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THE CRISIS IN MILITARY CENSORSHIP IN JULY – OCTOBER 1917 ¹

... like a mountain shaken by an earthquake
(About Russia from military censorship materials)

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The study of censorship activity is relevant because today politics is filled with technologies, but the techniques and methods for creating the desired image were developed and widely used back in 1917 in connection with the events of World War I and the situation of dual power and the political crisis in Russia. These means were instruments of waging war and achieving power. It was concluded that military censorship in 1917 was unable to counter disinformation, and in responding to challenges it lagged behind the rapidly changing situation. The understanding of the deployment of Bolshevik propaganda as a threat by both the Provisional Government and the Soviets was belated.

Key words: censorship, a proclamation, press, a newspaper, a leaflet, the Pavlovsky Regiment, Bolsheviks, the court of honor.

Introduction

The article examines the manifestations of dual power in the press of 1917, attempts to establish censorship frameworks for understanding the positive and negative consequences of information printed and distributed among soldiers. Based on military censorship reports, dangerous challenges caused by Bolshevik propaganda were identified.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the manifestations of the crisis in the information sphere and evidences of the disintegration of the army under the influence of Bolshevik propaganda.

The study is based on the materials of

the Russian State Military Historical Archive (RSMA), many sources are put into circulation for the first time.

The study uses the methods of semantic analysis of the text, content analysis of the text.

This article does not touch upon the topics of L. G. Kornilov's speech, the reign of A. F. Kerensky, the problems of organizing and holding the Constituent Assembly, since these issues require independent research.

In the review of historiography, we note that a number of studies on the topic of the press and censorship during the First World War were carried out by the historian D. G. Guzhva. He proved that in the conditions of the changing military-political situation in 1917, the struggle of the organs and means of the military press for the army was clearly manifested. Among the problems of policy in the information sphere, the researcher highlighted the inability of the military authorities to organize the work of correspondents, the concealment of information from the front and the use of the thesis on military secrecy in order to stop the discussion of particular failures [1, pp. 51-53; 2, pp. 35-36].

M. M. Smolyaninov, while studying the topic of the events of the First World War on the territory of Belarus, touched upon the activities of the authorities in the sphere of press management. Military censorship and military laws on the press were proved to have become stricter since the summer of 1917, which, however, did not lead to the normalization of this sphere [3, pp. 114-116]. The historian of the press A. A. Okuneva present-

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ed an analysis of the legislation in the sphere of censorship of the studied period, analyzed the responsibility of publications for violating the law [4, pp. 69-70]. The alignment of political forces and the periodical press was revealed by R.P. Ovsepyan, who included primarily the bourgeois press, the press of the Mensheviks and other socialist parties in the structure of political camps, separately singled out the press of the Bolsheviks [5]. The researcher D. E. Tsykalov studied caricature among the tools of propaganda, highlighting its particular effectiveness and focus on the illiterate reader. The historian came to the conclusion that caricature significantly influenced the creation of mass ideas in Russia, England, Germany [6]. The author of this article has examined the activities of military censorship in the sphere of perustration of letters highlighting the subject matter of letters that were censored [7]. It should be noted that the topic of the manifestation of the crisis in the information sphere and in the army in July-October 1917 is of great interest to scientists. However, according to the materials of military censorship reports and from the point of view of understanding the crisis, it requires further study.

Main Body

Freedom of speech in 1917 was a gain of the February Revolution, and freedom of the press was perceived, among other things, as a ban on censorship.

New conditions for the activities of censorship were created by the laws, in which the dual power manifested itself. On March 3, 1917, the Provisional Government secured freedom of the press. Among the decisions of the second branch of power – the Executive Committee of the Petrograd Soviet – the resolution of March 10, 1917 was of great importance, stating that “all publications may henceforth be published without the prior sanction of the Executive Committee”. On April 27, 1917, the Provisional Government adopted a resolution “on the press”, and civil censorship was effectively closed. Further, in the sphere of the army press, as a reflection of dual power in the country and in the army, a decision was made that in addition to the front headquarters, the Executive Committee of the Council of Soldiers’ Deputies was a co-founder of newspapers [2, pp. 36-40]. Over time, the conditions for publishing army and frontline newspapers became more favorable for the expansion of social-revolutionary, Bolshevik propaganda on a legal basis, since from August 1917 newspapers began to be published on behalf of army committees. On Au-

gust 8, 1917 the authorities made an attempt to intensify the activities of military censorship and establish censorship frameworks through the decree “On special military censorship of the press” [8, p. 83-85].

From our point of view, the legislation created unfavorable conditions for the functioning of the censorship sphere, putting it in a more dependent and vulnerable position, and made it difficult to counter propaganda in the army. In order to close a newspaper that worked for propaganda, it was necessary to make a fairly significant effort, create a commission, present a reasoned assessment of the texts, conduct lengthy correspondence, respond to the editorial objection and resist the discontent of soldier-readers when closing.

In terms of analyzing technologies in politics, it can be said that during the reign of Nicholas II and then the Provisional Government, they didn’t set up a team of professionals who could develop countermeasures to propaganda, create a competitive image of power, popularize the values necessary to confront the challenges of the time and spread them, above all, among armed soldiers. During the crisis of 1917, significant damage was done to the idea of “war to a victorious end”, support for the February Revolution in opposition to the aspirations of the Bolsheviks, and to the need to unite the army and the rear. In the information sphere, the Soviets themselves did not realize the need to establish a framework, at least for a certain period, to overcome negative propaganda, because then the left parties were ousted by the Bolsheviks in the Soviets. The authorities did not have enough time to understand the processes that were taking place, to analyze them. The subjective problem of this process was the lack of trained personnel.

Censorship opinion on the political crisis. A special place in the manifestation of the political crisis belongs to the speech of A.F. Kerensky in the State Duma on February 15, 1917. He spoke as a representative of democracy, criticizing the government in harsh terms and even insults, calling it “irresponsible” and “worthless.” The politician blamed “Rasputin’s autocracy” for the public opinion that the government and the “shadow people” who came and went from ministerial posts were largely to blame for the crisis [9, p. 1347].

Many political forces were cautious about this speech. The censorship reports expressed concern that A. F. Kerensky’s scandal in the State Duma would play into Germany’s hands. The prospect was that if the socialist parties in Russia

achieved scandals, then Russia would be weakened for many years. The censorship supported the wish to the press: it was necessary not to irritate the people, but to instill confidence in the government and eliminate everything that violated civil peace [10, p. 32].

The initial requirement of the censorship was to stop the politicization of the front and army press. In a number of reports of military censorship, the fact of the penetration of political programs and sentiments from the rear territories into the army was described as the most threatening to the army, contributing to its demoralization.

In 1917, there was a mass distribution of political soldier leaflets and such means of agitation as public speeches of propagandists in the army. A proclamation was an agitational leaflet with brief information, a slogan or a caricature. These forms made it possible to convey information and appeals to an audience of soldiers in a short time, which favorably distinguished them from official publications. Bolshevik proclamations, unlike the official press, wrote about real political and social problems, which aroused the confidence of the reader, and then the leaflets created the required public opinion. The Bolshevik press worked to create a conviction among soldiers that moderate press organs and the people reading them were "bourgeois and counter-revolutionary" [10, p. 110].

Many proclamations were created on behalf of soldiers. For example, the proclamation "Who is to blame?", The author is a soldier. First of all, the question was: who is to blame that the Germans are breaking through the front "wherever they want"? Newspapers everywhere blamed "us, old soldiers" for failures and that the troops "forgot their duty". Further, one can see in the structure of the proclamation the methods of setting soldiers against officers and generals: "the generals say this", but it is "not true". According to the author, the reason was that the Russian army did not have enough ammunition. The proclamation is aimed at deepening the confrontation between soldiers and officers within the army, which can be seen in the statement: "our officers are either hiding themselves or getting lost" [10, p. 135-136].

The analysis of military censorship reports demonstrates the development of the degradation of the army, the growth of contradictions between soldiers and officers, it characterizes the inconsistent position of the high command, which can be described as "flirting" with soldiers propagandized by the Bolsheviks. Similar facts are

evidenced by the materials of the courts of honor in the army. Let us consider the materials of one court of honor, which took place in the famous Pavlovsky Guards Regiment and revealed the disintegration of the army. This regiment fought in the direction that became a symbol of the failures of the Russian army near Tarnopol in July 1917.

The materials of the court of honor testified that in April 1917 the propaganda of Bolshevism in the Pavlovsky regiment was growing. Under the cover of slogans, the most "base instincts" of the crowd gained strength. The already shaken "military discipline fell", as well as the authority of the command staff. The attitude of soldiers towards the officers sharply worsened. As a result, the soldiers arbitrarily deprived officers of the right to representation in the regimental committee, declaring themselves the Council of Soldiers' Deputies of the regiment. In all official and private communications, the soldiers sought to show the officers that they "did not respect them" and tolerated them as an "inevitable evil", and the officers personally had to take part in the dirty work of strengthening "completely unequipped" positions. We made a conclusion that with the official abolition of external discipline, not only "internal conscious" discipline failed to be created, but even the minimal "manifestations of decency" disappeared. If soldiers did not consider failure to obey an order to be treason, they "almost always" did not obey it. Officers constantly heard "foul language" and threats of arrest addressed to them. When the regiment stood in the forest at an important line near Biala-Tarnopol, the officers' lives were threatened by "armed reprisals", and only the regiment commander N. Titovich, who constantly called on the soldiers to fraternal unity, disarmed the "obvious anger of the masses". The decline in discipline was directly related to the decline in combat effectiveness. Thus, we first observe balancing, and then the collapse of the regiment into the absence of discipline and combat effectiveness.

Because of the established relations, the question of disbanding the regiment arose. This greatly influenced the rethinking of the situation, since it was a disgrace for the military. Colonel A. V. Potocky asked in his report not to disband the regiment, and the soldiers completed their combat mission. The soldiers were also influenced by the commanders' proposal to follow the officers only for those who "did not want to be traitors" [11, p. 17-19]. Many soldiers wanted to restore "their good name."

Soon, on July 3, an order came to leave the

position to the rear in order to remove the “harmful element” that was interfering with its combat capability, and then return to the Biala-Tarnopol area on July 11. However, such measures should have been carried out over a longer period and with more decisive measures. At the meeting of colonel N. N. Salamanov and battalion commanders, it was decided to change the composition of the regiment at the end of training. However, the higher authorities decided to visit the regiment on the second day after arriving in the village of Velikiy Rakovets. As a result of this decision, the moment for removing undesirable was chosen unsuccessfully. There were 146 such people, and when the mass of soldiers learned of their removal, they became agitated again and the discontent reached “extreme limits”. The agitators took advantage of the situation and “spoke loudly” against the officers. The regimental council declared that there were no soldiers in the regiment who were detrimental to combat readiness and gave its sanction for non-fulfillment of the order to remove people on the list. At that time, the corps commander arrived at the regiment and proposed that both sides should reconcile through mutual concessions. He played along with the soldiers, showing that the demand to fulfill the commander’s instructions was not at all “due to necessity”, but was based on the stubbornness and ill will of the officers towards the soldiers. As a result, according to the case materials, the court of honor declared that “there was no possibility” of building any bridge between the officers and the representatives of the company committees. The case materials contain a record that with his speech the commander destroyed the living conditions in the regiment within three days, that had been created in three months of officer work [11, p. 2-8].

The military censorship connected the “Bolshevik speech” in October 1917 and the danger of the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly and the deepening of the political crisis. The censorship supported the opinion that the real revolution was the February Revolution, and after the “Bolshevik speech” in October 1917 came the “bitter feeling” of the danger to which “the homeland and the revolution” were exposed [12, p. 72]. The military leadership and censorship wrote that the Bolshevik uprising had spread across the country like “cold smoke”, and the prospect of anarchy, civil war and German offensive had become apparent. At the same time, the government, the army and society did not have “state-clear” and precise plans, “bold and quick” decisions. The society, political sphere and army disintegrated into

“small, powerless” parts [12, p. 73].

The only salvation for society was said to be the need to forget “millions of disagreements” and unite to fight external and internal challenges. It was proposed to immediately begin creating a revolutionary government and ensure the work of the Constituent Assembly [12, p. 73].

The newspaper “Voice of the Front” No. 48, 50, 1917 expressed the opinion that the Bolsheviks, with their actions, had created a “favorable moment” for Wilhelm to attack. The article states that in Russia an opinion about the Bolshevik political movement has been artificially created, inflated by “false slogans.” The revolution is not a plan of a handful of conspirators, but the fruit of a historical process. An article in the newspaper “Front” was one of such assessments, stating that the Bolshevik uprising in Petrograd could not be recognized as a popular movement, because there could not be a dictatorship of “only one” part of democracy [12, p. 74]. In the February Revolution, the people rose up against the autocracy and were united by one idea. This cannot be said about the Bolshevik uprising. The fact that the crowd joining the Bolsheviks was already numerically larger in places than those who were against their “coup” was described as a dangerous situation. The Bolshevik uprising was regarded as an adventure of “a few ambitious people” who took advantage of the consciousness of the “dark, tired masses” who, with “fiery words” about peace, bread and rest, drew the people to their side [12, p. 73].

The newspaper “Voice of the 10th Army” in issue No. 91 in the article “Terrible Moment” testified that the Bolshevik uprising turned in places into pogroms and robberies. The Bolsheviks’ calls for peace were criticized by explaining that fraternization with the enemy and withdrawal from positions is not peace. There was a fear that in this way the Bolsheviks could only stop shooting at the front and open the way for the enemy deep into the country.

The general objective, which can be traced in the collections of articles and reports of the military-political departments, was a call for the entire democracy and the entire army to unite and take up arms to save the motherland in the “deadly hour”, and to interrupt the Bolsheviks’ rise to power. The review was compiled by November 1, 1917 [12, p. 73].

Conclusion

In the conditions of wartime, dual power, Bolshevikization of the Soviets, abolition of civil

censorship the authorities were unable to maintain the boundaries of the information sphere, beyond which printed information had a destructive effect. Negative factors emerged that contributed to the politicization and disintegration of the army. From our point of view, the authorities underestimated the importance of the information sphere, made incorrect decisions that contributed to disinformation. The statements of various political forces with accusations of contributing to the development of the crisis and shifting blame and responsibility to each other are the manifestation of the political crisis.

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Цумарева Е. П. КРИЗИС ВОЕННОЙ ЦЕНЗУРЫ В ИЮЛЕ – ОКТЯБРЕ 1917 г.

Исследование деятельности цензуры актуально, потому что сегодня политика наполнена технологиями, но приемы и методы создания нужного образа были выработаны и массово использовались еще в 1917 г. во взаимосвязи с событиями Первой мировой войны, ситуацией двоевластия и политического кризиса в России. Данные средства являлись инструментами ведения войны и достижения власти. Сделан вывод, что военная цензура в 1917 г. была не в состоянии противостоять дезинформации, а в реагировании на вызовы отставала от быстро менявшейся обстановки. Понимание и Временным правительством, и Советами развертывания большевистской пропаганды как угрозы было запоздалым.

Ключевые слова: цензура, прокламация, печать, газета, листовка, Павловский полк, большевики, суд чести.