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“... HISTORY WILL WRITE YOUR NAME IN GOLD LETTERS ...”

The place of Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov (Topchubashi) in history is determined primarily by the fact that he played an important role both in the life of the Muslim peoples of the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and in the history of the independent Azerbaijani state in 1918-1920. His multifaceted activities for the benefit of these peoples, especially in the period of the empire still await their comprehensive researcher, but on the basis of what is already known one can get an idea of the wealth of the epistolary, journalistic and scientific legacy he left.

His father, hereditary nobleman Ali Akbar bey Topchubashov (1820-1868), began his career in 1843 as a rider of the Transcaucasian Muslim Cavalry Regiment, and in 1845 he was appointed to the Team of Muslims* of His Imperial Majesty's Convoy - the most elite military unit of the Russian army. Ali Akbar bey participated in the Crimean War of 1853-1856, was awarded for military services and was promoted to lieutenant in 1853 (1). Ali Mardan bey, according to his official biography,

was born in 1863, but for some reason, he celebrated his 60th birthday in 1925 while in exile in Paris (2). This is one of those ambiguities that are present in his biography, as among other major political figures of the time. For example, Stalin was born in 1878, but celebrated his 50th birthday in 1929.

Jafar Topchubashov, uncle of Ali Mardan bey, professor of Turkic and Iranian studies, came from Tiflis to Petersburg in 1811, where he studied, worked and died in 1869 (3). Ali Mardan bey himself, having graduated from the Tiflis grammar school in 1884, enrolled in the Faculty of History and Philology of St. Petersburg University and was transferred to the Faculty of Law a year later. In 1887, he was expelled from the university for membership of a secret student revolutionary organization, but thanks to support from professors he was restored and was able to continue his studies. In 1888, he graduated from the university, and in January 1889 he obtained the diploma of a candidate of law and returned to Tiflis (4). His extraordinary abilities and profound professional



*Alimardan bey Topchubashov in the presidium of the
 Third Congress of Muslims of Russia*

Alimardan bey Topchubashov

knowledge enabled him to quickly move forward both as a specialist and in public activities that began after he moved to Baku, one of the fastest growing industrial centers of the empire.

Soon he is elected to the Baku City Duma, where he immediately becomes known as a lawyer. At the same time, Ali Mardan bey becomes the editor-in-chief of the only Muslim Russian-language newspaper in the Russian Empire – *Kaspi*, which was published in Baku. In autocratic Russia, he took an active part in the social and political life of the Muslim population, whose position, as young Topchubashov was aware, was quite unenviable. Muslims were accused of separatism and were not allowed to participate in all-Russian life. Being a patriot of his people, Topchubashov felt sympathy for other Turkic and Muslim peoples of a huge empire.

Amid growing revolutionary events, on March 15, 1905, a conference of representatives of the Azerbaijani bourgeoisie and intelligentsia was held in Baku, where the need for reforms in the Caucasus and for the submission of a petition to the government was discussed. To deliver it, it was deemed advisable to send to St. Petersburg a deputation of Muslims of the Caucasus, who comprised almost two thirds of the region's population. The petition compiled by Topchubashov was sent to the Committee of Ministers in April 1905. It set out restrictions on the rights of Muslims in social and economic life: the number of Muslim deputies in the city municipal governments of the region could not exceed half of the total membership; they were not allowed to hold senior positions in all institutions of the civil and military departments; Muslims with both secondary and higher education were restricted in the choice of free professions, suspended from teaching, Muslim students could not use state scholarships and not admitted to a number of higher educational institutions; in some places, Muslims could not acquire immovable property, engage in trade, etc. The petition also raised the issue of the participation of Muslims in all institutions of a representative nature and the right to hold posts in the public service and public arena. Significant prominence was given to the justification of the need to introduce zemstvo institutions in the Caucasus on the basis of full self-government and without the interference of administrative authorities, and to the participation of Muslims in the zemstvo and municipal government without any restrictions (5). The petition contained a number



of democratic demands - the extension to Muslims of freedom of conscience, speech and the press (in Russian and in their own languages), freedom of assembly and association, inviolability of the individual and home, etc. The petition advocated the equation of Muslims in general civil property rights with the Russians, permission to hold public and state offices (6).

On June 10, 1905, the governor of the Caucasus, Count Vorontsov-Dashkov, received in Tiflis a group of representatives (among them Topchubashov) of the Muslim population of the Yelizavetpol and Baku provinces and the Borchali district of the Tiflis province, as well as Dagestan and Batumi regions. Recognizing the wishes set out in the petition as quite fair, the governor promised to pay special attention to the opening of schools in the native language, the creation of a women's educational institution and a Muslim religious educational institution, and also to promote the publication of newspapers, magazines and books in the native language (7).

The Azerbaijani liberal intelligentsia headed by Topchubashov sought to establish close contacts with the Muslim population of the rest of the empire, hoping to achieve great results in the struggle for its goals by creating a unified political party (8). In the summer of 1905, the main task of the Muslim community was to



Alimardan bey Topchubashov among the deputies of the Second Congress of Muslims of Russia

prepare the congress of the Muslims of the empire, at which it was planned to discuss such issues as defining the tasks and organization of the party, measures to raise the level of public education and culture of the Muslim population, compiling a note on its legal and economic needs and so on.

Topchubashov took an active part in the work of the congress held in Nizhny Novgorod in mid-August 1905. The Congress laid the foundation for the consolidation of Russian Islam into an independent political force. After a tumultuous debate, Topchubashov's program was adopted, which clearly set out the most important Muslim demands aimed at achieving religious and cultural autonomy. Representatives of various Muslim peoples returned from the congress, embraced by great hopes and faith in a better future. It was decided to continue the process of integrating the various Muslim communities into a single organization. The work on convening the second congress was entrusted to Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov.

On January 13-23, 1906, the Second General (All-Russian) Muslim Congress was held in St. Petersburg, attended by about 100 delegates. Topchubashov presided over several meetings. The congress adopted a charter calling on the Muslims of the empire to unite in one political party - the Union of Russian Muslims. In the first paragraph of the statute, all the provinces populated by Muslims were subdivided into 16 districts. In fact, a plan of cultural-national autonomy of the Muslim population of the empire was put forward. The charter and the program were prepared by Topchubashov, who published a brochure entitled "The Program of the Union of Russian Muslims" in Petersburg in 1906, and a brochure with the charter was printed on March 8, 1906, in the same place under the title "Charter of the Union of Russian Muslims".

The elections to the First State Duma, held in early

1906, meant that a representative system of legislative power was being established for the first time in Russia. These elections stirred up the Muslim population - their dream to have their representatives in the legislative bodies of the state came true. In the First Duma, which opened in late April of the same year, there were 25 Muslim deputies from different regions. Topchubashov was elected a deputy from the Baku province, from the list of the party of left-wing cadets. At the first meeting of the Duma on June 21, 1906, a separate Muslim faction headed by Topchubashov was formed. In terms of size, this faction was one of the most significant and was so active and so masterfully guided that alarmed Russian public opinion pushed the government to weaken Muslim influence in Russian parliamentary life. Some prominent Russian politicians even had the impression that the Muslims had become a political entity threatening the unity of the empire. Such irritation in St. Petersburg circles was caused by the participation of some Muslim Duma members in the work of the "parliamentary group of the Union of Autonomists" formed in the Duma, which unified deputies from several non-Russian peoples. Muslim representatives were among the organizers of this union, and Topchubashov was a member of the bureau of the Union of Autonomists. It follows that Topchubashov's political ideal was a federal structure for the Russian Empire with independent representative institutions in certain areas, including in the Caucasus.

On July 8, 1906, the Duma was dissolved, and on July 10 in St. Petersburg, the last meeting of members of the Muslim faction took place together with 40 representatives of St. Petersburg Muslims. The meeting, chaired by Topchubashov, discussed the dissolution of the Duma and decided to convene a regular congress of the Muslims of the empire. Meanwhile, the cadets asked the deputies to meet in Vyborg in order to jointly develop measures to resist the arbitrariness of the authorities. About one-third of the Duma deputies gathered there and adopted an appeal to the people to speak out in defense of the Duma, but using only passive means - refusal to pay taxes, evading conscription, etc. The authorities conducted an investigation into who signed this appeal, after which in December 1906 five Muslim Duma members were sentenced to three months' imprisonment. Among them was Topchubashov, who was

Alimardan bey Topchubashov among the deputies of the Fourth Congress of Muslims of Russia

removed from the Baku City Duma for this act. Topchubashov served three months in St. Petersburg's famous Kresty prison in 1908.

On August 16-21, 1906, the Third Universal Muslim Congress was held in Nizhny Novgorod. Approximately 800 delegates arrived at the congress, because this time the organizers were able to get permission from the authorities to hold a congress on condition that they would not consider political issues. They discussed problems which, according to the Muslim community, were supposed to promote the unity of all Muslims in the country. The congress elected the central committee of the "Union of Russian Muslims" from 15 members. At the end of the congress, the Central Committee gathered to form its presidium and develop a plan of work. Topchubashov was elected chairman of the Central Committee; Tatar Y. Akchurin and Kazakh S.G. Djantyurin were elected secretaries. By the decision of the Central Committee, a permanent Muslim bureau of three persons (chairman Topchubashov, Tatar members A. Ibragimov and F. Karimov) was formed in St. Petersburg to assist the work of the Muslim faction of the Second Duma. This bureau effectively worked with the Muslim factions in the Second and Third Dumas, composing oral and written reports, collecting materials, drafting

documents for inclusion in various Duma commissions, drafting speeches, etc.

All this, and first of all the influence of European democracy on Muslims provoked irritation in Russian political circles. The leader of the Russian nationalists, V. M. Purishkevich, declared in the State Duma on April 30, 1908 that some deputies spoke from its rostrum after "gathering" ideas in Paris and "brought separatist speeches here..." (9). In other words, for speaking out in defense of the civil rights of the Muslim population and in defense of their identity, Muslim Duma members were directly accused of aspirations against the state.

The real reason for discontent with the authorities among the Muslim population was the domestic policy of the state. Being a profound analyst, Topchubashov believed in the possibility of reforming Muslim religious institutions, which would undoubtedly greatly improve the social and political conditions of the lives of millions of Muslims and thereby actually contribute to the stabilization of the regime, but the latter did not welcome such a reform, committing another serious political error.

Due to tireless and systematic work on Muslim education, Topchubashov gained great popularity in the Muslim regions of the empire, as the following example shows. On May 2, 1908, the newspaper Terjuman



Members of the Azerbaijani delegation in Paris. From left to right: Maharram Maharramov, Miryagub Mehdiyev, Alimardan bey Topchubashov

celebrated its 25th anniversary in Bakhchisaray. By two o'clock in the afternoon, several hundred local Muslims, including about a hundred women, as well as representatives of the Russian, Greek, Jewish, Karaim populations and guests from St. Petersburg, Kazan, Yevpatoria, Kerch, Yalta and other places gathered for a prayer. During the prayer, the imam called for a prayer for the health and well-being of Ali Mardan bey Topchubashov. Thousands of voices chanted "Yashasunlar!" (10). Topchubashov, who was just over 40 at the time, was one of the Muslim leaders who earned the sincere respect of millions of co-religionists throughout the empire.

Being undoubtedly the most European-educated among the Muslim intellectuals of the time, Topchubashov became the soul of the national-cultural movement of the multi-million Muslim population of the empire. He belonged to that very rare type of intellectuals who can be called creators. One of letters to him in 1908 says: "History will write your name in gold letters ..." (11). Recalling these years, Topchubashov noted that he was not a revolutionary, but served the welfare of the Muslims of Russia, and especially of the Caucasus as far as he could (12).

Topchubashov was the actual chairman of both the plenary sessions and all the commissions of the next general Muslim congress held in St. Petersburg on June 15-25, 1914. In 10 days of almost continuous work, the participants prepared drafts for submission to the State

Duma: 1) Regulations on the management of the spiritual affairs of Muslims of the Russian Empire, 2) charts of spiritual institutions, 3) about the mekteb and madrasah, 4) the organization of the Muslim parish, 5) the district courts of the Turkestan spiritual government, 6) the main provisions of the transformation of spiritual institutions (13).

These plans were upset by the World War I, which began in August 1914. Until 1917, no changes were made to the imperial legislation regarding the Muslim population. At the time of the fall of the monarchy, Topchubashov was the most prominent Azerbaijani politician in the political elite of the country, at the same time, being one of the leaders of the general Muslim movement. The socio-political worldview of Muslims was not taken into account by the Russian authorities, "and this was the fatal error of the Russians, who made us an unhappy backward people, while Allah did not deprive us of natural abilities and love of work," Topchubashov told the former tsarist foreign minister, S. D. Sazonov, in 1919 (14).

In 1917, the Russian Empire collapsed, and on May 28, 1918, the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, one of the founders of which was Ali Mardan Topchubashov, was proclaimed.

Topchubashov devoted almost half of his life - 30 years - to the struggle for the interests of the Turkic-Muslim peoples of Eurasia, warmly embraced their problems and with all his inherent energy served his coreligionists with his vast knowledge and extensive experience. His name always enjoyed great respect among the Muslim population. Topchubashov left a rich and diverse heritage. He was not only a successful politician and a far-sighted statesman with an analytical view of the world, but also an original thinker and philosopher. The publication of the collection of Topchubashov's works, which will include his diverse intellectual heritage, is the most important task of the historians of Azerbaijan. In this direction, the first steps have been taken - documents and letters from the Topchubashov's archive, which is kept in Paris and Baku, have been published. Topchubashov's personal documents, which were discovered and returned to the homeland by the famous Azerbaijani diplomat Ramiz Abutalibov, are kept in the Baku archives.

Badge of a deputy of the Azerbaijani parliament which belonged to Alimardan bey Topchubashov. NMHA



Topchubashov's reputation as a person, politician and statesman has remained impeccable for almost 100 years - a perfect model for contemporary politicians to emulate. 🌟

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* The team of Muslims of His Imperial Majesty's Convoys was a military unit (platoon) formed from Azerbaijani servicemen of the Transcaucasian Muslim Cavalry Regiment and existed in St. Petersburg in 1839-1882.

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Tombstone of Alimardan bey Topchubashov at the Saint Cloud cemetery in Paris

