

Representation of Byelorussia in the Third Duma* (1 November 1907 — 9 June 1912)

BY

J. ZAPRUDNIK

The law of 3 June 1907, which made the third Duma 'Russian in spirit', to many in the North-Western Region (today's Byelorussia) came as no surprise. It had been in prospect since the promulgation in December 1905 of the electoral law and was spurred forward by subsequent alarming reports on the results of the election to the first Duma in the North-Western Region: 'In the Russian Western borderland, Russians have been defeated: Poles and Jews have got the upper hand'.¹ The results of the election further confirmed the view of the 'truly Russian people' (*istinnorusskije ljudi*) that something drastic should be done about the law charged with 'insufficiently careful treatment of Russian national interests on our Russian borderlands'.²

Even during the election, in February 1906, a delegation of Old Believers³ of the North-Western gubernijas was received by the Tsar and delivered to him 'prayers' to defend the rights of the Russian people because 'it was obvious to them that no-one of the local Russian people would be allowed to participate directly in activities, either as State Duma deputies, or among the elected representatives in the economic and civic life of the Region'.⁴ Soon another delegation of Orthodox Russians representing the Baltic Region, the Kingdom of Poland, and the North-Western Region followed in the footsteps of the Old Believers with their own 'most faithful address' to the Emperor. The plea called the Tsar's attention to the fact that the electoral law, based on social distinctions and property in the multinational borderlands of Russia, could cause the Russians of these regions to be without representation in the Duma at all. 'From the twelve million Russians of the North-Western Region,' said the delegates in their address, 'it may be that none will be elected to the Duma'.⁵

Indeed, the results of the election and the activity of the North-Western representatives in the first Duma were considered by the 'truly Russian people' as a disastrous defeat. The lesson of the defeat was duly interpreted by the monarchists: 'Now even those who belong to the Party of October 17th, which passes in silence over the borderland question, understand that Russians on the borderlands must be nationalists'.⁶

What Russian monarchists heard from the delegates to the first Duma certainly did not abate their drive to redress the shortcomings of the electoral law. In October 1906 a congress of 'Russian organizations in

* On the first and second Dumas see *JBS*, II, 3, pp. 290-8 and III, 3, pp. 229-43.

the Western Borderland' with delegates from Minsk, Viciebsk, Hrodna, Kovno, Warsaw and the Baltic Region, was held in Vilna. It engendered a new organization, the Russian Borderland Union,⁷ one of whose main objectives was to change the existing electoral law. At the congress itself a 'Note' to the Chairman of the Council of Ministers (Stolypin) was adopted calling the Premier's attention to 'the deep and fundamental omission in the electoral law which... almost completely eliminates the borderland Russian people from legislative activity in their own country'.⁸ The 'Note' warning that 'popular discontent' might take the form of 'disorder, violence, and even pogroms', requested a 'proportional distribution of the established number of deputies among the various national groups'.⁹ A twelve-member delegation went to St Petersburg to talk to Stolypin in person on this matter. One of its members, Shildner-Shuldner, reported to the Viciebsk chapter of the October 17th Union that Stolypin 'listened very attentively to the petition' and, although without giving hope for immediate satisfaction of the petition, said that 'the question of representation of the borderland regions does merit special attention'.¹⁰

The results of the election to the second Duma showed that 'special attention' was given to the Russian needs in the North-Western Region. The election was held in January-February 1907. When Stolypin presented his legislative plans to the second Duma, he called the Government of His Highness 'a staunch and purely Russian Government which it is and will continue to be';¹¹ the deputies from the Russian Borderland Union understood him well, as did Tseretelli, the Social-Democratic deputy from Georgia, who dubbed Stolypin's speech 'the first public expression of the Duma-dissolving Government'.¹²

The election to the third Duma took place in an atmosphere conducive to making the parliament 'Russian in spirit'. The Russian Borderland Union and the Orthodox clergy were especially zealous in defending their rights in 'Western Russia':

'At the crucial provincial level in Grodno, Minsk, Volhynia, Vitebsk, Belystok [and other North-Western cities and towns as well — JZ] peasants were isolated from the rest of society by the police and the clergy and given material and spiritual refreshment prior to performing their sacred public duty'.¹³

The results of that 'spiritual refreshment' in combination with the change of the electoral law, which substantially strengthened the position of the nobility and upper bourgeoisie, was that monarchist and rightist elements gained overwhelming dominance over the third Duma. The Government had two majorities in the new Duma (out of the total of 442 deputies established by the law): a majority of Black Hundred adherents and Octobrists consisting of around 300 deputies and a majority of Octobrists and Cadets of 260-odd deputies, with the Octobrists occupying the central position.¹⁴

No full figures are available for the non-Russian nationalities in the Russianized third Duma. The most complete table for all four Dumas was published in *Russkaja Enciklopedija* which gives the following breakdown of the nationalities:

TABLE 1
MAJOR NATIONALITY GROUPS IN RUSSIA'S STATE DUMAS

Nationalities	First D. 1906	Second D. 1907	Third D. 1907-12	Fourth D. 1912-17
Great Russians	265	331	337*	369
Little Russians (Ukrainians)	62	46	28	10
Byelorussians	12	8	11*	4
Poles	51	46	19*	17
Lithuanians	10	8	5	5
Jews	13	6	2*	3

Source: *Russkaja Enciklopedija*. Edited by S.A. Adrijanov *et al.*, SPB, n.d., VI, the table between pp. 152 and 153.

*According to the official *Obzor dejatel'nosti Gosudarstvennoj Dumy tret'jago sozyva. 1907-1912 gg. Čast' I: Obščije svedenija*, SPB, 1912, p. 8, there were in the third Duma: Great Russians — 377, Byelorussians — 12, Poles — 22, Jews — 4.

In Table 1 we see the decrease by 49 deputies — from 114 to 65 — in the number of deputies who were not Great Russians in the third Duma, as compared with their number in the previous Duma. These figures, however, do not reveal the full political impact of the new electoral law and practise, as the experience of the five North-Western gubernijas shows.

Politically, the election in those gubernijas (the similarities, if any, in other national areas have yet to be studied) resulted in an extremely conservative and nationalistic representation.

The electoral results in the five Byelorussian gubernijas are presented in Table 2. The 36 deputies assigned to the area became 41 in the table since during the five-year term of the third Duma several deputies died and were replaced by new ones, who were all included in the following table:

TABLE 2
DEPUTIES OF THE FIVE BYELORUSSIAN GUBERNIJAS ELECTED
TO THE THIRD DUMA

Nation- ality		Social Status					Education			Party Affiliation			
		Land.	Bour	Peas.	Work.	Cler.	High.	Sec.	Elem.	Prog.	Oct.	Right.	PLB
Byel.	11*	-	1	7	-	3	1	3	7	1	1	9	-
Pol.	6	4	1	-	-	1	5	1	-	-	-	-	6
Russ.	23	7	5	5	-	6	9	9	4	1	2	20	-
Lith.	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	41	11	7	13	-	10	15	13	12	2	3	29	7

Calculated from: *Obzor dejatel'nosti Gosudarstvennoj Dumy tret'jago sozyva. 1907-1912 gg. Čast' I: Obščije svedenija*, SPB, 1912, pp. 2-64; and other sources.

*Actually, there were twelve Byelorussians in the third Duma, one representing the Orenburg gubernija — Mitrofan I. Grodzicki, an Orthodox nobleman with a higher education who joined the Progressivist group in the Duma.

Of the 41 deputies from the five Byelorussian gubernijas, 29 were rightists,¹⁵ or in a few cases moderate-rightists, and 3 were Octobrists. Together they were 78 per cent of the representation of the five gubernijas as compared with 67 per cent representing the 'Black Hundred-Octobrist' bloc among the Duma's total membership.¹⁶ As in the first and second Dumas there were no Social-Democrats among the representatives of the five Byelorussian gubernijas. As in the second Duma, there were no Trudoviks and no Jewish deputies, although over 1,200,000 Jews lived in the area. The Unaffiliated deputies in the first Duma were 8 and in the second 14, all of whom disappeared from the third. The number of deputies of Polish nationality from the five gubernijas was halved. They showed their sensitivity to the conservative mood of the Stolypin era by their more vocal nationalism.

Unlike the second Duma where the Polish deputies of the North-western Region practically became members of the unified Polish Circle, in the third Duma five¹⁷ Polish deputies and one Lithuanian of the five Byelorussian gubernijas formally set up a separate parliamentary group called the Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian group. Although this organizational undertaking appeared to be more than it really was,¹⁹ nevertheless it reflected a certain activation of politically conservative elements among the Polish landlords and gentry in the North-Western gubernijas. Their principal spokesman was Korvin-Milevski, a member of the upper chamber, the State Council, and, according to some, 'the leader of the Polish-Byelorussian Circle'.²⁰

After the dissolution of the second Duma in June 1907, Korvin-Milevski published several booklets attacking Dmowski for his flirtation with the Cadets and Trudoviks. 'Democracy in the *Kresy* [Polish name for Russia's 'Western Region' — *JZ*] means ruin to the Polish Cause', said Michal Tyszkiewicz who agreed with Korvin-Milevski. Korvin-Milevski held that representatives of the Polish nobility in the Western gubernijas should give up their solidarity with the Kingdom of Poland's deputies, assume an independent role, and support Stolypin's policies. M. Wierzchowski asserts that such views 'were shared by many Polish gentry in Byelorussian and Ukrainian territories'.²¹

These views were reflected in the Duma's 66-member agrarian committee, where out of three Polish members two were conservative landlords, Montviłł and Wankowicz, coming from the Vilna gubernija. The Polish newspaper *Ślowo*, commenting on this fact in December 1907, wrote that 'for the Poles the centre of gravity of the agrarian question lies in the *Kresy*'.²²

While there were divisive currents among the Duma's Polish deputies from the Kingdom and the *Kresy*, straining relations among them and appearing to have resulted in the formation of a separate parliamentary group, there was also a powerful cohesive force, the need to defend Polish cultural and religious values, which came under increasing at-

tack from Russian, Lithuanian, Byelorussian, and Ukrainian nationalism in the historic *Kresy*. Stolypin's reactionary course made it painfully obvious that the political autonomy of which the Territorialists dreamt in the first Duma and toward which Roman Dmowski strove in the second Duma was out of reach. The last remaining position that they could realistically defend in the Western gubernijas after 3 June 1907 were the Polish private schools, Polish-language publications, cultural activity, free access to local self-governing institutions, and the Catholic religion, that historic spearhead of Polish nationalism in its eastward drive and westward retreat. These were the real issues in which Polish National Democracy flourished in the North-Western Region, and it was they which secured the fairly smooth collaboration of all the Polish deputies in the third Duma. The existence of the Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian group was even advantageous since it again made the Polish voice in the Western gubernijas more authentic and less vulnerable to charges of Polish expansionism from 'Sea to Sea'.

An insignificant factor in the North-Western Region's representation in the first Duma, as Alexander Lednicki maintained,²³ Dmowski National Democrats became more important as the Region's Russian reactionaries made their demands felt. In the second Duma, the Kingdom's National Democrats even became spokesmen for Polish interests in the Region. Close contacts were also maintained in the third Duma.²⁴

The Kingdom's Polish Circle apparently had to pay a political price for a united front which was its shift to the right to accommodate the conservatism of the Polish landlords from Byelorussia and Lithuania. It was reported that attempts had been made to reach an understanding with the Octobrists which caused some friction within the Circle and between it and the Cadet liberals. 'The Poles are abandoning the revolutionary ship', wrote the monarchist *Kievljanin*.²⁵ Whatever they abandoned, they did not give up the cause of Polish culture which was essential to the survival of Polish nationalism, especially in the *Kresy*.

If the Polish Circle had to move to the right in the sphere of economic programmes to compromise with the conservatism of the Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian group, both Polish factions wholly agreed on the defence of Polish cultural achievements. The battle again was fought along what P.N. Miljukov described as a 'wide strip of borderlands inhabited by Byelorussians and Little Russians' where 'violent' competition between Polish and Russian nationalism had been going on since the 17th century.²⁶

NOTES

1. *Okrainy Rossii* [a weekly, ed. P. Bjalkevič, pub. P. Kulakovskij; hereafter *OR*], 8, 23 April 1906, p. 138.
2. *OR*, 1, 5 March 1906, p. 13.
3. People very strong in their Russian convictions (*OR*, 6, 9 April 1906, p. 100).
4. *OR*, 3, 19 March 1906, p. 43.

5. *ibid.*, p. 42.
6. *OR*, 32, 8 Oct. 1906, p. 528.
7. *OR*, 33, 15 Oct. 1906, p. 548. See also A. Čvikičevič, *Zapadno-russizm*, Minsk, 1929, pp. 301-2.
8. *OR*, 38, 19 Nov. 1906, p. 647.
9. *ibid.*, p. 648.
10. *OR*, 39, 26 Nov. 1906, p. 659.
11. *Gosudarstvennaja Duma. Stenografičeskije otčety. Sozvy II*, I, col. 120, 6 March 1907.
12. *ibid.*
13. A. Levin, *The Reactionary Tradition in the Election Campaign to the Third Duma*, Oklahoma State University Publications, 59, no. 16, June 1962, p. 42.
14. F. I. Kalinyčev, *Gosudarstvennaja Duma v Rossii v dokumentach i materialach*, Moscow, 1957, p. 344.
15. According to M. Wierzchowski (*Sprawy Polski w III i IV Dumie Państwowej*, Warsaw, 1966, p. 32), almost 75% of the third Duma's rightist deputies came from Byelorussian and Ukrainian gubernijas.
16. Kalinyčev (*op. cit.*, p. 344) has the number 442 as the entire Duma's membership established by the law of 3 June 1907, whereas 446 is given by the Cadet publication *Tret'ja Gosudarstvennaja Duma. Materialy dlja ocenki jeja dejatel'nosti*, SPB, 1912, p. x.
17. Table 2 shows the number of Polish deputies to be greater by one; this difference arises because one Polish deputy died in mid-session and was replaced by a new one. Our table indicates the total number of Polish deputies who were sworn in, which was six.
18. See *Priloženja k stenografičeskim otčetam Gosudarstvennoj Dumy. Tretij sozvyv. Seszija I*, SPB, 1908, I, p. 432. Throughout the whole third Duma period the group consisted of seven members; the seventh, Dymša, was a Polish deputy from the Kovno gubernija.
19. Independent activity by the Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian group in the Duma was very limited. During the five-year period, the group submitted only one interpellation (*Obzor dejatel'nosti*, I, p. 192).
20. Zamyslovski in *Stenografičeskije otčety. Sozvy III*, 3, pt 4, cols 2781-2, 29 May 1910.
21. Wierzchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
22. Quoted by Wierzchowski, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
23. W. Lednicki, *Pamiętniki*, II, London, 1967, p. 532.
24. M. Roemer, 'Polaki', *Formy nacional'nago dviženija v sovremennyh gosudarstvach* (ed. A.I. Kasteljanskij), SPB, 1910, p. 374.
Some authors did not even distinguish between the Polish Circle and the Polish-Lithuanian-Byelorussian group. For example, both groups were mentioned as one Polish Circle of 18 deputies (4.1% of the Duma's total membership) by F. Dan *et al.*, eds (*Obščestvennoje dviženije*, SPB, 1911, I, pt 2, p. 146). They were also counted as a single group by the official *Obzor dejatel'nosti*, I, p. 12.
25. Wierzchowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-13.
26. P.N. Miljukov, *Nacional'nyj vopros: proischoždenije nacional'nosti i nacional'nyje voprosy v Rossii*, Prague, 1925, p. 154.