, Hunchakyan, mainly Western Armenians, under the leadership of writer, publicist, national-public figure Arpiyar Arpiaryan, separated and created a new party, which was later called “Reorganized”. The new Hunchakyan tried to use the party's official newspaper “Hunchak” to propagate their ideas, but after the leader of the Hunchakyan party, Avetis Nazarbekyan, managed to preserve his ownership rights to the newspaper through the London court, the reorganized Hunchakyan began to publish the newspaper “The

Fight” in London in 1897.¹ The first issue of the newspaper announced that the party’s official newspaper “Hunchak” has passed into the hands of an individual (namely Av. Nazarbekyan - G. H), therefore “The Fight” will become the official newspaper of the newly created party.²

Searching for ways to liberate Western Armenians in the periodical “The Fight”

“The Fight” was a small four-page newspaper. Arshak Chopanyan, Levon Bashalyan, well-known figures of Western Armenian literary and social life cooperated with this periodical, but Arpiar Arparyan was the author of the ideological-political direction of the newspaper and the author of most of the articles.

The newspaper criticized the tactics of the old Hunchak leaders, who used the press to insult the Turkish authorities, not realizing that by doing so they were inadvertently warning the Turkish authorities about possible Armenian uprisings. According to “The Fight”, the Armenian people could be liberated only through a general popular uprising.³

“The Fight” theoreticians sometimes referred to examples of national-liberation struggle of other peoples, trying to demonstrate their struggle experience. The article “Tricolor Flag” draws parallels between the ways and means of national liberation struggle of Armenian and foreign peoples.⁴ The search for a solution to this super-problem leads “The Fight” to the conclusion that salvation lies in the unity of all classes of the Armenian people⁵.

However, promoting the idea of the consolidation of national forces, the periodical meant only the Western Armenians, and the intervention of the Eastern Armenians was considered harmful.⁶ Citing Nazarbek and other Eastern Armenian figures, the newspaper wrote that they strive to lead the liberation movement of Western Armenians without recognizing Western Armenia, and instead of patriotism, they wrap the ideology of socialism around the neck of the Armenian people. The disastrous consequences of that activity for the Armenian people were shown.⁷

“The Fight” emphasized that the uniqueness of the Armenian Revolution⁸ lies in its purely national character, because the Armenians are persecuted without discrimination, rich or poor.⁹

¹ To the newspaper has been discussed in several studies (Hambaryan 1990; Khurshudyan 2006; Hovhannisyan 2019).

² “The Fight”, 1897, №1.

³ “The Fight”, 1897, №6.

⁴ “The Fight”, 1897, №2.

⁵ “The Fight”, 1897, №18.

⁶ “The Fight”, 1897, №3.

⁷ “The Fight”, 1897, №14.

⁸ “Armenian Revolution” was understood as the liberation struggle of Western Armenians at the end of the 19th century

⁹ “The Fight”, 1897, №19.

According to the newspaper, everything that can divide the nation should be removed from the program of the newly created Reorganized Hunchakyan Party, regardless their social status, intellectual Armenians, clergymen and merchants should unite their abilities for the salvation of the nation and homeland.¹⁰

“The Fight” emphasized that the newly created party changed its program, abandoned the clause of class struggle and focused purely on the issue of national freedom.¹¹

Coverage of the politics of the European powers in “The Fight”

“The Fight” paid special attention to the issue of the policy of the great European powers in the Armenian Question.

The periodical promoted the idea that the support of the European states is necessary for the liberation of Western Armenians, but it cannot be enough and it was necessary to carry out an active and multifaceted national activity. The editor of the newspaper, Arpiaryan, believed that the Armenian Question will not reach a result if the Armenian nation carries out all its activities only in the journalistic, propaganda and diplomatic direction.¹² The publicist came to the idea that the subject peoples of Turkey should undertake the work of their liberation themselves, and not passively wait for the support from Europe.¹³ He expressed his belief that the European powers will eventually either reform Turkey or dismember it.¹⁴

The focus of the periodical was on Russia’s policy on the Armenian Question

Arpiaryan, understanding the essence of the Russian colonial policy, wrote that the Russian state was using the situation of the Armenian people under Turkish rule for its political purposes.¹⁵ Criticizing the regressive Russian policy towards the Armenian people, the newspaper sometimes went to the extreme, putting a sign of equality between the Russian and Turkish dominions. The idea that the destruction of Turkey was one of the unchanging goals of Russian foreign policy was raised in “The Fight”. In the newspaper was արծածվում էր the idea that the destruction of Turkey was the constant goal of the Russian foreign policy. It was also emphasized that Russia’s policy on the Armenian Question was variable and depended on political circumstances.

¹⁰ “The Fight”, 1900, №26.

¹¹ “The Fight”, 1901, №28.

¹² “The Fight”, 1901, №28.

¹³ “The Fight”, 1899, №16.

¹⁴ “The Fight”, 1899, №17.

¹⁵ “The Fight”, 1897, №7.

According to the periodical, the reason why the Armenian people ended up in such a situation was the lack of a unified national policy. The periodical saw the way out of the created situation in the unity of the intellectual, military and monetary (financial) forces of the Armenian people, which would provide an opportunity to save the present and secure the future¹⁶. “The Fight” also emphasized the idea that the Armenian people could become a tool for Russia if Turkey’s anti-Armenian policy intensified.¹⁷

Coverage of the movement of Young Turks in “The Fight”

At the end of the XIX century, during the rise of the national liberation movement of the subject peoples of the Ottoman Empire, the movement of the Turkish opposition forces, the Young Turks, was launched against the dictatorship of the Sultan. The participants of that movement saw the further development of Turkey in the establishment of constitutional order in the country and during their struggle sought to cooperate with other political organizations opposing the Sultanate regime: Arabs, Macedonians, Bulgarians, including Armenian national parties.

In this context, in 1896, A. Arpiaryan had meetings with some leaders of the Young Turks in Paris (in particular with Ahmed Reza - G.H.). According to Arpiaryan, there was no general agreement between them during those meetings, because the leaders of the Young Turks declared that the Armenians should abandon the demand for reforms in Western Armenia. Understanding the true goals of the Young Turks in the national issue, Arpiaryan called on Armenian national parties to be realistic and not to follow abstract ideas. He came to the conclusion that the Young Turks were more hostile to the Christians of Turkey than the Old Turks.¹⁸

Coverage of the conflict between Arpiaryan and the Armenian Revolutionary Federation in “The Fight”

“The Fight” also highlighted a painful reality in Armenian public life, the problem of the competition between political parties, which was clearly expressed in the form of the conflict between Arpiaryan and the ARF. In particular, in the late 1890s, the news about the so-called betrayal and espionage by Arpiaryan, thrown into the arena by the ARF, made a big noise in the western public life.

A number of well-known figures of the Western Armenian public life of the time came out in support of Arpiaryan.

The articles of A. Chopanyan, L. Bashalyan V. Malezyan and others, published in “The New Life” and “The Fight”, completely deny Arpiaryan’s treachery and being a spy of the Turkish police. The fake news spread by the Constantinople Committee of the

¹⁶ “The Fight”, 1898, №9.

¹⁷ “The Fight”, 1900, №23.

¹⁸ “The Fight”, 1897, №7.

ARF proves that their real purpose was to undermine Arpiaryan's great authority and popularity, a circumstance that the ARF viewed as a serious obstacle to increasing its influence in Constantinople.¹⁹

The publication of "The Fight" was stopped in 1901, the reason for which was the intensifying intra-party disagreements within the reorganized Hunchakyan party and Arpiaryan's departure from the party.

Conclusion

Thus, the study of the articles published in the newspaper "The Fight", the organ of the reorganized Hunchakyan party in 1897-1901, shows that the focus of the periodical was the policy of the European great powers in direction of the Armenian Question, anti-Armenian destruction policy of the Ottoman Turkey, the Young Turk movement, and the relations between the Armenian national parties. The search for ways and means of liberating Western Armenians was in focus of their publications. Rejecting the fighting tactics of the old Hunchakians, who were surrounded by the dogmas of socialism, the chief editor of "The Fight" A. Arpiaryan after long preparation put forward the idea of a common uprising, whose propaganda was undertaken by "The Fight". Although "The Fight" was published for a short time, it left a noticeable mark in the history of the Armenian liberation movement and social-political thought of the end of the XIX and the beginning of the XX century.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

NEWSPAPERS

The Fight (London, in Arm.).

STUDIES

Hambaryan A. 1990. The Armenian social-political thought on the ways of the Armenian liberation. Yerevan: Hayastan (In Arm.).

Hovhannisyan G. 2019. Arpiar Arpiaryan. Social-political ideas and activities. Yerevan: Archbishop Mesrop Ashchyan (In Arm.).

Khurshudyan R. 2006. The History of Armenian Periodicals (XVIII-XIX centuries), vol.1. Cairo: Armenian General Benevolent Union (In Arm.).

Translated from Armenian by Gevorg Harutyunyan

The article was delivered on 02.08.2023, reviewed on 14.09.2023, accepted for publication on 01.10.2023.

¹⁹ "The Fight", 1897, 6 1900, 24,25,26.