

1918: Rasulzadeh vs. Shaumian

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On 15 September 1918, Baku, according to the modern Azerbaijani historiography, was liberated from the dictatorship of the Menshevik-SR-Dashnaks as a result of the joint operation of the Caucasian Islamic Army and the Armed Forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This event is considered as the revenge of the Azerbaijanis, who had earlier suffered defeat as a result of the military clash between the Bolshevik-Dashnak alliance and the Musavatists in March 1918. 1918 as a whole was a year of complex and contradictory events in the history of Azerbaijan. That year, political power in Azerbaijan changed hands several times, there were several military conflicts and confrontations, the creation of the national state was announced, and at the end of the year, the first parliament began to function. Despite the participation of various political forces (social democrats, socialist revolutionaries, constitutional democrats, etc.) in the processes that took place in 1918, the political competition was mainly conducted by two political parties—the nationalist Musavat and the Bolsheviks. In this regard, how the Musavat leader Mamedamin Rasulzadeh and the leader of the Caucasian Bolsheviks Stepan Shaumian interpreted the events of 1918 is of great importance. These interpretations are important not only for assessing the processes that took place in 1918, but also for clarifying the conditions under which the political positions and views of two public figures changed.

In March 1918 the Bolsheviks managed to win over the Dashnaktsutyun party and put a brief end to Musavat's claims to power in Baku. The events of March were presented in Soviet historiography as a conflict between the national bourgeoisie and workers led by Bolsheviks, as a class struggle. Modern Azerbaijani scholars present this event as a deliberate extermination of the Muslim population by the Bolshevik-Armenian forces, as an ethnic genocide. In September

1918 Musavat, with the help of the Ottoman military forces, managed to oust the Menshevik-SR-Dashnak alliance from power, during which the Armenian population of the city suffered losses. The events of September were not included in Soviet historiography, and modern Azerbaijani historiography also prefers to remain silent on them. How did Rasolzadeh and Shaumian react to these events? How did Rasolzadeh, who was defeated in March 1918, interpret the conflict with the Bolsheviks? How did Shaumian, who was arrested in August 1918, explain his loss of power? To find answers to these questions, this piece examines the articles and speeches of Rasolzadeh and Shaumian in 1918.

1918: Historical Review

At the beginning of the 20th century, Baku was one of the most ethnically, socially, and politically diverse cities in the South Caucasus. In the absence of a number of surrounding villages and towns included in the territory of the current metropolis of Baku, the population of the city itself was approximately 28% local, comprising Azerbaijanis (Muslim Turks, according to sources from that period).[\[1\]](#) Azerbaijanis did not constitute a majority (12% of all workers) of the workers who supported the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks themselves were the most organized political force in the region.[\[2\]](#) Since the formation of the working class in Baku was mainly linked to the development of the oil industry and capitalist relations, the weight of the national bourgeoisie in political life was important. But here, too, the locals were not the majority. About one-third of the enterprises in Baku's oil industry belonged to Azerbaijanis.[\[3\]](#)

In 1918, several political parties and organizations of socialist, liberal, anarchist, Islamist, and ethnic nationalist character were active on the political scene in Baku. However, with the exception of the nationalist and Islamist parties, none of these parties operating in Baku were independent. They were local branches of parties and

organizations created in other places in the Russian Empire. Among them, the socialist-oriented parties were more organized and experienced. The Social Democrats and Socialist Revolutionaries were distinguished by their numbers and political cohesion. During the political debate, the Social Democrats were divided into Bolsheviks and Mensheviks, and the Socialist Revolutionaries into right and left. Branches of all these parties operated in Baku. In addition, part of the local intelligentsia united in the social democratic organization "Gummet." Many Azerbaijani politicians, including Mammad Amin Rasulzadeh, were among the first members of this organization. There was also liberal party of constitutional democracy (Cadets) that had great number of supporters. Most of the officers and soldiers of the army of the Caucasian Front were Cadets. Azerbaijani politicians Alimardan Topchibashov, Ismail Gadzhinsky, Armenian industrialist Konstantin Khatisov were Cadets. The creation of national parties such as Musavat, Ittihad and Ahrar disrupted the lines drawn between the cadets and the socialists. Azerbaijanis were often represented in different political parties and sometimes moved from one party to another. The parties' programs differed mainly in the future state structure of the Russian Empire, attitude to war, means of production, labor, and land.

Although the creation of Musavat is associated with 1911, the first congress of the party was held in the fall of 1917, practically coinciding with the October Revolution in Russia. Simultaneously with the first congress of Musavat, the Azerbaijani socialist revolutionaries formed the Muslim Socialist Bloc under the leadership of Aslan Shafikurdski. In addition, in January 1918, the creation of the national Ittihadi-Islam (Islam in Russia) party[\[4\]](#) was announced, and in the fall of 1918, Ahrar[\[5\]](#) was founded.

At the beginning of the 20th century, branches of political organizations and parties of Armenian, Jewish, and other nationalities were active in Azerbaijan. The Dashnaktsutyun party was the most organized national party for Armenians. The

political experience of the Dashnaktsutyun Party and its sphere of influence on the Armenian population was wider than that of other national parties. The first congress of this party was held in 1892, and three of its branches operated in Azerbaijan (Baku, Shusha, and Elizavetpol).

In 1917, Azerbaijan, like the entire Russian Empire, was in a deep socio-economic crisis. There were two political authorities in Baku: the Baku Soviet which included Mensheviks, Social Revolutionaries and Bolsheviks, and the Executive Committee of Public Organizations, in which the Baku Soviet was also represented. The Muslim population of the city was not represented in the first political organization because of Bolsheviks' position. In the second political organization, Muslims were represented by Mamedhasan Hajinsky and Mamed Amin Rasulzadeh. This organization received financial support from the national capitalists.[\[6\]](#) The lack of Musavat representation on the Baku Soviet was explained by political objectives. In addition to social issues, two major problems stood in the way of an alliance between the Bolsheviks and Musavat. The first was Musavat's demand for a federal structure and autonomy, and the second was its support for Russian participation in World War I. The Bolsheviks supported the unitary structure of Russia, as they declared, "on the principle of internationalism" and opposed participation in the war.

The struggle for political power created obstacles to ensuring social stability. The inability of the Baku Soviet to provide the city with food caused discontent among the population. This discontent manifested itself in the elections to the Executive Committee of the Baku Soviet held in October 1917. Musavat won the elections with a majority of votes; the Bolsheviks managed to get about 18% of the votes.[\[7\]](#) Since this vote did not satisfy the Bolsheviks, they held elections in December 1917 under the new rule. The holding of local elections, i.e., in factories and industries, did not allow the Azerbaijani workers,[\[8\]](#) who were in the minority, to

obtain a majority of votes. In light of the inevitable outcome, Musavat opted to abstain from the electoral process and thus the majority in the Baku Soviet passed into the hands of the Bolsheviks and Dashnaks. Disagreeing with this composition of the Baku Soviet, the Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks left the organization and turned to the Musavat Party, asking for joint action to strengthen their positions. But Musavat sided with the Bolsheviks.[\[9\]](#) The change of power in Russia, the fall of the Provisional Government and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks led to a convergence of the positions of the Baku Bolsheviks and the Musavat Party on above mentioned issues. After the Bolsheviks seized power in the Baku Soviet, they managed to dissolve the Executive committee of Public Organizations.

After the overthrow of the Provisional Government in Russia in October 1917, the Transcaucasian Special Committee, the Provisional government's organ in the South Caucasus, lost its powers. The leading national parties of the South Caucasus refused to recognize the power of the Bolsheviks in Russia and announced the creation of the Transcaucasian Commissariat in November 1917. Lenin responded in December by appointing Shaumian special commissioner for Caucasian affairs. In response, representatives of the leading political parties announced the creation of the Transcaucasian Seim in February 1918 with the goal of creating a Transcaucasian Federation. However, as is known, contradictions between political parties and national groups represented in the Seimas did not allow the creation of the Transcaucasian Federation. The most serious obstacle was the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty in March 1918 by Soviet Russia with the Quadruple Alliance (Germany, Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria).[\[10\]](#) Under the terms of the treaty, Kars, Ardahan and Batum were declared part of the Ottoman Empire.[\[11\]](#) The Georgians and Armenians who disagreed with these decisions had the Transcaucasian Seim declare war on the Ottomans, but were soon defeated and forced to sign a peace treaty. This

agreement confirmed the terms of the Brest-Litovsk Peace. However, this conflict has actualized territorial disputes between Armenians, Azerbaijanis and Georgians. The issue of territorial claims and borders forced the peoples of the South Caucasus to abandon the idea of a federation. In May 1918, the Seim was dissolved and the representatives of three nations of the South Caucasus declared the creation of independent states. While the relations between the Seim and the Ottoman Empire were being discussed in Tbilisi, an armed conflict between the Bolshevik-Dashnak forces and the Musavat forces took place in Baku, and the power of the Council of People's Commissars (CPC) led by Shaumian was declared.

After the proclamation of the independent state, the question of the formation of the branches of power under the leadership of Musavat and the liberation of Baku had to be solved. During the First World War, the Ottoman political forces, which had repeatedly attempted to occupy Baku, positively assessed the calls for military assistance of the officials of the newly proclaimed Republic of Azerbaijan and decided to send military units to liberate Baku from political opponents. Although the military units of the Baku CPC under the leadership of Shaumian tried several times to stop the Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces, these attempts were unsuccessful. Failure at the front led to a coup d'état by the forces of the Socialist Revolutionaries- Menshevik-Dashnaks against the Bolsheviks in Baku and the arrest of the Baku commissars. Power passed into the hands of the "Centrocaspian dictatorship". In March, the dictatorship arrested Bolshevik commissars on charges of using military force to remove their political rivals, namely Musavat, from power, and asked the British to protect the city from attack by Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces (Islamic Army of the Caucasus). At that time, the British were actively involved in the Russian Civil War (Whites vs. Reds) and were trying to restore the Empire. However, the British forces in Iran under the leadership of Major General Dunsterville were small in numbers and ammunition, so the British decided to leave the

city on September 15. [\[12\]](#) Another reason for the British withdrawal from Baku was the success of the Ottoman troops on the Iranian front, the capture of Urmia and the successful advance towards Ghazvin and Hamadan.

On 16 September 1918, a telegram was sent to Ottoman's minister of defence Enver Pasha about the capture of Baku by Ottoman-Azerbaijani forces. However, the Ottomans, having suffered defeat on other fronts, realized the impossibility of winning the war and responded positively to the Entente's peace proposal in October 1918. Under the terms of the Mudros treaty, signed on October 30th 1918, the Ottomans were forced to retreat to the borders of the Russian Empire before the outbreak of war, thus leaving Baku.

Shahumyan's accusations, Rasulzadeh's response

In January 1918, armed clashes took place in the provinces of Elizavetpol and Baku. On 4 January, peasant uprisings began in Elizavetpol province in protest against the heavy tax burden. From 9-12 January, soldiers of the tsarist army died in Shamkhor (modern Shamkir) as a result of the disarmament of Russian military units returning from the Caucasian front. At the same time, a conflict between Russian colonists (who mainly sided with the Bolsheviks) and units of the tsarist army began in Mugan, Lankaran district of Baku province. These events sparked disputes between Musavat and the Bolsheviks over the future political destiny of the region. On 31 January 1918, the newspaper *Kavkazskii Vestnik* published Shaumian's appeal to the peasants of the Muslim provinces of Transcaucasia and the peasant uprising in Transcaucasia. [\[13\]](#) In the first article, Shaumian addresses the Muslim peasants and calls upon them not to kill the khans and members of their families, not to burn or destroy their property, and notes that what they have gained as a result of the uprising will belong to them, because the workers' and peasants' power in Petrograd, Bolshevik Party will not allow the landlords to take back the lands. After this, Shaumian writes that Muslim

lords, khans and beys have repeatedly managed to incite Muslim peasants against Armenian peasants, and emphasizes that Armenian peasants are the same hard workers as Muslim peasants, and they fight against their lords and landowners. Shaumian notes that the Muslim upper class has always deceived the peasants, and now by creating a Muslim army they will try to create a Muslim state in Baku, Elizavetpol and Iravan provinces. But the state they create will serve the interests of the upper class, not the workers and peasants. Speaking about the peasant movement in Transcaucasia, Shaumian mentions the names of landlords killed by peasants in different regions of Elizavetpol province. Many of these names are known to the reader as founders of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Shaumian writes that on 4 January, Muslim peasants attacked the property of Bahram Bey Garabekov, located in the village of Yukharyaibly, near the Transcaucasian Zayam (Dzegam) railway station. Bakhrambey himself and his two brothers were killed; on 6 January, the property of Boyukaga Garabekov was attacked, and he, his daughter, and 5 sons were killed.[\[14\]](#) On that day the property of Khalid Zulgardarov was attacked, he, his wife and 5 daughters were killed, one daughter and one son were taken hostage, 4 sons and 10 family members were killed on his territory. Shaumian writes that the Armenian residents of the village described the tragic death of Allahyar bey, the most influential representative of the Zulgardarov family, as well as his wife, son and daughter, adding that his sons fled to the Armenian village of Badakend and took refuge in the house of a resident of the village Galusa Yavryants. Many members of the Zulgardarov family were killed, some tried to flee to the village of Gushchu, but were captured by the villagers. The article mentions that many of the so-called Kurdish Beys were killed and 30 families fled and took refuge in Badakand. On 4 January, the property of the Shamkir landlords was attacked, but the villagers acted in an organized manner, did not kill the landlords, but drove them out of their mansions. About 80 beks were forced to leave

their estates. The sheikhulislam, leader of Shia Muslims, from Tbilisi managed to save the Morul[\[15\]](#) Beks, and the villagers allowed them to take their belongings and leave.

Shaumian notes that in all the areas where the uprising broke out, the peasants seized the land and began to cultivate it, and the estates, mansions, and property of the nobles were burned or plundered. The peasant uprising began on 15 January in the village of Kyuli in the Gazakh region. The villagers attacked the mansions of landlords. In the second article, Shaumian touches on the Shamkhor incident, writing that "Russian soldiers were disarmed in Shamkhor between January 7 and 12, when peasant unrest began. Thanks to the events in Shamkhor, there were no large-scale pogroms in the area; the villagers looted the mansions, but the landlords survived."[\[16\]](#) Among the dead, Shaumian names the following: Mamed-aga and Isgenderbekov from Ojagly beys, the Sultanovs from the village of Jirdakhan, Isgenderbekov from the village of Bezangelin. It is written that about 30 beks were robbed from the village of Gulagi, among them was Sary bek Garabekov. It is mentioned that the Sultanovs from Oysuzlu fled to Tbilisi. At the end of the article Shaumian gives the names of the landowners who own the largest amount of land in the Elizavetpol province: "56 thousand desyatinas[\[17\]](#) belonged to the Zulgadarovs, 20 thousand desyatinas to the Shamkhor Beks, 20 thousand to the Adygozalovs, 70 thousand to the Shakhmalievs, Tagiyev has more than 20 thousand, the Garabekovs 15 thousand, Patkhanov 10 thousand, Udmiev 20 thousand desyatinas of land. Such landlords as Vazirov, Khasmamedov, Khan Khoisky have from 5 to 3 thousand desyatinas of land. Armenians, Mantashev, Mirzoev (20 thousand desyatinas), Yuzbashov, also have real estate in this province."[\[18\]](#)

In his speech to the Executive Committee of the Workers' and Soldiers' Council in January 1918, Rasulzadeh touched upon the same issues: the riots in the regions against the background of the aggravated social situation, the problem of the military conflict between the local population, Russian

colonists and the remnants of the imperial army in Mugan and Lankaran, as well as the events in the province of Yelizavetpol, and stressed the importance of forming Muslim regiments to prevent chaos. Unlike Shaumian, however, Rasulzadeh characterizes these events not as class struggle, political protest, and rebellion, but as banditry and robbery. A summary of Rasulzadeh's speech was published in the *Bakinskii Rabochii*. In this publication, the Bolshevik newspaper accused Rasulzadeh of counter revolutionism for calling the conflict in Mughan not a revolution but chaos. In response, Rasulzadeh sent an article "Our Autonomy and the Baku Bolsheviks" to the newspaper *Acid Soz* to explain his position on the crucial problems of modernity.^[19] Rasulzadeh writes that Sukhartsev, one of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, in commenting on the armed clashes that took place in the Lankaran area of the Baku region, objected to the formulation of robbery and stated that the clash was not robbery but a political movement. And the aim of this political movement was to prepare Muslims for an attack on Baku. In response, Rasulzadeh emphasizes that Sukhartsev's accusations are unfounded, that Muslims do not intend to expel other nationalities from Baku, and especially notes that in a dangerous political situation, Muslims must also create military units and build an army. Rasulzadeh refutes the Bolsheviks' attempt to convince the people that Muslim autonomy will be the autonomy of the ruling class, and once again recalls that Musavat stands for the workers' demand for an 8-hour working day, social insurance, land for the peasants, and the establishment of a social system based on democratic principles. Rasulzadeh also adds that "the right to autonomy of the peoples of Russia does not lie in getting rid of the whims of the Great Russian nobility and submitting to the whims of the Great Russian workers."^[20] Rasulzadeh also rejects the Bolshevik view that the demand for autonomy would destroy the Caucasus, writing that "if autonomy is bought at the price of destruction, then we Muslims are ready for it." At the end of the article, Rasulzadeh suggests that they are

ready to wait for another Lenin to recognize Muslim autonomy. [\[21\]](#)

About two weeks after Rasulzadeh's reply to Shaumian's accusations, on 17 February 1918, Shaumian's reply *To Citizen Rasulzadeh* was published. [\[22\]](#) Shaumian writes: "By writing on our behalf what we did not say and hiding what he said himself, Rasulzadeh has shown that he is a dishonest opponent. Rasulzadeh first admits that the Muslim regiments were created by the National Council (*sic*) and that Nagiyev and Tagiyev provided financial support in this matter, and then writes that they have nothing to do with the National Council. However, Rasulzadeh cannot deny that the military regiments were created at the expense of the bourgeoisie. This means that the power they will create will be a bourgeois-Romanov power." At the same time, Shaumian disagrees with Rasulzadeh's characterization of what happened in Lankaran as a bandit attack, noting that what happened was a revolution.

Commenting on Rasulzadeh's views on self-determination and autonomy, Shaumian writes that regardless of one's attitude toward the Bolsheviks, the policies pursued by Caucasian nationalists, Muslims, Armenians, and Georgians will eventually lead the Caucasus to ruin because these policies will eventually bring nationalists into conflict with each other. Warning that what happened in the Balkans and Armenia [\[23\]](#) would sooner or later be repeated in the Caucasus, Shaumian stressed that it was nationalist policies that would lead the Caucasus to destruction. Shaumian reminds Rasulzadeh, who accuses the Bolsheviks of treating Armenians and Turks differently, that the Bolsheviks are fighting nationalist Dashnaks both in Armenia and throughout the Caucasus. Shaumian reiterates that the Bolsheviks do not oppose the right of Muslims to self-determination, "but you, Muslim nationalists, do not want to recognize the right of the Bolsheviks to continue the struggle for the liberation of the working class. [\[24\]](#) Shaumian adds that the Muslim bourgeoisie wants to create its own rules, but "for some reason it does not want to

recognize the right of the working class to create its own rules." Shaumian took a class-internationalist position in his polemics with Rasulzadeh, accusing the Musavat nationalists and Dashnaks of fomenting national hatred in the region and protecting the interests of the national bourgeoisie, not the workers.

On 16 February 1918, Rasulzadeh responded to Shaumian's accusations in his speech at the 4th meeting of the Transcaucasian Seim in Tbilisi. Rasulzadeh accused the leader of the Caucasian Bolsheviks of "sacrificing the idea of people's freedom to international political intrigues" and expressed support for the position of the Dashnaktsutyun party and the right of Turkish Armenians to self-determination.[\[25\]](#) In his speech, Rasulzadeh also clarified the reason for his nationalist position, noting that only the people themselves can fight for their freedom and democratic principles: European policies will not bring freedom to small nations. Rasulzadeh gives the example of what happened to the "suffering Armenian people" and the results of the support promised by England, and for this reason he emphasizes that "we will not support agreements signed by people like Milyukov,"[\[26\]](#) but agreements that do not contradict democratic freedom. In his speech Rasulzadeh once again emphasizes that the Great powers, especially Great Britain and France, are thinking about their personal interests and not about the interests of the Caucasian peoples.

In his speech at the regular session of the Seim on 19 February, Rasulzadeh also responded to the Bolshevik accusations that Musavat is a bourgeois party and explained the social platform of his party, explaining the difference between them and the Bolsheviks. In his speech, Rasulzadeh stated that Musavat does not support the free transfer of land to peasants (Rasulzadeh calls this the socialization of land) and that it plans to set a maximum limit on the amount of land that will be given to peasants.[\[27\]](#) In his speech about the future state structure of the empire, Rasulzadeh states that

they want to have free and independent states in Transcaucasia and calls for being ready to fight any threat that may arise. Rasulzadeh stresses that this threat comes mainly from abroad. Rasulzadeh points to both northern and southern neighbors, i.e., Russia and Turkey, as external threats and writes in this regard that "the peoples of Transcaucasia must change their internal psyche" in order to combat the external threat.[\[28\]](#) In general, Rasulzadeh's views on the future structure of the state, participation in the war, and the land issue changed several times against the background of the political processes that took place in 1917-1918, while Shaumian's position on these issues was stable.

At the end of February, Shaumian gave a lecture to the workers of White City and expressed his opinion on a number of issues raised by Rasulzadeh in the Seim. First of all, Shaumian rejects the accusation of false internationalism and states that he does not accuse anyone of being a counterrevolutionary because of their nationality. At the same time, he notes that it is not difficult for Muslim nationalists to accuse the Bolshevik Shaumian, an Armenian by nationality, of false internationalism: "If the Armenian Shaumian opposes the Muslim landlords and khans, then he is a secret Dashnaksakan, although he calls himself a Bolshevik. There was a time when we, a group of Armenian Bolsheviks, were called enemies of the Armenian people because we fought together with the Georgian Social Democrats against the Dashnaktsutyun party. Two or three years ago, when the Armenian nationalists made a shameful and criminal deal with the tsarist government and its representative in the Caucasus, Vorontsov-Dashkov, we began a decisive struggle against them, and that is why we were called Turkophiles, almost direct mercenaries of the Turkish government and local Muslims."[\[29\]](#) Shaumian notes that after the formation of the Left Socialist Revolutionaries and the Hummat Party among Muslims, he is no longer so concerned about the beks' [\[30\]](#) accusations against him.

On 20 March (2 April according to the new calendar), at a

meeting of the Transcaucasian Seim in Tbilisi, Rasulzadeh clarified both the situation in Baku and Musavat's attitude toward the Bolsheviks and Dashnaks at the beginning of the year. Rasulzadeh explained Musavat's support for the Bolsheviks at that time as a forced step since the Bolsheviks had great influence in Baku. Noting that the Baku Bolsheviks, who had a large military force, pose a serious threat not only to the Baku province but also to the entire Transcaucasus, Rasulzadeh emphasizes that they chose the line of supporting the Bolsheviks based on tactical considerations.[\[31\]](#) At the same time, Rasulzadeh argues that Musavat's opposition to the Bolsheviks, "who came to power through rigged elections", could lead to interethnic conflict that could spread throughout the Transcaucasus. Musavat was forced to support the Bolsheviks precisely in order to prevent ethnic clashes. Noting that the Baku Soviet had declared war on the Transcaucasian Seim, Rasulzadeh also raises the question of the participation in the March events of Dashnaksutyun party units that had previously rejected Soviet power.[\[32\]](#) At a meeting on 9 April, Rasulzadeh referred to the events of March and stressed that the Bolsheviks promised devastation to the peoples who wanted autonomy, and now this devastation has been created.[\[33\]](#) Rasulzadeh criticizes the Mensheviks, socialist revolutionaries and cadets who look with hope to the Bolsheviks who are trying to restore the empire, and opposes their sarcastic approach to the ideas of independence of the peoples of Transcaucasia.

Shaumian's response to the policy of the Transcaucasian Seim and Rasulzadeh's speeches was delivered at a meeting of the Council of Peasant Deputies in May 1918. In this speech, Shaumian touches upon the reasons for the March pogroms. In his speech on the politics of the Seim and the situation in Transcaucasia, Shaumian admits that Musavat, the weakest political party in Transcaucasia, became the strongest, most organized and important political force in the region in the second year of the revolution,[\[34\]](#) and notes that this was

possible for two reasons. According to Shaumian, these reasons were the alliance of Musavat with the Georgian Mensheviks and the Muslim Democrats.[\[35\]](#) Regretting that the Georgian Mensheviks and Armenian Dashnaks did not support the revolution, Shaumian says that if they had had this support, the Bolsheviks could have created a great alliance with the Muslim peasants and would have established a strong international Soviet workers' power. Shaumian explains the impossibility of an alliance between Muslim peasants and the Bolsheviks under existing conditions with the exclusive role of landowner power and the old feudal order in the life of Muslim peasants. Shaumian believes that the serious social problems faced by the SNK are a result of the alliance of noble and petty-bourgeois parties with Musavat. He argues that this alliance strengthened the power of the beks and khans and created the basis for Turkish rule in the region.[\[36\]](#) Shaumian sees the only way to change the situation is to destroy the nest of counter-revolution in Elizavetpol. He also criticizes the Declaration of independence of Georgia, calling it an unscrupulous betrayal of the Armenian people, and stating that the Transcaucasian Seim, the Muslim, Georgian-Menshevik, and Dashnaksakan union has already collapsed.[\[37\]](#) Shaumian accuses the Georgians who declared independence of feeding the rest of Transcaucasia to the Turkish-German armies. Stating that they faced the threat of attack by Turkish-German troops after the collapse of the Seim, Shaumian states that they will not retreat, will receive both financial and military assistance from Soviet Russia, and especially notes that maintaining power could lead to unfortunate clashes between the Armenians and Muslims in Elizavetpol.[\[38\]](#) In his speech, Shaumian strongly criticizes the Dashnaks for communicating with the Ottomans, accuses them of contacting the Armenian bourgeoisie, and emphasizes that if they want to be sincere, they need to abandon their nationalist positions. Shaumian notes that the threat to Transcaucasia (i.e., Bolshevism) comes from within, particularly from Elizavetpol and Musavat, since he believes that Turkey is weak militarily. The clashes should not

frighten the Bolsheviks because the Muslim peasants would not allow a repeat of the Armenian-Muslim massacre in Baku. In his speeches, Rasulzadeh pointed out that the main threat to Transcaucasia's independence came from foreign powers. After capturing Baku, the Bolsheviks were preparing to suppress the resistance of Musavat and establish Bolshevik control in Elizavetpol, where the nationalists held significant sway. The majority of Muslims in both provinces and their lack of support for the Bolshevik movement made it unfeasible for the Bolsheviks to peacefully seize power.

The end of the controversy: Shahumyan's arrest, Musavat's victory

Following the collapse of the Transcaucasian Seim and the declaration of independence by the three South Caucasian peoples' representatives in May 1918, the Bolshevik-Musavat controversy came to an end. Rasulzadeh and the Azerbaijani representatives of the dissolved Seim began working on creating state structures and liberating Baku from political opponents, while the Bolsheviks focused on addressing the aftermath of their failed policies and maintaining power.

After establishing diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire, the armed forces of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which received military assistance, began advancing towards Baku in July 1918 alongside the Caucasian Islamic Army created by order of the Ottoman War Minister Enver Pasha.[\[39\]](#) In his address to the workers of Baku, Shaumian stated that Turkish troops were approaching the city's borders, Bicherakhov retreated to the north, Armenian military units did not want to fight, and the commander of the Soviet troops, Colonel Avetisov, stated that the fate of the city had already been decided and resistance was pointless.[\[40\]](#) In his speeches, Shaumian acknowledged that an armed conflict was inevitable. In his address to all workers and peasants of Transcaucasia, he called for the defense of Soviet power. As a true Bolshevik, Shaumian opposes the British invitation to save

Baku. Regarding the situation at the front, Shaumian states that previously successful operations were carried out in many directions (Kurdemir, Agsu, Garamaryam, Goychay), but it was not possible to take Yevlakh, and the Bolshevik detachments retreated.[\[41\]](#) Shaumian accuses the Dashnaktsutyun party of treason, stating that they refused to protect Baku from the Turkish-Musavat forces due to the lack of military uniforms. Additionally, military leaders Amazasp and Kazarov also refused to support the Bolsheviks. Shaumian accuses the Dashnaks of openly allowing the 160.000 Christians of Baku to be killed. From Shaumian's article it is clear that no one paid attention to the appeal of the Council of People's Commissars of 30 July and the call to protect the city. Although the Dashnaks promised 3.000 troops, on 31 July they announced that they would not fight. Shaumian sharply criticizes the decision of the Menshevik-SR-Dashnak dictatorship to invite the British to Baku and once again accuses the Dashnaktsutyun party of betraying the Soviet government and the interests of the working people.[\[42\]](#)

The day before the capture of Baku by the Caucasian Islamic Army, Stepan Shaumian and other commissars were released from prison. They attempted to escape to Russia but were arrested and killed by local authorities in Krasnovodsk.[\[43\]](#) A few days after the capture of Baku, Rasulzadeh, who was in Istanbul, shared his thoughts about Baku in an interview with a correspondent of the Tarjumani-Hakikat newspaper. These ideas were published in an Azerbaijani newspaper in October 1918 under the title "Discourse on Baku Issues." R. Rasulzadeh discussed the reasons behind the losses of the Armenian population during the capture of Baku, as well as the hostile relations between Azerbaijanis and Armenians. He emphasized that this problem could only be resolved through the independence of Azerbaijan.[\[44\]](#) Rasulzadeh connects the desire of the Bolsheviks of Baku to separate the city from the rest of the country with oil resources and notes that the government of Azerbaijan, aware of the international

importance of oil, is ready to sign relevant agreements for this purpose, but it is not worth separating the head from the body for oil, i.e., separating Baku from Azerbaijan and committing national extermination.[\[45\]](#)

The controversy between Rasolzade and Shaumian reflects the bitter political struggle between these two individuals. The Bolshevik Shaumian linked the future of Russia to the power of workers and peasants within the former borders of the empire. The nationalist Rasolzadeh fought for the existence of independent nation-states based on liberal democratic principles on the territory of a divided empire. The lack of support from the Muslim working class severely limited the Bolsheviks' ability to peacefully establish political power in the region. In March 1918, all the political forces in Baku – Bolsheviks, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, Cadets and Dashnaks – miraculously united into one front and formed an opposition bloc against Musavat. The primary factor contributing to Musavat's political marginalization was its advocacy for national interests. The struggle for independence of this party did not meet the interests of either the Socialist Revolutionaries and Cadets, who wanted to restore the empire, or the Bolsheviks, who wanted to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat. In the confrontation, however, some forces were able to support Musavat rather than the Bolsheviks. For example, the Dashnaks could support Musavat during the March 1918 confrontation; such a possibility existed. But there were at least two serious reasons why the Dashnaks refused to support Musavat. The first was the ethnic conflict in the South Caucasus in 1905-1907 and the tragic events of 1915 on the territory of the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in heavy losses among the Armenian civilians. These events forced the Dashnaks to abandon their alliance with the Turks. Second, the Dashnaks were not confident that the nationalist Musavat would share political power with them if they won, but the Bolshevik internationalists in Baku, led by an ethnic Armenian leader

(Stepan Shaumian), could have been more attentive to the Dashnaks' political ambitions. Most likely, these considerations brought the Bolsheviks and the Dashnaks closer together, albeit temporarily, and set the Musavatists against the Dashnaks, despite their unity of ideas. After the Bolshevik Shaumian nationalized the oil industry, the Dashnaks realized that political union with the Bolsheviks was impossible and abandoned it.

[1] Azərbaycan Respublikası Dövlət Tarix Arxivi (ARDTA), f.894 siy.10, iş 99, v.30.

[2] Раевский А. Н. Большевизм и меньшевизм в Баку в 1904–1905 г. Баку: АзГНИИ, 1930, s.42.

[3] Ibid., 42

[4] A. Göyüşov. Azərbaycanda ittihadçılıq, Bakı, İrşad, 1997, 48 <http://web2.anl.az:81/read/page.php?bibid=27628&pno=26>

[5] Azərbaycan Respublikası Mərkəzi Dövlət Arxivi, f.1775, siy.1, iş 384, v.15

[6] Azərbaycan tarixi. 7 cilddə. 5-ci cild. Bakı: Elm, 2008, 222.

[7] Выборы в Исполнительный Комитет Бакинского Совета. Каспий, 25 октября 1917.

[8] Local workers did not want to join parties dominated by Armenians and Russians, so their numbers in the Bolshevik party were small, they supported the nationalist Musavat party.

[9] M.Ə.Rəsulzadə. Bakı məsələsinə dair mülaqat. Azərbaycan 3 oktyabr 1918.

[10] By a decision of Soviet Russia in November 1918, the treaty was declared null and void.

[11] These territories came under Russian control because the Ottoman Empire was unable to pay a large amount of compensation as a result of the Russo-Ottoman War of 1877-1878.

[12] The Diaries of General Lionel Dunsterville. 1911-1922. 1918.

http://www.gwpda.org/Dunsterville/Dunsterville_1918.html. Retrieved July 29, 2024.

[13] К Крестьянскому населению мусульманских провинций Закавказья. Кавказский Вестник совета народных комиссаров. 31 января 1918 года; Крестьянское восстание в Закавказье. Кавказский Вестник совета народных комиссаров. 31 января 1918 года.

[14] К Крестьянскому населению мусульманских провинций Закавказья. Кавказский Вестник совета народных комиссаров. Кавказский Вестник совета народных комиссаров. 31 января 1918 года.

[15] Village in Shamkhor.

[16] Крестьянское восстание в Закавказье. Кавказский Вестник совета народных комиссаров. 31 января 1918 года

[17] A desyatina is equal to 1.09 hectare.

[18] Выступление гражданина Расул заде в Исполнительном Комитете Бакинского Совета Рабочих, Солдатских и Матросских депутатов. Бакинский рабочий, 21 январь 1918.

[19] M.Ə.Rəsulzadə. Bizim muxtariyyətimiz və Bakı bolşevikləri. Açıq söz, 28 yanvar, 1918.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Rasulzadeh probably refers to the position of Lenin, who was ready to recognize the independence only of the peoples of Finland and Poland, and the aspirations for autonomy of other

peoples were not recognized by him.

[22] С. Шаумян. Ответ гражданину Расул заде. Бакинский рабочий. 17 февраль, 1918.

[23] Shaumian meant the territory of the Ottoman Empire.

[24] С. Шаумян. Ответ гражданину Расул заде. Бакинский рабочий. 17 февраль, 1918.

[25] М.Ə.Рәsulzadə. Əsərləri. V cild. Bakı : Qanun, 2017, 22-23.

[26] Miyukov was a leader of Russian Cadets and minister of External Affairs in the Provisional Government of Russia in 1917.

[27] М.Ə.Рәsulzadə. Əsərləri. V cild. Bakı : Qanun, 2017, 27.

[28] Ibid., .31.

[29] С. Шаумян. Маленькие объяснения. Бакинский рабочий. 16 марта, 1918

[30] Azerbaijani wealthy class, usually landlords.

[31] М.Ə.Рәsulzadə. Əsərləri. V cild. Bakı : Qanun, 2017, 38.

[32] Ibid., 40.

[33] Ibid., 45

[34] Shaumian was referring to the March 1917 coup.

[35] Шаумян С. О политике сейма и положении Закавказья. Известия Бакинского Совета 2 (15) мая 1918 № 105 (327).

[36] Ibid.

[37] Шаумян С. Речь на съезде советов крестьянских депутатов Бакинского уезда. Известия Бакинского Совета. 29 мая 1918 г.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Erickson, Edward J. Order to Die: A History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War. Greenwood press: 2001. p. 189.

[40] It is alleged that Shaumian's appeals, made in August, were secretly distributed in leaflets from prison.

[41] Шаумян С. Воззвание к бакинским рабочим. Известия Бакинского Совета“ № 143 (365). 21 (8) июля 1918 г.

[42] Шаумян С. Статьи и речи. 1917–1918 гг. Баку: Институт истории классовой борьбы в Азербайджане им. С.Шаумяна. 1926, с. 235–236.

[43] Modern-day Turkmanbashi in Turkmenistan.

[44] М.Ə.Рəsulzadə. Bakı məsələsinə dair mülaqat. Azərbaycan 3 oktyabr 1918.

[45] Ibid.