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IS THERE CENSORSHIP IN THE SOVIET UNION?  
METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF STUDYING SOVIET CENSORSHIP

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A Russian language version of this paper was previously published in *Kontinent*, no. 42, 1984. A Glossary of unfamiliar terms regarding censorship in the Soviet Union can be found at the end of this study.



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Censorship, as is generally known, was abolished in Russia after the 1917 revolution. Yet by 1922, the Bolsheviks had officially reintroduced censorship for all printed materials and all forms of entertainment through the creation of Glavlit, the Main Administration for Literature and Publishing, which was under the authority of Narkompros, the People's Commissariat of Education. Glavlit was joined in the following year by Glavrepertkom, the Main Repertory Commission.

In early 1921, Anatoly Lunacharsky, Commissar of Narkompros, produced a lengthy article entitled "Freedom of the Book and the Revolution" in which he justified the need for censorship in a worker-peasant state. "The second condition," he wrote, "identical for all areas of art, including literature, is the struggle itself, and it has become impossible to allow freedom, especially freedom of expression. Words are weapons, and just as the revolutionary authorities cannot permit just anyone to possess revolvers and machine guns, for anyone is frequently a dire enemy, neither can the state permit freedom of printed propaganda. Old wives' tales to the effect that the revolutionaries seek freedom of the word when the authorities do not grant it and then themselves take it away are really narrow-minded nonsense.... Censorship? What a terrible word! But for us the words cannon, bayonet, prison, and even state are no less terrible.... This goes for censorship too. Yes, we are not in the least frightened by the need to censor even belletristic literature, for under its banner, under its belletristic exterior, may be embedded poison for the still naive and dark soul of the masses, ready at any moment to toss and throw off the hand leading them through the desert to the promised land because of too many tribulations along

the way."<sup>1</sup>

For many years, the "liberal" Lunacharsky program, presented here so frankly, determined the existence and growth of an apparatus for the control of all cultural life in the Soviet state. A fear of freedom of expression--of any appearance of intellectual freedom--was and remains the cornerstone of the cultural policy of communists leaders from Lenin to Andropov.

In the 1920s, censorship was on the whole still relatively liberal. This was due in part to organizational confusion, duplication, and frequently the open insubordination of local authorities to central ones. The censors of this period were skilled writers and critics. For example, the cinema section of Glavrepertkom was headed by Pavel Blyakhin, a long-time communist and author of the scenario *Red Imps*. Public censorship also existed to some degree. Glavrepertkom put out a special bulletin listing approved and banned films and plays for the years 1926-1928 in which censors specified lower age limits for each production and critics published reviews explaining the reasons why some of them had been banned.<sup>2</sup> In the late 1920s, censorship in the Soviet Union was structured as follows.

**Narkompros RSFSR**

People's Commissariat of Education  
of the Russian Soviet Federated  
Socialist Republic (RSFSR)

**Glavlitprosvet**

Main Political Education Center  
of the Narkompros RSFSR  
(1920-1930)

**Glavlit**

Main Administration  
for the Protection of State  
Secrets in the Press  
(from 1922)

## Glaviskusstvo

Main Administration of Art  
(from 1928)

## Glavrepertkom

Main Repertory Administration  
(from 1923)

Until the formation of Glaviskusstvo in 1928, Glavrepertkom was subordinate both to Glavpolitprosvet and to Glavlit. Glaviskusstvo was created as the first step toward the decentralization of censorship. Glavrepertkom was doubly subordinate to both Glavlit and Glaviskusstvo. This principle continued to direct the development of the functions of state control. Central control was established in the guberniya as Gublits; local control was established in uyezd as Uono; and Glavrepertkom created its own vertical structure of local "political controllers."<sup>3</sup> In accord with a general trend toward the consolidation of state control over all areas of life during the 1930s, the character of censorship became more strict and tended to avoid publicity. The last documents on censorship to be published in the USSR were the collections *Current Legislation on the Press* (1931) and *The Cinema and Photography Industry* (1936).<sup>4</sup> After this, there were no further publications on the topic.

Western scholars and Soviet emigre newspapers occasionally publish studies of censorship in the USSR. In general, one must agree with the statement published in 1968 in the emigre journal *Posev* that "Glavlit has a large number of censors. But the general structure of Glavlit is unknown. No information on this is given anywhere. State secret."<sup>5</sup> In recent years, censorship in the USSR has been discussed in several politically oriented books of a general nature and a number of articles published in *Posev*, *Novyi Zhurnal* (*New Review*), *Problems of Communism*, *Index on Censorship*, and other

journals. The only book devoted specifically to this topic is *The Soviet Censorship*, edited by Martin Dewhurst. Published in 1973, this work contains the notes of a round-table discussion held in London in 1969<sup>6</sup> covering Soviet censorship from the 1950s to the mid-1960s. The participants in this discussion, who included Arkady Belinkov, Anatoly Kuznetsov, Yuri Demin, Leonid Finkelstein, Michael Goldstein, Max Hayward, and Leopold Labedz, discussed a broad range of issues related to the censorship of literature, cinema, theater, music, and other materials.

Another important publication worth our attention is Professor Merle Fainsod's *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule*.<sup>7</sup> This monograph analyzes the so-called "Smolensk archives" of party and state documents that fell into the hands of the Germans and after World War II turned up in the American Army Record Center.<sup>8</sup> Among these documents are materials from the Smolensk regional administration for censorship. However, Fainsod's book spends little time on the problem of censorship, and the documents concerning censorship are analyzed only cursorily. The same may be said of his article "Censorship in the USSR."<sup>9</sup> The Smolensk archives contain the only original and complete collection of Soviet censorship documents available in the West, and although they are nearly 50 years out-of-date, the need to study them more carefully is self-evident.

Problems of censorship in the scientific arena during the 1950s and 1960s are considered in two books by Leonid Vladimirov (Finkelstein).<sup>10</sup> Another recent publication worth mentioning is Paul Lendvai's *The Bureaucracy of the Truth*.<sup>11</sup> Lendvai tells the entertaining story of Andrei Sokolov, deputy chief



of the second division of Glavlit, who was in charge of censoring foreign publications entering the USSR. Instead of destroying these according to orders, he sold them on the black market and by so doing was able to lead a life that was luxurious by Soviet standards. The author makes use of samizdat material relating to Sokolov's secret trial. A chapter on Soviet censorship can be found in the collection *Press Control Around the World* (1982),<sup>12</sup> and a fair amount of material on Soviet censorship is available in periodicals such as *Index on Censorship*, published in London and edited by Michael Scammell from 1972-80.<sup>13</sup> Though my purpose is not to present a comprehensive bibliography, it should be noted that the list of relevant books and articles on Soviet censorship would not be very long. Relatively little has been written on the subject.

An interesting and promising direction for study might be the comparative analysis of Soviet censorship and the methods by which censorship operates in East Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.<sup>14</sup> In 1977, the Cracow censor Tomasz Strzizewski defected, and in the same year the London publishing house Annex came out with a two-volume edition called *The Black Book of Polish Censorship*.<sup>15</sup> These volumes contain unique materials and documents that include the complete *Book of Records and Recommendations* referred to in the USSR as the "compendium" or the "Talmud."

Although the structure of Polish censorship and its administrative functions differ from the Soviet pattern (in Poland, censorship is centralized and the Main Administration of the Press, Publications, and Entertainment includes an independent military division and a division of cinema, theater,

radio and television), they have much in common, especially as regards methods of operation and jurisdiction over documentation. Clearly, the Polish censorship apparatus has benefited from the experience of its "big brother."

An official bulletin "S" is issued by the Main Customs Administration of the Polish People's Republic and contains a compendium of banned publications. It specifically names 488 newspapers and journals published in the West and banned for import, along with the names of 23 publishing houses. The list is divided into several groups--"strict control," "especially strict control," etc. There is no doubt that a similar bulletin is used by Soviet customs authorities or that it contains many more titles than its Polish counterpart.

Several important facts on the functioning of censorship in socialist states can be gleaned from a discussion of the role of censorship printed in the Polish press in 1980 and 1981. It is no accident that Solidarity listed the removal of censorship as third among the 21 demands and first among the political demands it addressed to the Polish government. Solidarity called on the authorities "To respect freedom of expression and publication, as upheld by the Constitution of People's Poland, and to take no measures against independent publication, as well as to grant access to the mass media to representatives of all religions." In addition, the government agreed that it would submit a proposal to the Sejm (the Polish parliament) within three months for a new law on control of the press, publications, and other public manifestations that would include a guarantee of the right to lodge a complaint against censorship authorities in a special court; it would also

give the press and ordinary citizens access to official documents of public importance and require press, radio, and television networks to allow the expression of differing ideas and opinions.<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting that the Polish communist party fought vigorously against this particular demand of the Gdansk agreement. The law on censorship was not passed until August 1981 and it differed significantly in content from Solidarity's original demands.

### **The Contemporary Structure of Soviet Censorship**

For approximately three decades after the Russian revolution, the structure of censorship in the USSR remained basically unchanged. It consisted of Glavlit and Glavrepertkom, and was based on the same forms of organization as in tsarist Russia.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1950s and early 1960s, however, the organizational structure of Soviet censorship underwent fundamental changes because of the influence of a variety of factors such as decentralization, the appearance of new means of mass communication, the expansion of the film industry, and the rise or revival of several scientific disciplines. A division of military censorship was created under Glavlit, and a department of film and television censorship came into existence under Glavrepertkom. Atomic (nuclear) and space censorship organizations were also created.

The current structure of the censorship apparatus of the USSR can be seen on the following page. (Oversight organizations are indented.) Glavlit, the Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press, is under the Council of Ministers of the USSR. Glavlit is the head organization re-

## The Organizational Structure of Censorship in the USSR

### 1.) Glavlit

Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press

Council of Ministers of the USSR  
Secretary of Propaganda  
Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the CPSU  
Committee for State Security (KGB)

Republic Glavlits  
Krailit (territorial)  
Oblit (provincial)  
Gorlit (municipal)  
Railit (regional)

### 2.) Glavrepertkom

Main Repertory Administration

Ministry of Culture

### 3.) Division for Control of Film Repertory

Main Administration of Film Exhibition and Distribution (Goskino)

### 4.) Repertory Control of Television and Radio

Gosteleradio

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### 5.) Military Censorship

General Staff of the Ministry of Defense

### 6.) Atomic Censorship

Committee on Atomic Energy of the Council of Ministers of the USSR

### 7.) Space Censorship

Commission for Research on and Exploration of Cosmic Space of the  
Academy of Sciences of the USSR

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#### Also consulted:

Committee for State Security (KGB)  
Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD)  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs  
Central Committee of the Komsomol (CC VLKSM)  
Ministry of Defense  
Ministry of Education

sponsible for the control of all materials published in the USSR, and it maintains a branching network of local divisions down to the regional level. According to unofficial data, it employs approximately 70,000 censors.

Glavlit is responsible for the overall leadership of the entire system of censorship, in particular for methodological guidance in the publication of compendia, special bulletins, and direct orders to censors and other personnel responsible ideological workers. Glavlit is subordinate both to the Secretary of Propaganda and the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).<sup>18</sup> It also has close ties with the KGB, and one of its deputy chiefs must be a KGB general. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Central Committee of the Comsomol (CC VLKSM), the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Education are also consulted.

Little direct information is available on the administrative structure of Glavlit, but indirect evidence suggests that it approximates the following.

- 1.) Administration Chief and two or three deputy chiefs
- 2.) Secretariat
- 3.) Division for the Press and Agencies
  - a.) press section
  - b.) agency section
- 4.) Division for Books and Journals
  - a.) section for scientific and technical literature
  - b.) section for sociopolitical literature

- c.) section for belletristic literature
- 5.) Coordinating Division (coordinates the activity of the different departments of censorship)
- 6.) Methodology Division (prepares all documentation, compendia, orders, etc.)
- 7.) Division for Monitoring the Execution of Central Directives
- 8.) Personnel Division
- 9.) Financial Division
- 10.) Legal Division
- 11.) Library
- 12.) Archives
- 13.) Technical Services<sup>19</sup>

Of course, it is entirely possible that there are other divisions--for example, a special division in charge of censorship of subordinate divisions at the republic, provincial, municipal, and regional levels.

An analysis of Glavlit's work is complicated by a lack of documentation. Western scholars have access only to an oral description of the "Talmud" and how it is utilized by Soviet censors. This makes a careful study of the materials in the "Smolensk Archive" all the more relevant. It is clear that every document at our disposal should be analyzed in detail.

One example of such a document is an order from Glavlit that is reproduced on the following page. It orders all libraries and bookstores to remove six collections of short stories by the author A. L. L'vov and supplies full

Для служебного пользования

экз. №

003458 \*



ГЛАВНОЕ УПРАВЛЕНИЕ  
ПО ОХРАНЕ ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫХ ТАЙН В ПЕЧАТИ  
при Совете Министров СССР

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**П Р И К А З**

5 октября 1979 года

№ 58-дсп

Москва

Об изъятии из библиотек  
и книготорговой сети книг  
Львова А. Л.

Изъять из библиотек общего пользования и книготорговой сети следующие книги Львова А. Л.:

Большое солнце Одессы. Рассказы. М., „Советский писатель“, 1968. 273 с. 15 000 экз.

Бульвар Целагантус. Повести и рассказы. М., „Молодая гвардия“, 1967. 174 с. 65 000 экз.

В Одессе лето. Рассказы. Одесса, „Маяк“, 1970. 365 с. 15 000 экз.

Две смерти Цезаре Рассолимо. Прерванный процесс. Улица Франсуа Вийона. Повести. Одесса, „Маяк“, 1969. 261 с. 30 000 экз.

Крах патента. Рассказы. Одесса, „Маяк“, 1966. 221 с. 15 000 экз.

Скажи себе кто ты. Рассказы. Одесса, „Маяк“, 1972. 254 с. 15 000 экз.

Начальник Главного  
управления

П. К. Романов

З. 102 дсп

bibliographical data for all six works. This relatively recent document is signed by P. Romanov, who worked for almost 25 years as head of Glavlit.<sup>20</sup> It is copy number 003458 of the total printing. Thus, since this copy was intended for a Moscow organization, it can be assumed that approximately five to six thousand copies were required for Moscow's ideological organizations, the press, libraries, and bookstores. Theoretically, a total of 999,999 copies could have been printed judging from the six-digit copy number.

It should be noted that L'vov's books were to be removed only from general circulation. In other words, they are to be left in central and restricted libraries. Interestingly, this order was issued several years after L'vov had emigrated. One might suppose that the Methodology Division had prepared its order on the basis of data obtained by the KGB or the Department of Propaganda of the Central Committee of the CPSU.

Signed by the head of Glavlit, such an order is distributed according to a special list. For libraries and bookstores, this signals the beginning of immediate action. This is especially hard on librarians, who must collect all existing copies of the books listed in a very short time, including those currently in the possession of borrowers. All the books are destroyed by a special act signed in the presence of several witnesses. In its executive function, the censorship system depends on the assistance of the administrative organs of the MVD.

The work of newspaper censors is known to be guided by different principles from that of book and journal censors. Newspaper censors usually



sit in printing-house reading columns until an entire newspaper issue has accumulated. Large book and journal publishing houses have their own censors who read a specific group of journals as well as other printed material subject to censorship (such as dissertations and business cards).

The next most important censorship organization is Glavrepertkom, the Main Repertory Administration of the USSR Ministry of Culture. Glavrepertkom has charge of the theater, circuses, concerts, phonograph records, musical productions intended for general performance, and all works of art. It maintains a highly branching structure of local divisions and inspectors. For example, a group of inspectors is assigned to the Aprelev Phonograph Record Factory. Such inspectors are a part of all provincial and municipal administrations and cultural divisions.

In contrast to Glavlit, Glavrepertkom is not limited to only approving or banning certain works. It is also empowered with major monitoring functions. It is not enough to proscribe or pass a play, circus, or show; each must be constantly monitored to ensure that it stays within the prescribed mold. For this reason, the inspectors who have a permanent position in all theater companies attend public performances of plays, circuses, variety shows, and musical performances to ensure constant control.

As mentioned above, Glavrepertkom, like other departmental censorship systems, is subordinate to Glavlit. But in view of its direct departmental subordination, Glavrepertkom works closely with other administrations of the Ministry of Culture of the USSR, the RSFSR, and other Soviet republics. Its

activities are characterized by a relatively high degree of decentralization. Local theaters are under the control of local censorship organizations, and Moscow interferes only in controversial and complex cases.

In contrast to the activities of Glavrepertkom, cinema censorship is highly centralized, which is only natural in view of its proscriptive function. The Division for Control of Film Repertory is administratively subordinate to Goskino, the Main Administration for Film Exhibition and Distribution. Absolutely all films are censored by this division located in the Mosfilm studio in Moscow.

A basic document of Soviet censorship is the "certificate of permission" that accompanies films at every state of their screen life, from the printing of copies to their showing in movie theaters. The example reproduced on the following page gives permission for the one-minute commercial "For Women and Children" to be shown in movie theaters and on television. Cinema censorship involves a branching network of provincial and local inspectors who are in charge of film showings and the elimination of banned films.

Television and radio censorship is under the control of Gosteleradio. Every television and radio studio has its own censors. Of course, all of the main programs that are broadcast by central radio and television networks are censored in Moscow. This is a departmental form of censorship that combines local and centralized principles. In view of the special requirements of television broadcasting, such control is divided into the censorship of live and filmed broadcasts. Regular programs are censored according to the same



ГОСУДАРСТВЕННЫЙ КОМИТЕТ СССР ПО КИНЕМАТОГРАФИИ  
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principles as newspapers. Some of these are not even censored (for example, the programs "The World Today" and "Time").<sup>21</sup> Basic control is the responsibility of the director, the author of the broadcast, and the producing editor, who at any time can press a button to interrupt transmission.

Filmed programs must undergo a regular censorship process similar to that for books and journals. For example, it is not uncommon that a completed film that has been approved by the censors might have to wait several months or even years before it is broadcast. Before broadcasting, television films and plays are viewed by the editor in charge of the entire day's broadcast. The political editor is accorded unlimited authority. He can eliminate any part of the program, or as is more often the case, he can cut out any scene or whatever he thinks might sound ideologically uneven--i.e., whatever might contain currently undesirable allusions. Thus we have an example of the censorship apparatus closing ranks with editorial personnel and the apparatus of ideological control.

The final three types of censorship might be described as "centralized-interdepartmental." Military censorship split off from Glavlit in 1966 and is now part of the General Staff of the USSR Ministry of Defense and the Main Intelligence Administration. Military censors exercise full control over the publishing and entertainment activities of military subunits. Military theaters, film showings, vocal performances, and the repertory of military orchestras and ensembles are the prerogative of military censorship. Military censorship also functions interdepartmentally. All newspaper and journal articles, books, films, radio, and television programs dealing with military

themes (including the history of the Civil War and World War II) are subject to preliminary censorship by the Soviet army. Without the stamp of military censorship, such works cannot be approved by Glavlit or departmental censors.

All the available literature on censorship indicates that military censorship is efficient and relatively liberal in contrast to the distinctly conservative position of the Main Political Administration (PUR). This frequently leads to conflict between various departments (especially Goskino) and PUR. For example, after Chukhrai's film *Tryasina (Quagmire)* was approved, it was removed from circulation under pressure from PUR and later reinstated when Goskino sought the support of the Central Committee.

"Atomic censorship" is under the control of the Commission for Atomic Energy of the USSR Council of Ministers, and "space censorship" is a part of the Commission for Research on and Exploitation of Cosmic Space of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Current Situation**

The most striking feature of the Soviet censorship apparatus is its decentralized and departmental nature. The existence of seven independent types of Soviet censorship is by no means accidental, but this structure is not evidence for a weakening of censorship controls. The decentralization of Soviet censorship has become necessary for a variety of reasons.

First, the volume of banned material is constantly growing. Some of what

was permitted in the 1950s or even the 1960s is now banned. But can unspecialized censors really have any idea what can or cannot be said about the Soviet space program or nuclear research? The same applies to military issues. Glavlit censors have only general information about such matters--a list of so-called "post-office boxes" (i.e., defense plants and other sensitive facilities). The USSR produces approximately 150 feature films per year, not to mention an additional 1,000 documentaries, cartoons, and advertising films. To monitor such a vast quantity of films, the Soviets need a decentralized apparatus sufficiently qualified in specialty areas.

In addition, the censorship is in close touch with departmental organs and can resolve controversies without noise and without going the rounds of different departments. In practice, this is what usually happens. Finally, as an appendage to a particular department, censorship tends to "dissolve" and disappear from public view. Even specialized handbooks published in the West make no mention of Glavrepertkom or the more modest Division for Control of Film Repertory of the Main Administration of Film Exhibition and Distribution of the Goskino USSR and other similar subdivisions.

The rapid decentralization and the appearance of new types of censorship begun in the 1960s has been accompanied by a further innovation--a fundamental change in the quality of personnel employed as censors. Today, most censors are relatively young and well-educated. At least this is the case in central subdivisions. Censors are selected from graduates in pedagogy, history, the humanities, and they are all party members. Working as a censor offers somewhat higher than average pay and greater privileges than most workers

receive. However, we can assume it is not easy to spend one's entire day in a tiny room crowded with typesetters and proofreaders, reading and verifying printed copy against originals, and checking all suspicious words and phrases against the "Talmud."

Every book or journal issue is read twice. First the censor must approve the proofread copy "for printing," and then it is read a second time before receiving approval "for the public" after it has been verified that the printed copy is identical to the galleys. In the majority of cases, censors are on friendly terms with authors and coworkers involved in the publication process. Thus, for example, a censor who had been working for many years in the *Iskusstvo* publishing house and was by profession a historian frequently gave the editorial staff helpful advice on material with historical content. He did so not in his official capacity, but as a historian. If on occasion he happened to discover an ideological error, he would call an editor and the necessary changes would be made immediately as a rule. But this did not prevent him, when necessary, from informing his supervisor of more serious errors. Such a report could result in a scolding for one of his co-workers, or even the loss of a job. Of course, such administrative measures are taken not by Glavlit, but by a branch of the Central Committee or the department head of the Committee for the Press, Goskino, Gosteleradio, or the Ministry of Culture.

Another censor that I met worked at the *Sovetskii Khudozhnik* (Soviet Artist) publishing house censoring two journals that I edited, *Iskusstvo Kino* (*Art of the Cinema*) and *Sovietskii Ekran* (*Soviet Screen*). Of course, there

are censors who are less friendly and more fault-finding than those I have mentioned, but on the whole, the range and amount of censorship of book manuscripts and completed films and plays has decreased significantly over the years.

### **One More Form of Censorship?**

Most authors writing on Soviet censorship say that the Committee on State Security (KGB) is one of the main tools of censorship in the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that the KGB has some influence on literature and art, but to call the activities of the ideological division of the KGB or the MVD "censorship" is incorrect. "Censorship" is carried out by organizations that have the authority to approve or ban works of literature and art based on legislative acts. When they approve a particular work, it gains an official stamp of censorship or an official document and a certificate of approval is issued.

The activities of the KGB and the MVD cannot be viewed as censorship, if only for the reason that these organizations fear publicity and any documentation of their workings. Both the KGB and the MVD prefer to operate through oral consultation, advice, and preliminary work with authors. The deputy minister of internal affairs, Yuri Churbanov, has written in *Iskusstvo Kino* that the administrative boards of Goskino and the MVD in fact voted for the preliminary review of film scripts by the MVD as well as for the appointment of film consultants. Churbanov does not find this satisfactory, however. He complains that "Unfortunately business relations with the authors



of scenarios are not yet strong enough.... A scriptwriter generally works alone, not coming to us for assistance in the course of work. The MVD of the USSR is made acquainted with his work in its finished form, after which a rather long and painful process of eliminating inaccuracies frequently begins."<sup>23</sup>

Thus the current methods of operation of the KGB and the MVD are based on consultations and endless reworking. No works of literature or art containing any trace of a problem concerning these organizations can get through the censorship process without long and painstaking consultation. If a work is banned, this is done on the basis of oral telephone "advice" from Lyubyanka or Ogarev Street, where the KGB and MVD are headquartered.

The situation is the same for other government and party organizations. If a book or film touches on foreign policy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must be consulted. If there is mention of young people, then the Central Committees of the Komsomol and the Ministry of Education are called in. In 99 percent of all cases, such consultations prevent the occurrence of any "errors," thus obviating the need for any changes by the censors.

It is methodologically imperative to distinguish between "censorship" and "ideological control" without referring to such terms as official and unofficial, or formal and informal types of censorship. One should always try to determine the exact reason for banning or altering the sense of some book, film, or play. Ideological control can be divided into two groups. Most importantly, party members and state officials (e.g., the Central Committee

secretaries for ideology and the departments of propaganda and culture), the heads of publishing houses, film studios, theaters, writers' and artists' associations, and ideological workers in various military and internal security organizations exert pressure on the activity of writers and artists. The party *nomenklatura* in regional and municipal committees, various local organizations, and corresponding structures in every union republic play a role as well. In addition, theater editors and ordinary workers in ideological institutions such as editors of publishing houses, film studios, and state committees are important in the process of ideological control. To understand the role and function of this immense ideological apparatus and to judge the actual sphere of its activity, one must understand the situation as it developed over the last 20 years.

#### **Is There Censorship in the Soviet Union?**

The talented American scholar Alex Inkeles wrote as early as 1950 that "Glavlit has never held a position of more than secondary importance. In the newspaper and magazine field, and to a lesser extent in book publishing, the official censorship agency has been reduced very largely to the position of a mere technical agency."<sup>24</sup> He cites the opinion of a Soviet commentator in *Partiynoe stroitel'stvo* (*Party Construction*) that "The success of the Bolshevik press is decided by the cadres of editors."<sup>25</sup> In the 1940s and 1950s, this was a problem for the future, but the basic direction was absolutely clear. The fact that the Soviet system of censorship has entrusted a significant part of its functions to editorial workers was mentioned by Nadezhda Mandelshtam in her memoirs. "In our country it is not censorship

which castrates a book--it only administers the final strokes--but the editor, who with undivided attention sinks his teeth into the text and chews through every fiber."<sup>26</sup>

In many articles and studies, editorial and official censorship is confused because the editor's interference is less conspicuous than that of the censor. This mistake characterizes many examples cited in the book *The Soviet Censorship* and a number of articles in *Index on Censorship*, not to mention Valentin Rasputin's curious statement to Swedish journalists in 1975 that "Censorship is like a marketplace--the more you ask, the less you will knock off the price. I know perfectly well how books are edited. I agree with the editor about something, but when he says, 'you have to remove this too,' then I can say, look here, I agreed to cross out the previous part, but this one I want to leave in, and that's what usually happens."<sup>27</sup> Thus it is clear (perhaps intentionally so) how censorship is confused with the editorial process.

Unable to make sense out of all this confusion, Vasily Aksyonov proposed the introduction of a special term "Sovcens" to refer to all types of control of intellectual life in the USSR. He considers censorship to belong to an authoritarian society, while "Sovcens" characterizes the activities of a totalitarian state.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Aksyonov's neologism is little help in making sense of censorship in the Soviet Union. Soviet censorship has become increasingly departmental; it has developed an altered personnel structure; and the volume of banned material has increased. But beside these changes, an important development occurred outside the official structure of Soviet

censorship. A gigantic editorial apparatus was created during the 1960s and 1970s taking over many of the functions that previously were the exclusive duty of the censorship apparatus.

The Moscow publishing house Iskusstvo has approximately 80 editors, not including supervisors. Each editor receives four or five books a year. Each manuscript is read more than once by an editor, the chief of the editorial department, a deputy editor-in-chief, and the editor-in-chief. In more complex cases, manuscripts are read by the director, and the Committee on the Press and a division of the Central Committee might be consulted. The same is true for journals. In general, editors are specialists in their chosen fields and must possess far more information than censors. For example, they must know which Soviet writers or cultural workers have emigrated to the West, who has signed declarations unfavorable to the authorities, and which Western writers are out of favor and cannot be mentioned. Soviet editors must know all of this, but such information is slow to appear in the censors' "Talmud." Even in the case where ideological errors reach the public, it is the editor of the book, film or play who bears full blame.

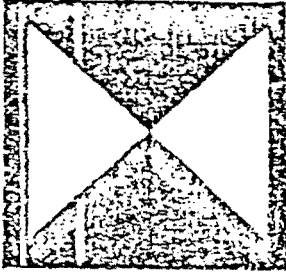
An example of editorial practice in the Soviet Union is instructive. In the annual collection *Ekran* (*Screen*) published by Iskusstvo, materials were included concerning Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Andrei Rublev* and Andrei Konchalovsky's *Asino shchast'e* (*Asya's Happiness*). *Ekran* was printed after receiving approval from the censors, but the director of the publishing house learned that both of these films had met with serious criticism from the Central Committee and might not be actually shown on the screen. By the

director's order, three articles were torn out of the printed books and replaced with others. The table of contents of the book was reprinted in some of the copies, but in others part the old titles were crossed out typographically and replaced with new ones to minimize losses. This is a rare case for the Soviet publishing industry. The editor of the book and the chief of the editorial department were severely reprimanded, while the censor who had let the book pass was not even scolded. The page in question is reproduced on the following page.

When word got out that Yuri Lotman was preparing to emigrate to the West, his articles ceased to be published in the USSR. Of course, there was no evidence for this rumor and such information was not to be found in the censors' compendia, but the editors of the relevant publications knew. Typically, unofficial consultation with higher-level organizations is the most important and productive form of ideological action taken. As a result, the number of formal bans has decreased sharply.

In some cases, the editors completely usurp the censors' functions, and *Sowietisch Heimland*, a monthly literary journal published in Moscow in Yiddish, is not officially censored. Its editor, Aron Vergelis, is at the same time its censor. Of course this is a unique case explainable by the fact that Glavlit has no censors who read Yiddish. But on the whole, there is a general trend toward exempting certain types of publishing activity from censorship. Newspapers, journals, and books published for export to foreign readers by the *Russkii Iazyk* (Russian Language) publishing house are not censored. In addition, reprintings of Russian classics and second and third

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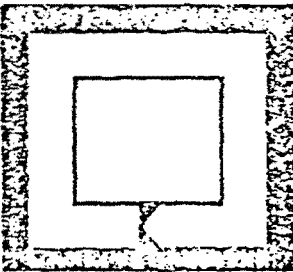
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editions of books by Soviet authors also lack the characteristic censor's mark on their front pages.<sup>29</sup> However, in certain articles on censorship we still run across outdated concepts of its functioning. In "The Writer and Censorship in the USSR," Roman Gul' writes that "Today in the USSR preliminary censorship is required for all printed works without exception, whatever their nature and size...."<sup>30</sup> As we have seen, reality has become much more complex.

Yet this does not mean that censorship in the USSR has ceased to exist or is gradually declining. Rather, its forms have changed. Transferring a part of its banning to the ideological supervision of editors, censorship is strengthening its executive and monitoring functions. For example, a banned book, film, or record can be withdrawn from circulation throughout the entire Soviet Union in a single day. This has become possible thanks to a branching and well-drilled network of local censors and inspectors.

Our understanding of Soviet censorship is still extremely limited. A study of Soviet censorship in relation to the ideological life of the USSR would be a significant addition to our knowledge. Censorship is one of the most striking and tangible aspects of the totalitarian character of communist rule. The following is a list with some topics concerning Soviet censorship still left to be investigated.

--A study of all possible documentary materials on censorship including the "Smolensk Archives."

--A sociological study of the issue supplemented by interviews with former

Soviet journalists, writers, and cinematographers, etc.

--Solving a number of methodological questions concerning censorship and ideological control, and formal and informal censorship, etc.

--An analysis of the activity of the lower levels of the Soviet censorship apparatus, i.e., of the censors themselves.

--An attempt to determine more precisely the structure of the leadership of the censorship apparatus, especially of Glavlit.

--A more active study of the forms of censorship about which we are relatively uninformed, especially television and radio censorship, and atomic censorship.

--An effort to eliminate elements of legend and inaccuracies from our understanding of the activity of contemporary censorship in the Soviet Union.

--A comparative analysis of the methods of operation of censorship in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.



## Glossary of Unfamiliar Terms and Acronyms

Glaviskusstvo--Main Administration of Art

Glavlit--Main Administration for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press  
(formerly Main Administration for Literature and Publishing)

Glavpolitprosvet--Main Political Education Committee of the Narkompros RSFSR  
(1920-1930)

Glavrepertkom--Main Repertory Administration (formerly Commission)

Goskino--State Committee for Cinematography

Gosteleradio--State Committee for Television and Radio Broadcasting

MVD--Ministry of Internal Affairs

Narkompros--People's Commissariat of Education RSFSR

Uono--Regional Division for People's Education

PUR--Main Political Administration, Ministry of Defense

*Nomenklatura*--a system of appointment lists, controlled directly or indirectly  
by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

## NOTES

1. A. V. Lunacharsky, "Freedom of the Book and the Revolution," *Pechat' i revolyutsiya*, no. 1, 1921, pp. 6-8.
2. *Repertuarnyi byulleten' Glaviskusstva* [Repertory bulletin of Glaviskusstvo] for the years 1926-1928. A complete copy of this bulletin can be found in the New York Public Library.
3. See *Kinospravochnik za 1926 god* [Cinema handbook for 1926] (Moscow, 1926). This handbook can be found in the library of the Museum of Modern Art in New York.
4. L. G. Fogelevich, *Deytvuyushchee zakonodatel'stvo o pechati. Sistematischeskiy sbornik* [Current legislation on the press. A systematic collection] (Moscow: Sovetskoe zakonodatel'stvo, 1931).
5. "Glavlit," *Posev* (Munich), no. 8, 1968, pp. 50-53.
6. Martin Dewhirst and Robert Farrell (eds.), *The Soviet Censorship* (New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, 1973).
7. Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk Under Soviet Rule* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).
8. These archives are presently located in the Army Record Center, Alexandria, Virginia. Documents concerning censorship include the following: a) Bulletin of Glavlit RSFSR and the Department of Military Censorship, no. 8, 1934; b) secret instructions to the censorship apparatus for 1934; c) a list of banned books and authors; and d) copies of Glavlit directives to the press.
9. Merle Fainsod, "Censorship in the USSR--A Documentary Record," *Problems of Communism*, vol. V, no. 2 (March-April 1956), pp. 12-19.
10. L. Vladimirov, *The Russians* (New York: Praeger, 1968); L. Vladimirov, *Sovetskij kosmicheskiy blef* [The Soviet cosmic bluff] (Frankfurt/M.: Posev, 1973).
11. Paul Lendvai, *The Bureaucracy of the Truth* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981). Lendvai refers to Nils M. Udgaard, *Der ratlose Riese. Altage in der Sowjetunion* (Hamburg, 1979), pp. 123-24.
12. Jane Curry and Joan Dassin (eds.), *Press Control Around the World* (New York: Praeger, 1982).
13. I will mention only a few of the materials in *Index on Censorship*: Janis Sapiets, "Extolling the Party," no. 5, 1982, pp. 14-15; Jeanne Vronskaya, "Down the Drain," no. 4, 1981, pp. 12-15; and Anna Tamarachenko, "Theatre Censorship," no. 4, 1980, pp. 23-28.

14. See Yan Vlokh "Behind the Scenes," *Posev* (Frankfurt/M.), no. 8, 1968, p. 5. Dusan Havlicek, "Czech Interlude: The Rise and Fall of Censorship," *Index on Censorship* (London), no. 5, 1982, p. 19. See also Paul Lendvai, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-138.
15. *Czarna ksiega cenzury polskiej* [The black book of polish censorship] (London), Aneks, vol. I, 1977, p. 247; vol. II, 1978, p. 472. See Jane Leftwich Curry (trans. and ed.), *The Black Book of Polish Censorship* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984). See also *Index on Censorship*, no. 4, 1978.
16. Dennis MacShane, *Solidarity. Poland's Independent Trade Union* (Nottingham: Spokesman, 1981).
17. For example, Gogol's *Revizor* was first approved by the censorship for entertainment and was then censored by the censorship for printed works. At the time, censorship for entertainment was directly subordinate to the Third Gendarme Department, which is evidence for the particularly great danger of plays as compared with books. The same principle is valid even today--not everything that can be printed is allowed on the stage, and not everything that can be staged is permitted to be filmed for the cinema, or even more importantly, for television.
18. It is only financially and administratively subordinate to the Council of Ministers of the USSR.
19. *Directory of Soviet Officials--National Organizations. A Reference Aid*, July 30, 1982. According to this publication, Glavlit is divided into eight directorates analogous to the organizational structure of the KGB and MVD. But "directorates" means roughly the same as "administration," and Glavlit itself is an administration, with a structure based on departments and sections. This directory gives no information either on military censorship or on Glavrepertkom of the Ministry of Culture.
20. The above July 1982 directory contains a number of errors. For example, it names as one of the leaders of the Third Directorate Andrei Sokolov, condemned several years ago.
21. See interview in *Time*, June 23, 1980 with Vladimir Dunaev, who is in charge of the broadcast "The World Today." According to Dunaev, this live broadcast is not censored.
22. Space censorship is discussed in L. Vladimirov's *The Soviet Cosmic Bluff*, *op. cit.*, and J. Oberg, *Red Star in Orbit* (New York: Random House, 1981).
23. See *Iskusstvo kino*, no. 7, 1982, p. 19. On the activity of the KGB and the MVD; see also my article "Fartsovshchik-marksist" [A marxist speculator] in *Novoe russkoe slovo* (New York), March 12, 1982.
24. Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 186.
25. *Partiynoe stroitel'stvo* (Moscow), no. 9, 1940, p. 40.

14. See Yan Vlokh "Behind the Scenes," *Posev* (Frankfurt/M.), no. 8, 1968, p. 5. Dusan Havlicek, "Czech Interlude: The Rise and Fall of Censorship," *Index on Censorship* (London), no. 5, 1982, p. 19. See also Paul Lendvai, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-138.
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24. Alex Inkeles, *Public Opinion in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 186.
25. *Partiynoe stroitel'stvo* (Moscow), no. 9, 1940, p. 40.

26. Nadezhda Mandelshtam, *Vtoraya kniga* [Second book] (Paris: YMCA Press), p. 133.
27. From the text of an interview with the Swedish journalist Disa Hostad, published in *Russkaya mysl'*, no. 3417, June 17, 1982.
28. Vasily Aksyonov, "Looking for Colour," *Index on Censorship* (London), no. 4, 1982, pp. 3-4.
29. The traditional censor's mark is missing from recent editions of the works of Dostoevsky, Il'f, Petrov, V. Astaf'ev's *Tsar-ryba* [The fish-tsar], and even from *Uchebnik voennogo perevoda* [Textbook of military translation] published by Voenizdat.
30. *Novyj zhurnal* (New York), no. 109, 1972, p. 242.