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LENIN AND THE FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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The Bolsheviks won the Civil War because they proved themselves superior to their opponents in two crucial areas of struggle: organization and propaganda. The embodiment of Bolshevik principles of organization was the Party. It brought a unity of purpose to the revolutionaries and it enabled them to build a rudimentary form of administrative structure, which, in turn, helped them to overcome the forces of anarchy. The Party was also a crucially important instrument in spreading the revolutionary idea. Both contemporaries and historians, friendly and hostile, have given credit to the Bolsheviks for their propaganda skills. Indeed, an appreciation of the significance of winning over the uncommitted marked all aspects of their activities: Lenin's government framed its decrees as propaganda tools; it organized institutions, such as the youth movement (Komsomol) which helped in mass mobilization; it sent thousands of agitators into the villages; it used conventional means, such as the press, and unconventional ones, such as sending agitational trains and boats into remote areas.

The Bolsheviks were fortunate that their past as revolutionaries helped them to develop precisely those weapons which proved crucial in the conditions of the Civil War. As Leninists they understood the significance of organization and discipline and as revolutionaries they saw as one of their major tasks the development of programs and the attractive presentation of those programs. The only serious opponents of the Bolsheviks were the army officers, and how different their background was! They had learned to despise politics and therefore they did not understand the essentially political nature of the Civil War, but perceived it as a series of military encounters in which their task was to command and the duty of the Russian people was to obey.

The undoubted superiority of the Bolsheviks in matters of propaganda does not, of course, mean that they were better in each and every respect. Let us examine in this article only one instrument, the press. This is a crucially important subject, not only because of its inherent significance, but also

because the Soviet press, as we know it today, developed remarkably early. Those who want to understand the peculiar character of Soviet newspapers must begin their study with the earliest days of the regime. Further, the history of the Soviet press is tantamount to a history of censorship, and an examination of that subject will give us revealing glimpses of the attitude of the Soviet leaders at the moment of their victory toward freedom.

-1-

Revolutionaries were also journalists; much of their activity consisted of writing articles, and editing and distributing small newspapers. V.I. Lenin stood out among his colleagues in his unusually clear understanding of what newspapers could accomplish and therefore in his more self-conscious use of the press. In his writings he gave an impressive analysis of the role of the newspaper in the revolutionary movement. As always, he was most insightful and clear-sighted when dealing with the problems of organization. In a short but important article, published in 1901 "Where to Begin?" he argued that the most important immediate task of the socialists was to establish a national newspaper. In the process of putting the paper together the party would develop. He also wrote that the work of carrying out propaganda was an instrument of propaganda itself. His insight that propaganda and organization are opposite sides of the same coin, established a major principle of Bolshevik policy-making even after the Revolution.

Soviet publicists made Lenin's sentence famous by quoting it endlessly: "The newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer." Lenin went on to explain:

> The mere technical task of regularly supplying a newspaper with copy and of promoting regular distribution will necessitate a network of local agents of the united party, who will maintain constant contact with one another, know the general state of affairs, get accustomed to performing regularly their detailed functions in the all-Russian work and test their strength in the organization of various revolutionary actions.[1]

In his major and seminal work, published in 1902, What Is To Be Done?, Lenin returned to the same theme. It is characteristic of the down-to-earth quality of his thinking that in this study, in which he stated the theoretical premises of Bolshevik ideology, he devoted an extraordinary amount of space to the mundane questions of organizing a single newspaper. His arguments served an immediate purpose: he wanted to strengthen the position of the Iskra group, publishers of the first Marxist national newspaper, within the socialist movement. Iskra, among whose six editors Lenin was one, indeed played a crucial role in directing nascent Russian social democracy.

Throughout his life Lenin continued to pay great attention to journalism. He wrote articles for the obscure papers which his faction published in exile. When, after 1905, tsarist censorship relaxed to such an extent that it was possible to print Bolshevik papers in Russia, Lenin followed their editorial policy from exile with great care. The most important of the Bolshevik papers was Pravda, which came out in Petrograd between 1912 and 1914. In the course of these two years Lenin published 265 articles in it.[2] When he settled in Cracow and the Austrian police questioned him about his profession, he could answer not untruthfully that he was a "correspondent of the Russian democratic paper, Pravda."[3]

In spite of Lenin's remarkable energy and talent, however, it would be a mistake to imagine that the pre-revolutionary Bolshevik press was fundamentally different from the press of the other revolutionaries. All revolutionaries operated in the same environment: they had to battle the censor, they constantly needed money and they tirelessly and tediously polemicized against one another. Comparing the main Menshevik paper between 1912-1914, the daily Luch, with a circulation of 9,000-12,000, and Pravda, which had a somewhat larger circulation, one is struck by the similarities in style and content.[4]

The February Revolution was a turning point in the history of the Bolshevik press: since all censorship was temporarily abolished, for the first time the

socialist newspapers had to compete with old, established and well financed papers for a mass audience. In perspective it is hard to evaluate how well the Bolsheviks did in this competition. On the one hand it is evident that support for the Party's position grew by leaps and bounds. In the course of a few months Party membership more than quadrupled, and, even more importantly, the Leninist position which had only small support among the workers at the time of the collapse of the Romanov monarchy, by November acquired the support of the majority of the workers in the two capitals and a powerful following among the soldiers of the enormously large Russian army. That the Bolsheviks were skilled propagandists and that their newspapers made a contribution to the spreading of their message is self-evident. On the other hand it is far from clear that the Bolsheviks can be credited or blamed for the collapse of the Provisional government. It seems more plausible that the Bolsheviks simply benefited from the weakness of their opponents. On the basis of painful experiences of war and revolution, a crucial segment of the Russian people came to hold opinions which the Bolsheviks had already propounded. The Leninists did not disorganize the army nor did they make the peasants rebellious; but they were ready to take advantage of both these developments. A close examination of the history of the press in 1917 suggests that the Bolshevik newspapers were not superior to other socialist and non-socialist papers. Their victory came in spite of the fact that the bourgeois press continued to dominate the medium.

The Bolshevik press, and the socialist press as a whole, grew impressively. The first issue of Pravda appeared already on March 5th, and it was soon followed by a large number of provincial papers of which the one published in Moscow, Sotsial-Democrat was the most important. Later the Party also published papers specifically for peasant and soldier audiences.

However, this achievement must be placed in context. In the course of 1917 the combined circulation of Bolshevik papers probably never surpassed 600,000.[5] This was much smaller than the circulation of non-socialist papers: popular

papers such as Kopeika or Malenkaia gazeta each had large circulations. Lenin estimated that in the summer of 1917 the combined circulation of all socialist papers was less than a quarter of all newspapers printed, and of course, the Bolshevik press was in a greatly disadvantaged position even as compared to the papers of the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks.[6] Non-socialist politicians had an immensely easier time communicating their positions. Their papers were financially strong and had a loyal readership acquired through the years.

The Bolsheviks could not compete for journalistic talent. The major Kadet paper, Rech' or other dailies such as Novoe vremia or Birzhevye vedomosti were clearly better written and had broader coverage of events. Although the Bolsheviks did not disdain demagogy in their papers, neither did their opponents. For example, at one point, the Bolsheviks accused Kerenskii of wanting to hand over Petrograd to the enemy in order to rid the country of the revolutionary center. The anti-Bolsheviks, in turn, charged Lenin with being a German agent.

But the attack on the Bolsheviks was not limited to a press campaign. Following the disturbances of the July days, a detachment of Cossacks destroyed the editorial offices of Pravda. The paper could reopen only some weeks later, under a different title. Further, it is clear that army authorities did everything within their power to prevent the circulation of anti-war propaganda, i.e. Bolshevik papers, within the Army. The military postal service, for example, frequently confiscated papers sent through the mail.[7]

The Soviet press came into being in an historically unprecedented situation: it was created and protected by a one-party revolutionary state. This fact essentially determined its character. It is understandable that the Bolshevik papers, once relieved of the pressure of competition, developed characteristics which were unique at the time. The decisive development was the immediate suppression of the free press.

Ideologically Lenin was prepared for such a move. It is not that he had advocated censorship before. The Bolsheviks, as a revolutionary underground party, had to battle censorship and it was natural that in their writings the revolutionaries should denounce tsarism for the limitations on the freedom of the press. Nor did Lenin advocate the institution of censorship after the victory of the socialist revolution. Neither Lenin nor anyone else envisaged the circumstances in which the Bolsheviks would emerge victorious. The revolutionaries assumed that the revolution would be carried out by the great majority of the people and, consequently, the question of repression would not even arise. However, Lenin was never a liberal. He placed little value on "formal" freedoms, such as the freedom of the press, and it was clear from his writings and actions that he would not hesitate to take steps, however brutal, when the success of his movement was at stake.

In retrospect, the first warning signal was contained in What Is To Be Done? After his famous denunciation of spontaneity Lenin wrote:

> Since there can be no talk of an independent ideology formulated by the working masses themselves in the process of their movement, the only choice is--either bourgeois or socialist ideology. There is no middle course (for mankind has not created a "third" ideology, and, moreover, in a society torn by class antagonisms there can never be a non-class or an above-class ideology). Hence, to belittle socialist ideology in any way, to turn aside from it in the slightest degree means to strengthen bourgeois ideology. There is much talk of spontaneity. But the spontaneous development of the working class movement leads to its subordination to bourgeois ideology . . .

A few paragraphs later Lenin went on:

> But why, the reader will ask, does the spontaneous movement, the movement along the line of least resistance, lead to the dominance of bourgeois ideology? For the simple reason that bourgeois ideology being far older in origin than socialist ideology, is more fully developed and has at its disposal immeasurably more means of dissemination.[8]

It is a peculiar notion that bourgeois ideology is more effective because it is older and it is somewhat surprising to find Lenin, the defender of Marxist orthodoxy, arguing that socialism was insufficiently developed, but he was unquestionably correct in maintaining that the bourgeoisie possessed far better means for spreading its ideas. Lenin would return to this point again and again,

and it ultimately came to be a justification for censorship. However, the main significance of these passages is in showing that even in this early period Lenin did not accept the principle that one fights ideas with ideas and that he did not trust the workers to arrive at "correct" conclusions if two sides of an ideological issue were presented. It would be an exaggeration to say that these statements from What Is To Be Done? implied approval of censorship, but they are certainly consistent with Lenin's attacks on the freedom of the press two decades later.

It was during the 1905 revolution that Lenin first explicitly discussed the question of the freedom of the press. In his article, "Party Organization and Party Literature" he argued that literature should be party literature, and that the literature of the proletariat should be under the control of the organization of the workers, i.e. the Russian Social Democratic Workers Party. Literature should be an instrument in the class struggle.[9] To those who objected that such a development would result in control of creativity he responded with two arguments: First, while individuals have the right to say anything they desire, organizations have the right to exclude those who do not agree with their fundamental principles; second, talk about absolute freedom of the press is hypocracy, since in bourgeois society the writer depends on those who finance him.

In 1905 Lenin did notforesee that his party soon would be in a position to suppress the opposition. He was preparing for a period when the workers would struggle against the bourgeoisie and only begin to organize for a socialist revolution. Under the circumstances suppressing non-socialist papers was not an issue, because it was not a realistic possibility. Once again, however, Lenin made it clear how little regard he had for the "bourgeois" notion of free expression. Most disconcertingly, in this article he failed to draw a distinction between literature and journalism. Present advocates of artistic freedom in the Soviet Union cannot find much encouragement in it.

The February Revolution made freedom of the press a practical issue. The Bolsheviks supported the efforts of the Petrograd Soviet to close down reactionary-monarchist papers. Lenin had only scorn for the March 10 decision of the Soviet which reversed itself and allowed papers to appear without previous permission.

The traumatic events in Petrograd in early July and the new opportunities presented by the failure of the Kornilov mutiny changed Lenin's tactics in the revolutionary struggle in general and his attitude to the press in particular. In his article, "How to Assure the Success of the Constituent Assembly?" published on September 15th, he wrote:

> The capitalists (and many SRs and Mensheviks following them either through misunderstanding or inertia) call freedom of the press that situation in which censorship is abolished and all parties freely publish any paper they please. In reality this is not freedom of the press, but freedom for the rich, for the bourgeoisie to mislead the oppressed and exploited masses.[10]

Lenin proposed to remedy this situation by suggesting that the Soviet would declare a monopoly on printing advertisements. This move would undermine the financial strength of the bourgeois press and help the socialists. Then he went further. He realized that in the short run what mattered most was the availability of paper and printing facilities. Therefore he proposed the expropriation of all paper and printing presses and their distribution according to the political strength of the parties in the two capitals.

Simultaneously, in another article, Lenin advocated closing down the major bourgeois papers such as Rech' and Russkoe slovo.[11] He did not make it clear how the two sets of suggestions could be reconciled. After all, the Kadets did have substantial voting strength in Petrograd and Moscow.

Throughout the years, Lenin was remarkably consistent concerning the freedom of the press. It is true that in the fall of 1917 he did not renew his call for party-mindedness as developed in his 1905 article. But the reason was not a newly found liberalism. His article, "How to Assure the Success of the Constituent

Assembly?" was addressed to the socialists in the Petrograd Soviet. It is unlikely that he expected them to adopt his ideas, but he certainly hoped to score debating points. On the other hand, in September 1917 Lenin did not yet envisage a one party regime in which only a single voice could be heard. Had his recommendation been followed the Russian people could have heard a multiplicity of views. This was, of course, not the policy which the Bolsheviks followed after they seized power.

On October 25th the Bolsheviks struck, seizing the Winter Palace, the ministries, the post and telegraph buildings and at the same time the printing presses of Russkaia volia. The next day the Military Revolutionary Committee (MRC) issued a resolution, temporarily forbidding the publication of bourgeois papers and counterrevolutionary publications.[12]

It is not necessary to search for ideological reasons for preventing the publication of hostile declarations and manifestos. It is perfectly understandable that during the period of transition extraordinary measures had to be taken. Another and far more important question was what attitude the new authorities would take toward freedom of expression once their rule was established.

On October 27th the Council of Commissars (Sovnarkom) published its decree on the press.[13] This decree, after repeating Lenin's views on the bourgeois notion of the free press, gave Sovnarkom the right to close down newspapers which advocated resistance to the new authorities or attempted to "sow disorder by the publication of clearly slanderous misstatements of facts." The last paragraph asserted that the decree was temporary and after the return of normal order, complete freedom of the press would be assured.

A few days later, on November 4th, an important debate irrupted in the Executive Committee of the Soviet (CEC) concerning the decree. The issue was even more profound than freedom of the press. It was what kind of regime would follow the revolution? At the time it was unclear that the exclusively Bolshevik Council of Commissars could retain power, or the Bolsheviks would accept a compromise and bring the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks into the government. The

majority of the supporters of the October revolution hoped for a socialist coalition. It was demanded in forceful terms by the Union of railroad workers, who possessed considerable power through their ability to call a strike. The idea of coalition was obviously attractive to an important segment of the Bolshevik leadership. The issue of coalition and the issue of freedom of the press became intertwined. Obviously it was not possible to attempt to suppress the publications of the moderate socialists and while at the same time trying to induce them to participate in the government. It seems fitting that the first crucial and bitter debate which took place within the Soviet leadership concerned free expression.

The Central Executive Committee of the Congress of Soviets had 67 Bolshevik, 29 Left SR and 20 other socialist members.[14] When the Sovnarkom issued its decree on the press, the CEC did not object. The revolutionaries understood that the exceptional circumstances necessitated exceptional measures. Ten days later, however, when the issue was thoroughly discussed, circumstances had changed. The dispute which took place was remarkable not because of the profundity of the views expressed but because the two points of view, both expressed with great passion, represented real and irreconcilable differences in the vision of the coming socialist order.

B.F. Malkin, a Left SR and the editor of Izvestiia said:

> We firmly repudiate the notion that socialism can be introduced by armed force. In our view socialism is a struggle not merely for material advantages but for supreme human moral values. The revolution's appeal lies in the fact that we are striving not just to fill our hungry bellies, but for a higher truth, the liberation of the individual. We shall win not by closing down bourgeois newspapers but because our programme and tactics express the interests of the broad toiling masses, because we can build up a solid coalition of soldiers, workers and peasants.[15]

Later, in the heat of the debate he responded to an opponent: "You are dishonouring the socialist movement by depriving it of its moral force."[16]

V.A. Karelin, another Left SR argued in terms of political expediency. In his opinion suppression of views would only make those more attractive. Prominent Bolsheviks, such as Iu. Larin and D.B. Riazanov also spoke up in the defense of

freedom of expression.

The Leninists, by contrast, were willing to subordinate all values to the immediate interests of the revolution. In their position one can sense a certain ambivalence. They defended suppression by pointing to immediate and presumably temporary needs, but at the same time they made it clear that in any case they had little regard for "formal" notions of freedom.

V.A. Avanesov said:

> We defend the freedom of the press, but this concept must be divorced from old petty-bourgeois or bourgeois notions of liberty. If the new government has had the strength to abolish private landed property, thereby infringing the rights of the landlords, it would be ridiculous for Soviet power to stand up for antiquated notions about liberty of the press.

His resolution included these sentences:

> The restoration of so-called "freedom of the press" i.e. the return of the printing press to the capitalists, poisoners of the people's consciousness, would be an impermissable capitulation to the will of capital, a surrender of one of the most important strong points of the workers' and peasants' revolution, and thus indubitably counterrevolutionary.[17]

Lenin based his argument both on expediency and on principles. He put it picturesquely: "If we want to progress toward social revolution, we cannot allow the addition of lies to the bombs of Kaledin."[18] He went so far as to say that allowing "bourgeois" papers to exist was the same as ceasing to be socialists.

The Leninist position prevailed. Avanesov's resolution was adopted by a vote of 34 to 24 with one abstention.[19] It was at this point that people's commissars V. Nogin, A. Rykov, V. Miliutin and I. Teodorovich resigned.[20]

The November 4th meeting of the CEC was a turning point in the history of the Revolution. One can well imagine that had Lenin's opponents possessed more political acumen the outcome of the vote would have been different. The concept of the future, inherent in the thinking of the defenders of the freedom of expression, was obviously profoundly different from Lenin's ideas. On the other hand the likelihood is that if the revolutionaries had repudiated Leninist methods, the regime would not have lasted very long. The events which took place between

February and October 1917 proved that Russia could not be administered in accordance with liberal principles. Those who refused to learn this lesson were condemned to defeat. Lenin, after all, was correct: the new regime could not tolerate freedom of criticism nor could it repudiate terrorist methods.

The adoption of Avanesov's resolution did not immediately result in Bolshevik monopoly of the press. First of all, the Leninists did not yet desire such a monopoly. It was one thing to advocate suppression of forces hostile to the revolution and quite another to claim that there could be only one correct interpretation of all political events. Time had to pass before the Bolsheviks came to this view. But even if the Bolsheviks did secretly desire such a monopoly, it was good politics to proceed gradually. Prematurely frightening the uncommitted might have had dangerous consequences. But most importantly, the Bolsheviks lacked the means to suppress all enemies, real and potential. The control of the new regime over the workers of Moscow and Petrograd was weak, and control over the rest of the enormous country was minimal. As a consequence, the first eight months of the Bolshevik regime represented a twilight period for the Russian press. It was a period in which liberal and socialist journalists tried to defend themselves by rallying public support and by attempting to circumvent the regulations of the new authorities. Meanwhile, the Bolsheviks were making increasingly successful efforts to impose order on the country and to undermine the strength of their enemies; only when they considered themselves strong enough did they carry out frontal attacks.

The Bolsheviks' first obstacle was the Menshevik dominated printers' Union. The printers' opposition to the press decree surfaced even before the CEC debate. On November 1st the Union notified the MRC that if the press decree was not rescinded, "the Union would use all available means for pressure" i.e. it would strike.[21] On November 6th a meeting of Union representatives passed a resolution (171 to 69) which made the threat explicit.[22] The MRC was forced to engage in discussions with the printers in which the arguments used at the CEC meeting were repeated. The

printers proved themselves to be just as eloquent defenders of freedom as the socialist politicians. However, the position of the printers was seriously weakened by the fact that the Bolsheviks controlled a large enough minority to shatter solidarity in case of a strike. At a time of extremely high unemployment the Bolsheviks were able to prevent a strike.

As in all other aspects of national life, great confusion prevailed in the regime's policy toward the press during the first weeks following the October take-over. The MRC or the Sovnarkom frequently closed down newspapers which then simply changed their names and continued to appear. Rech', for example, appeared under five different titles in the course of a few weeks and the SR paper, Volia naroda had six different titles.[23] The Bolsheviks arrested editors and journalists, but almost all of them were freed within a few days. Furthermore, the situation varied a great deal from city to city. In Moscow, for example, repression was far less severe than in Petrograd.[44] The Moscow MRC went on record in support of free expression exactly when in Petrograd the CEC reaffirmed Lenin's position. The decree issued on November 6th forbade only the printing of proclamations calling for armed struggle against Soviet power, but allowed all papers to publish.[24] Indeed, moderate socialist publications continued to appear in Moscow relatively undisturbed until March 1918, when the government moved to that city. In the rest of the country the situation varied depending on the views and power of the leading local Bolsheviks. In the first few months hundreds of newspapers were closed down in provincial cities.

During the transition period the Bolsheviks often did not feel strong enough to carry out frontal attacks and therefore turned to indirect means. In the early days of the regime they confiscated the presses of such major papers as Rech, Novoe vremia, Birzhevye vedomosti, Zhivoe slovo and Kopeika.[25] These presses were taken over by Soviet publications. The confiscation of the printing facilities was, of course, a heavy blow to the "bourgeois" papers. They were forced to find smaller presses and contract their work. The newspapers which managed to survive did so with greatly reduced circulations.

The worst problem of all the newspapers was a shortage of paper. Publications tried to protect themselves by hiding their paper supplies. Already on October 26 the MRC ordered a complete inventory of paper[26] and a few days later forbade the removal of paper from Petrograd.[27] However, in the confusion it was relatively easy to disobey the MRC; indeed, it was necessary to do so in order to stay in business. But when the Bolsheviks did succeed in confiscating the scarce material, it was often tantamount to closing down a hostile newspaper.

As compared to the confiscation of presses, paper and newsprint, the regulation which outlawed the printing of advertisements was only a petty harassment. Lenin first presented this idea in September 1917 and clung to it with a lack of realism which was uncharacteristic of the great revolutionary leader.[28] On his initiative the Sovnarkom passed a regulation on November 15th according to which only government publications would be allowed to print advertisements after November 22, 1917.[29] The newspapers resisted and the Socialist press which, by and large, had not carried advertisements, started to do so as a solidarity gesture. A.I. Minkin, the Commissar for press affairs, who foresaw the difficulties, asked and was assigned a hundred sailors from the MRC to overcome resistance.[30] In many localities the local Soviets failed to take any steps to carry out this particular decree.

After the end of the Civil War Lenin himself admitted that outlawing advertisements had been a mistake.[31] It created a great deal of resistance and focused hostility toward the Soviet regime, while at the same time exhibiting the powerlessness of the new government. Worst of all, the damage inflicted by this regulation on the bourgeois press was trivial: with the economy of the nation in ruins, advertisements were no longer an important source of financial strength.

During the first months of the regime, Soviet policy toward hostile journalism was inconsistent. The authorities closed down newspapers for small violations of vague and sweeping laws while allowing others to print truly subversive material. In order to bring some order into the confused situation, the Commissariat of Justice on December 18th decided to set up revolutionary tribunals for press matters.

I.Z. Shteinberg, the Commissar of Justice and a Left SR, (the Left SRs had joined the government as junior partners in mid-November) issued regulations for the operation of these tribunals which appeared much too lenient to the Bolsheviks. They circumvented this leniency by using the Cheka, which, of course, remained safely in Bolshevik hands. The jurisdictional struggle which irrupted between the Commissariat and the Cheka was resolved by the Sovnarkom in favor of the Cheka.[32] In the Sovnarkom the Bolsheviks had a firm majority. Legal and extra-legal repression became ever harsher.

The signing of the Brest-Litovsk treaty caused great dissension, the withdrawal of the Left SRs from the government--and a new series of repressive measures. But the final attack on the non-Bolshevik press occurred only in June-August 1918. After that time in Soviet Russia only one point of view could be expressed in the newspapers. Why did Bolshevik tolerance come to an end at this particular moment?

To some extent the Leninists simply responded to the moves of their opponents. The abortive Left SR rising in early July finished all possible hopes for cooperating with other socialists. During the late spring and early summer of 1918 the Civil War in the east and in the south assumed ever more serious proportions. Red terror and White terror obviously reinforced one another.

It would be naive, however, to regard the Bolsheviks as merely reactive and to see the repressive regime which emerged from the revolution as entirely the result of the bitterness of the Civil War. The existence of the Red regime was threatened more seriously during the first half of 1918 than during the second. In the first months of that year the regime was almost destroyed by sheer anarchy; by the inability of the Bolsheviks to feed the cities and make the state machinery function. In the second half of 1918 Bolshevik rule became more repressive at least partly because now the Bolsheviks had more strength to suppress. The final closing down of all liberal and socialist newspapers in the middle of 1918 was a natural step in the process of ever increasing repression.

What kind of press did the Bolsheviks create in an environment in which their monopoly was assured? There was general agreement among the revolutionaries who concerned themselves with journalism that the press functioned poorly and could not carry out its assigned tasks. Observers criticized the content and format of the press and also recognized its technical poverty. Worst of all, from the point of view of the Soviet leadership, the circulation remained low.

Immediately after the November Revolution the Bolsheviks enjoyed the fruits of victory. They confiscated the paper supply, machinery and buildings of the "bourgeois" papers as spoils of war. On October 27 Pravda took over the presses of Novoe vremia. On the same day MRC of Petrograd gave the presses of Den' to Derevenskaia bednota and those of Rech' to Soldatskaia pravda.[33] According to a Soviet historian the Bolsheviks had confiscated 30 presses by the end of 1917, 70 by July 1918 and 90 by the end of that year.[34] The Soviet press was based on these confiscated goods. As a result, in the course of 1918, the Bolsheviks managed to increase the circulation of their papers ten fold.

The most difficult problem continued to be a lack of paper and newsprint. In 1914 the Russian Empire produced 33 million puds of paper, but in 1920, the worst year, Soviet Russia produced only 2 million. The paper shortage in 1920 was so great that the Sovnarkom was willing to use its precious supply of foreign currency and buy 400,000 puds from Estonia.[35] The paper which was available was poor in quality, often hardly better than wrapping paper. The situation was almost as bad in matters of newsprint, the quality of which was so poor that on occasion entire columns were completely unreadable.

The shortage of paper inevitably resulted in a fall of circulation. Many papers closed down, the publication schedule of others became erratic, and such major papers as Pravda and Izvestiia appeared during the second half of the Civil War in editions of only two pages. Izvestiia had the largest circulation in 1919, appearing in 300,000 to 400,000 copies depending on the availability of paper. The average

figure for Pravda was 130,000.[36] Such popular papers as Krasnaia gazeta, published in Petrograd as an evening daily, had so little paper that it did not accept individual subscriptions, preferring to send their copies to institutions where they had larger readership.[37]

The newspapers also suffered from a lack of trained personnel. The Menshevik dominated printers' Union continued to be hostile. There was a great need for typesetters and for people capable of operating the machinery. As a result the appearance of the newspapers was poor. Trotskii addressed a gathering of printers with these words:

> Comrade printers, our printing technique is terrible. Whole series are so blurred that you cannot make out a single line. The number of misprints, jumbled lines are innumerable. To the person who for ten years has become accustomed to reading papers and understands a phrase from two words, it is difficult, often times impossible, to decipher the idea of our newspaper articles. Under the circumstances, how much more difficult it is for the young Red Army soldiers, often semi-literate?[38]

Looking at issues of Pravda, Izvestiia and Petrogradskaia pravda, just to mention the best papers of the time, one is struck by the dullness of format. The Bolsheviks had learned nothing of the techniques of the yellow press. The central papers did possess means to reproduce drawings and caricatures, but photographs never appeared.

Distribution was a major problem. The postal service did not function adequately, and at least during the beginning stages of the conflict, it was in the hands of non-socialist workers. Since postal workers often refused to deliver Bolshevik newspapers, these had to be sent surreptitiously in parcels and practically smuggled here and there by travelling soldiers and activists, just as before the October Revolution. Local party organizations constantly complained that newspapers and other propaganda material did not arrive from the center. Pravda, for example, wrote on October 27, 1918, that the Vitebsk party committee had received only two or three copies of Izvestiia per month.[39] In 1957 Soviet historians published the correspondence between the Secretariat of the Party's Central Committee and local party organizations in 1917 and 1918. Complaints about the unavailability of newspapers in the villages

is a constant refrain in the letters.[40]

Another difficulty in the development of the press was the lack of qualified journalists. The Soviet regime faced the problem of not having enough trained people in almost every area of reconstruction, but the shortage of journalists was an especially difficult problem. The regime could hardly entrust to potential enemies the sensitive matter of conveying its point of view. The task did not attract party activists. Newly converted, but uneducated soldiers and workers were capable of carrying out oral agitation among workers and peasants, but they, of course, could not write effectively. Among the top leaders, journalism did not have much prestige as work on the front, in industry or in administration. Lenin had to admonish his colleagues repeatedly to write more often for the newspapers. Naturally, in the provinces skilled and reliable journalists were even more scarce and as a result the state of local journalism was indeed pitiful.

Since every army unit and local soviet wanted to have its own paper, even though they were incapable of publishing effective propaganda, there was a great proliferation of publications. At the end of the Civil War there were more periodicals printed in Russia than there had been in peacetime. Soviet historians today use these figures to show how quickly the press developed, but at the time the leaders well understood that a few strong papers would have been more beneficial than many weak ones, and they regarded proliferation both as a sign and a cause of weakness.

The Party, wisely, stressed the need to improve agitation among the peasantry. This policy was used to justify claims for paper on the part of local organizations. However, it was one thing to publish a newspaper and another to carry out successful agitation. The provincial papers failed to make contact with village life. By and large they reprinted articles from Pravda and Izvestiia and filled their pages with the texts of laws and regulations. Without village correspondents their information on village life came from hearsay. They appeared irregularly and their "original" articles were even duller than the ones they copied from the central press. At the same time a large share of the central papers was sent outside of the main centers.

In 1920, for example, out of 350,000 copies of Izvestiia, 279,000 were sent out of Moscow; of the 250,000 copies of Pravda only 41,000 remained in the capital. Bednota, aimed at the poor peasants, was distributed almost entirely in the villages.[41]

The Red Army was politically a most powerful organization. During the second half of the Civil War when the number of civilian papers declined for lack of resources, the military press continued to expand. At the end of 1918 there were 90 newspapers published by various military units and in the course of 1919 their number grew to 170.[42] For the army distribution was, of course, no problem and the investment in indoctrination definitely paid off.

Agitation among the soldiers was a relatively easy task compared to creating a network of newspapers for the entire country. Journalists and party leaders alike were aware of the technical and ideological weaknesses of the press and discussed these problems repeatedly. L.S. Sosnovskii, editor of Pravda, reported to the 8th Party Congress (March, 1919) on the situation of the press. He talked about the confusion in the provinces concerning the financing of newspapers. He complained about the ideological unreliability and lack of education of provincial editors and journalists.[43] Then he submitted a set of resolutions which the congress accepted. This was the first:

> The general weakening of party work at the time of the civil war badly damaged our party and soviet press. A general weakness of almost all party and soviet publications is a remoteness from local and often from general political life. The provincial party and soviet press almost completely ignores local life and chooses its material on general issues extremely unsuccessfully. They print long, uninteresting articles instead of responding with short, simply written articles to the main issues of national and local life. On occasion entire pages are filled with decrees, instead of explaining in a simple and understandable language the most important points of the decree. Newspapers print rules and regulations of different offices and departments instead of making from this material a lively chronicle of local life.[44]

The resolution blamed the failures of the press on the fact that most experienced party leaders paid too little attention to newspapers. In view of the importance of propaganda, the Congress directed local party organizations to assign their most experienced and talented people to press work. It assigned the task of supervising the local press and commenting on questions of party construction to the central press. The task of local papers was exclusively to appeal to a mass audience, to discuss their

problems in a simple language. That the resolution had little effect can be seen from the fact that the 11th Congress in 1922 found it necessary to repeat all the main points.

Two congresses of journalists at the time of the Civil War, in November 1917 and in May 1919, also looked for ways to improve the work. The deliberations show that the Soviet press was still in a formative stage and that the journalists held a variety of opinions on how best to shape its character.

The first congress was addressed by such major figues of Bolshevism as Kamenev, Radek, Lunacharskii and Kollontai.[45] All speakers agreed that the press should pay more attention to life in the villages and factories. There was, however, an interesting disagreement over the question of audience. Sosnovskii argued that all papers should be written for simple people, but the resolution of the congress spoke of "leading" papers and "mass" papers. In fact, however, the intellectual level of such "leading" papers as Pravda and Izvestiia was not appreciably higher than that of the local papers, even if those in the capitals were more professionally produced.

The journalists devoted considerable attention to the organizational aspect of their work. A resolution called for the establishment of a Central Council of Journalists (Tsentrosoviet) which would not only protect the professional interests of journalists, but would also be responsible for such matters as distribution of paper and information. Nothing came of these plans. Tsentrosoviet was an organization of little influence which within a few months ceased to exist. The Party was not about to give control over crucial matters to an outside authority; the journalists were simply disregarded. The political-ideological orientation of newspapers and appointing leading cadres continued to be the responsibility of the Central Committee of the Party; distribution of paper, newsprint and machines was handled by the Central Economic Council (VSNKh) and the Sovnarkom set up the Russian Telegraph Agency (Rosta) for distribution of information.

The mood and character of the second congress of journalists in May 1919 was altogether different.[46] The organizers understood that in the developing system there

was to be no such profession as journalism, but simply a party function for publishing newspapers. The press would have no other task than to spread and advertise the policies and decisions of the Party. But the Party did not support even such a modest conception. The newly elected Central Committee of journalists soon fell apart when the Party sent its members to different parts of the country. The party had no interest in supporting even the slightest degree of professional independence of journalists; it wanted no mediators between its policies and the publicizing of these policies.

The years of the Civil War were the formative period of the Soviet press. The Bolsheviks repudiated the principles governing the "bourgeois" press but they did not have clear ideas on the kind of newspapers which would be appropriate in the new age. There were no models to follow and many questions. What subject matters should the communist press emphasize? What should be the style? On what level should the journalists address their leaders? Lenin made a major contribution to the discussions in an article in Pravda in September, 1918.

"About the Character of Our Newspapers" began with the practical statement that it was necessary to write simply and concisely for the masses. Lenin recommended that in order to be effective,journalists should deal with concrete situations. But he went much further. He argued that Soviet newspapers should devote less attention to politics.

> Instead of 200-400 lines, why don't we talk in 20-10 (sic) about such matters as the treachery of the Mensheviks, who are the lackeys of the bourgeoisie, or such as the Anglo-Japanese attack for the sake of reestablishing the sacred rule of capital, or such as how the American billionaires gnash their teeth about Germany. These matters are simply well-known and to a considerable extent already well understood by the masses.[47]

What should the press write about then? In Lenin's opinion more attention should be given to economics. He did not have in mind, however, the discussion of such issues as war communism, the effects of outlawing free trade in grain, or the consequences of workers' control of the factories. He wanted detailed reports of which factories did their work well and which ones did not; how successes were achieved; and, above all, he wanted to unmask the guilty--those who did not do their work. They were class enemies. The press should be an instrument of the dictatorship of the proletariat exposing those who through poor work in fact helped the enemy. These were the last lines of the article:

> Less political noise. Less intelligent-like discussions. Closer to life. More attention to how the masses of workers and peasants in fact build something new in their every day work. More documentation of just how communist this new is.

Lenin was implying that there was no point in discussing the political and economic issues of the day, for those had been decided. It is significant that this article was written exactly at the time when the last vestiges of a critical, non-Bolshevik press had disappeared. There remained no one to polemicize against. Politics as a conflict of opinion, as a presentation of alternatives no longer existed. The public sphere of discussion was drastically narrowed and remained so for decades.

It would be naive to think that the Soviet press developed as it did because editors followed the advise of the founder of the system. But Lenin's article was prophetic. Today's Pravda would please him: the journalists admonish workers to do their job well, they single out specific factories for praise or blame and they most certainly waste no space on "intelligent-like" discussion of large political issues in terms of alternatives."

This brief report of the early history of the Soviet press shows that the evidence does not support claims for a decisively important role of the press in the battle for public opinion. The peasantry was still largely illiterate and the printed word was not the most suitable instrument for winning them over. Furthermore, the Bolsheviks faced insuperable technical difficulties: there was a chronic shortage of paper and the communication system barely functioned. Nor can it be said that the Bolsheviks were particularly innovative in this field. Journalism was a rather insignificant side-line for the most able leaders. Bolshevik superiority over their enemies in using the press for propaganda had a single cause: they were much more methodical in suppressing opposition. It is not, of course, that the generals were the followers of John Stuart Mills, deeply committed to free expression. However, they were 19th century men and had a much more naive understanding of the role of ideas. They were content to suppress overt opposition, while allowing the expression of heterogeneous view. For example, under Denikin's rule Trade unionists, Mensheviks, and Socialist Revolutionaries more or less freely published their newspapers. The Bolsheviks, by contrast, represented the wave of the fu[illegible]

1. V.I. Lenin, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii.5th ed. Moscow, 1967-70, Vol. 5, pp. 11-12.

2. Russkaia periodicheskaia pechat', (1895- Okt. 1917) Sbornik Moscow, 1957, p. 199.

3. S.A. Andronov, Bol'shevistskaia pechat' v trekh revoliutsiiakh. Moscow, 1978, p. 138.

4. Russkaia periodicheskaia pechat'. p. 195.

5. Kh. M. Astrakhan and I.S. Sazonov, "Sozdanie massovoi bol'shevistskoi pechati v 1917 godu," Voprosy istorii, 1957, No. 1, p. 98.

6. Lenin, PSS. Vol. 34, pp. 209-210.

7. V.P. Budnikov, Bol'shevistskaia partiinaia pechat' v 1917 godu. Kharkov, 1959, p. 106.

8. Lenin, PSS. Vol. 5, pp. 39-41

9. Ibid, Vol. 12, p. 101.

10. Ibid, Vol. 34, pp. 208-212.

11. Ibid, Vol. 34, pp. 236-237.

12. A.Z. Okorokov, Oktiabr' i krakh russkoi burzhuaznoi pressy. Moscow, 1970, p. 168.

13. Pravda. October 28, 1917.

14. L. Schapiro, The Origin of Communist Autocracy. 2nd Edition, London, 1977, p. 69.

15. John Keep, ed., The Debate on Soviet Power. Minutes of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of Soviets. Second Convocation., October 1917-January 1918. Oxford, 1979, p. 75.

16. Ibid. p. 76.

17. Ibid. p. 70.

18. Unfortunately this crucial sentence is mistranslated in Keep. In his version: "If we are moving toward social (ist) revolution, we cannot reply to Kaledin's bombs with bombs of falsehood." p. 75. See Lenin, PSS. Vol. 35, p. 54.

19. Keep, p. 76.

20. Ibid. p. 78. D. Riazanov, N. Derbyshev, Commissar of press affairs, I. Arbuzov, Commissar of state printing works, K. Iurenev, Commissar of Red Guards, G. Fedorov, head of the labor conflict department in the Commissariat of Labor, Iu. Larin also associated themselves with Nogin statement and resigned. A. Shliapnikov expressed his agreement without resigning.

21. Petrogradskii Voenno-Revoliutsionnii Komitet. Dokumenty i materialy. Moscow, 1966-67, 3 volumes, Vol. 1, p. 530. See also discussion in Okorokov, p. 193.

22. Ibid. pp. 144-146.

23. A.A. Goncharov, "Bor'ba sovetskoi vlasti s kontrrevoliutionnoi burzhuaznoi i melkoburzhuaznoi pechatiu (25 Okt. - iul 1918 g.)" Vestnik MGU Zhurnalistika, 1969, No. 4, p. 16.

24. Okorkov, p. 271.

25. Goncharov, p. 14.

26. PVRK Documents. Vol. 1, p. 130.

27. Okorokov. p. 212.

28. Lenin, PSS. Vol. 34, pp. 208-213.

29. Okorokov, pp. 222-229.

30. PVRK Documents. Vol 3, p. 232.

31. Lenin, PSS. Vol. 44, p. 200.

32. Okorokov, pp. 251-255.

33. PVRK. Vol. 1, pp. 162-163.

34. Okorokov, p. 325.

35. N. Meshcheriakov, "O rabote gosudarstvennogo izdatel'stva," Pechat' i Revoliutsiia 1921, No. 1, p. 9.

36. D. Lebedev, Shest' let moskovskoi pechati 1917-1923. Moscow, 1924, p. 22 and p. 27.

37. C.S. Sampson "The Formative Years of the Soviet Press: An Institutional History 1917-1924," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Mass., 1970, p. 126.

38. L. Trotskii, Sochineniia. Vol 21, p. 243. Also in Sampson, p. 96.

39. Pravda, October 27, 1918.

40. Perepiska sekreteriata Ts.K. RSDRP(b) s mestnymi organizatsiiami Noiabr' 1917g fevral' 1918g. Moscow, 1957.

41. Lebedev, p. 79.

42. A. Berezhnoi, K istorii partiino-sovetskoi pechati. Leningrad, 1956, p. 6 note.

43. Vosmoi s'ezd RKP(b) Mart 1919 goda Protokoly. Moscow, 1959, pp. 295-296.

44. Ibid. pp. 436-437.

45. A detailed description of the conferences and its resolutions can be found in I.V. Vardin (Mgeladze), Sovetskaia pechat'. Sbornik statei. Moscow, 1924, pp. 126-13

46. Ibid. pp. 130-132.

47. Lenin, PSS. Vol. 37, pp. 89-91.