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POLITICAL PROPAGANDA AND THE SOVIET CITIZEN IN THE
1950-1960S

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Abstract

The political ideas proclaimed by the Soviet government in the 1920s and 1930s proved to be relevant in the 1950s and 1960s. Over time, idioms, while retaining the old forms, were filled with new content. The image of a person belongs to one of these transformations. In the pre-war period, it was considered only from class positions, in the post-war period, along with this interpretation, there is another one – emotional and sensual. This evolution of the image was due to several reasons, among which a special place is occupied by de-Stalinization and increasing the cultural and educational level of the citizen. The promotion of a more complex image of man required the invention of new forms of political work. The propaganda and agitation bodies were not ready for these new conditions, they were not able to effectively use the new methods of work, in turn, and cultural institutions were ready for them, which led to an increase in their role in political propaganda. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet government was characterized by the search for mechanisms and ideas that would demonstrate that the gap between ideas and reality is not so significant. Considerable work has been done in this direction, and interesting ways of solving the problem have been proposed, but in the end the main focus was not quite successful, which led to the further growth of a certain skepticism about ideological postulates among the population..

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1. Introduction

The historiography of political propaganda in the USSR consists of Soviet, foreign and Russian studies. The first ones studied theoretical, methodological and practical issues. The works of representatives of the Soviet scientific school of the first half of the 1950s are characterized by the dominance of political and ideological attitudes. A more critical understanding, which does not go beyond the ideological framework, begins in the second half of the 1950s, which was facilitated by the democratization of the country and the beginning of the rehabilitation of sociology as a scientific discipline (Kardashenko & Rybjakov, 1961, 1966; Likhachev, 1974; Zhukova, 1987).

Foreign researchers, as well as Soviet ones, studied the methods, forms, and main activities of propaganda agencies. Until 1991, they were unable to use archival documents and conduct independent sociological research, so when writing monographs and articles, they used publications of Soviet authors, published in the Soviet Union methodological literature and collections of documents. However, this did not affect their assessments and judgments, which were overly critical. After the collapse of the USSR and the opening of archives, foreign scientists had the opportunity to study previously inaccessible sources. But even in this case, most of their conclusions were influenced by political stereotypes and established ideas about the USSR (Bubbayer, 2010; Hollander, 1970; Plamper, 2010).

Modern Russian historical science to a certain extent combined Soviet and foreign historical traditions, which led to the existence of diametrically opposite points of view in it. Unlike Soviet researchers, Russian scientists analyze political propaganda in the context of other historical issues (Bakanov & Fokin, 2019; Fokin, 2017).

Turning to the part of Russian historians, which are characterized by “increased” critical reflection of the past, you can find a point of view that the peace of the postwar Soviet life and reducing the urgency did not allow propaganda to develop new incentives that mobilized the Soviet people to achieve the goals and objectives set by the government: “peace to the party-state absolutism was, in this respect, the most severe test”.

Moreover, it is emphasized that every year it became more and more difficult for the Soviet elite to explain the deepening gap between theory and reality: “there were no fundamental increments in the Marxist-Leninist Communist concept during the entire Soviet period. But the life of society, of course, did not stand still. And in connection with this development, the difficulties of interpreting new realities in the spirit of the traditional postulates of the concept of communism gradually increased. ... The relationship between the theory of communism and the development of real life has been growing especially rapidly since the 50s and 60s” (Barulin, 2000, pp. 357 358).

2. Problem Statement

Having studied the historiography of the issue, it becomes obvious that historical science still pays little attention to an important component of propaganda – the image of the Soviet man. It was in the 1950s and 1960s that his new non-class interpretation appeared. Turning to the materials of Leningrad of this time will allow us to trace how the new sense-emotional understanding of the essence of man developed and how the methods of political work changed.

3. Research Questions

The study should consider the following issues:

- Why did the image of a person change in the political propaganda of the 1950s and 1960s?
- What new forms of political propaganda appeared during this period?
- What was the new understanding of person?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to analyze the evolution of the human image in the political propaganda of the 1950s and 1960s based on the materials of Leningrad.

5. Research Methods

The research is based on a wide range of sources-periodicals and archival documents. The use of general scientific methods and analysis of sources allow us to reconstruct the history of political propaganda in the USSR.

6. Findings

The main complex of political and ideological ideas in the Soviet Union was laid in the 1920s and 1930s (Fokin, 2017, pp. 16-19). During this period, the propaganda image of a person was positioned from class positions – a worker, a peasant. In the 1950s and 1960s, in the political space, along with class (TsGA St. Petersburg, n.d a, pp. 1-22), which is reflected in literature, periodicals, theatrical works, etc., a person begins to be positioned from emotional and sensual positions.

This is expressed in the desire to know your inner self, lyrically romantic attitude to the world around you, the struggle with negative traits of your character, simple human joys, experiences, doubts. Now on the pages of the press, cinema screens, theatre platforms and other means of communication, more and more happy faces appear which are not devoid of ironic, and sometimes sarcastic, expressions (Krasovskaya, 1961). In general, the image of a person becomes more complex and contradictory.

Of course, at the very beginning of the 1950s, such an interpretation of a person in political propaganda could not yet find a place and he was positioned as a representative of the class, which is in the shadow of the “personality cult”. In general, the image of I. V. Stalin in the political and ideological space dominated other ideas. This phenomenon has been studied in detail in the literature and does not require additional arguments. But already in the early 1950s, elements of a new understanding of man began to appear.

For example, after a very traditional description of the work of the Vyborg cultural centre at the end of the article “Here they study and rest”, published in January 1950 in the “Evening Leningrad”, a couple of phrases describe the feelings of visitors: “we always leave the cultural centre in a high, happy mood. I want to work harder and better” (Bortkevich, 1950, p. 2). Most likely, this is the maximum possible emotions that were allowed to be displayed in public space at that time.

Yet more common and characteristic was the rhetoric praising the “Father of Nations”. For example, in the newspaper “Smena” (“Shift”), aimed at young Leningraders, in the September issue of 1951 was published a typical article “we were raised by Stalin” (Bitner, 1951, p. 2). It contains phrases that emphasize the special role of I. V. Stalin in the life of people and the country: “under the leadership of the great Stalin, the Soviet people are building a communist society”.

Visiting cultural and educational institutions in Leningrad in the early 1950s, the citizen also met with elements of the “personality cult”. For example, walking through the Kirov Central Park In August 1950, he was offered an exhibition “to help study the biographies of the leaders of the Bolshevik party and the socialist state, V. I. Lenin and I. V. Stalin” (TSGALI St. Petersburg, n.d a, p. 23).

It should be noted that in general, the culture of the early 1950s was characterized by the so-called “high style”, which did not imply the display of the emotional and sensual side of a person. Emotionality was allowed in relation to the broad masses, which are euphoric at the opportunity given to them to implement grandiose political, economic and social tasks for the benefit of the working class, the party and a bright future.

The situation changed very quickly in 1953, when the “Father of Nations” died, as Jan Plumper writes: “soon after the death of Stalin, a quiet phase of de-Stalinization began. It is unlikely that this tectonic, although underground, shift was not noticed by anyone. It would not have been missed even by a not very discerning reader of “Pravda”. For the rest of 1953, the image of Stalin appeared in the newspaper only five times” (Plamper, 2010, p. 132).

This trend was observed not only in the central newspaper, but also in regional publications, in particular, in “Leningradskaya Pravda”, “Vecherny Leningrad” and “Smena”. After the death of I. V. Stalin, his image is no longer used in the construction of political and ideological space.

This allowed other political and ideological idioms that were previously in the “shadow of the leader” to develop, and the image of a person was no exception to this. Moreover, the Soviet citizen himself becomes ready for the complex, contradictory, filled with emotion, constant search for himself, the desire to rebuild his system of values, etc.in the second half of the 1950s, the educational and cultural level increases, which makes the system of ideas about the surrounding world more complex (Chulanov, 1974). All this creates the necessary conditions for the promotion, along with the class, of a new emotional and sensual essence of human.

It is no accident that since the second half of the 1950s issues of moral and aesthetic education of a person have been raised more and more actively than before, which, in turn, become an element of the formation of a political and ideological system of views (Babosov, 1962; Likhachev, 1974).

The desire to show simple human relationships, the search for happiness and other ordinary desires of people at the turn of the 1950s and 1960s are increasingly supported by propaganda agencies. For example, it is no accident that when the popular magazine “Amateur Art” was published in 1957, a photograph of a man and a woman was chosen for the design of its first pages; their looks, gestures and mutual embraces demonstrate their tender feelings for each other. Every year there are more and more such images in the periodical press.

The image of human feelings is also distributed in various reviews, reviews and articles. In particular, on the pages of “Vecherny Leningrad” in August 1957, the newspaper's editorial Board paid special attention to the play “A man is looking for happiness” (Demchenko, 1957, p. 3).

Preserved in the second half of the 1960s, the emotional and sensual understanding of a person is pushed into the background by anniversaries from the history of the USSR, which the second half of the decade was rich in (50 years of the October Revolution, the 100th anniversary of the birth of V. I. Lenin). In the political space, larger – scale images of the revolution, V. I. Lenin, and the Soviet state are getting a “fresh impetus”.

Bringing a complicated image of a person to the Leningrader could not only take place through traditional (passive) forms of political propaganda – lectures, reports, and speeches. New ways were needed that could adequately convey the new content of the essence of a person, and respond to the changed cultural and educational level of a resident of Leningrad. Therefore, the Arsenal of political and ideological work included Sunday readings, debates, and evenings of questions and answers, which implied active participation in the political event of visitors. However, the propagandists themselves were not ready for this. In Leningrad, there were cases when during debates, evenings of questions and answers, the hosts lost control of the audience and the event developed not according to the scenario, the participants raised very acute problems from the Soviet reality.

The ability to put into practice new methods of working with the residents of Leningrad in the propaganda agencies was limited; such problems did not arise in cultural institutions. Therefore, in the early 1960s in the Central Committee resolution “On the tasks of party propaganda in modern conditions” stressed the need for cultural institutions to become a centre of advocacy; to bring propaganda to the specific questions of communist construction; to massively expand and use a variety of forms of advocacy; strengthen ideological and educational work among workers; conduct differentiated work among different segments of the population, taking into account their age, professional, educational and other characteristics (TsGA St. Petersburg, n.d. b, p. 1).

In the 1960s, the organs of political propaganda themselves were also reorganized. Since 1962, communist labour brigades, schools of experience of communist labour for workers, universities of political knowledge for the general public, philosophical methodological seminars for scientific and technical intelligentsia, permanent theoretical conferences, propaganda schools for students, etc. have been created (TSGAIPD SPb, n.d. a, p. 3).

The system of political education is also changing. In the mid-1960s in Leningrad, it is clearly structured, organized three levels: the first-primary political education (it focused on communists with grades 4-7 education, who had no experience of independent work with political literature); the second – secondary political education (at this level were engaged communists with secondary, partially incomplete secondary education) and the third-higher political education (here were trained party, Soviet, economic leaders) (TSGAIPD SPb, n. d. b, pp. 1-12).

The search for new meanings and forms of political propaganda was accompanied by problems and difficulties-personnel, financial, material and technical, but the most difficult problem remained the problem of bridging the gap between theoretical developments (political slogans) and life in the eyes of the population. Of course, this issue was raised in the first half of the 1950s, but no serious measures were

taken to overcome “dogmatism and formalism”. During this period, attention was drawn to the need to raise the level of lecturers, provide listeners with political, ideological and methodological literature, etc. But in essence, the main question was not raised – what can become the link between theory and reality.

The attempt to find this missing link was made by the authorities in the second half of the 1950s. It was assumed that this problem could be solved with more active use in the promotion of specific examples of the work of factories and enterprises, the life of urban areas.

Along with this possible mechanism of convergence of theory and practice in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s, the economy begins to be considered. In the development of mass economic education during this period, there are two stages: the first between the XX and XXI congresses of the CPSU, which was characterized by “deep development of a specific production economy” among communists and business leaders. During this period, economic propaganda did not go beyond the network of party education, and its forms were circles, seminars and independent training. But at this time, the number of articles and notes that introduce Leningraders to the basics of economics is increasing in the periodical press.

The second stage begins after the XXI Congress of the CPSU. It is characterized by a more widespread economic education due to the involvement of non-partisans, especially workers, in the educational process. This stage, as indicated in party documents, was held under the slogan “economic knowledge – for every worker.

Another possibility that would allow to build a bridge between ideology and life was the profession of a person. It was believed that a closer connection between professional training and political and ideological postulates would help to close the gap that existed between propaganda and reality.

The universities of political knowledge, which were created on a professional basis – the university of engineers, doctors, teachers, young masters, etc., which in Leningrad were organized in Vyborg, Dzerzhinsk, Kuibyshev, Leninsky, Oktyabrsky districts – combined political training and professional development. For example, at the Karl Marx Factory at the university of engineering, half of all classes were devoted to the study of the basics of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, and the other half – to questions of technology.

It is well known that in the second half of the 1950s and 1960s, the Soviet Union developed not only heavy industry, as it was under I. V. Stalin, but also other branches of the economy, which made it possible to improve the standard of living in the USSR, so the popularization of economic achievements among the population is quite logical and clearly demonstrated the correctness of theoretical developments.

However, there was one flaw in solving the problem of a certain remoteness of the theory from life, which drew attention to a researcher at The Institute of party history at the regional and city party committees Yu.I. Tarasov. He stated his point of view in the report “On the unity of organizational and ideological work”, which he presented at a seminar of employees of the propaganda and agitation departments of the district party committees with the participation of Deputy Secretaries of party organizations of large industrial enterprises in 1966. The main idea was summarized as follows: “our attention should not be focused on machines, with all the importance of production, you understand me, I am consciously saying, Human! After all, our slogan is: “For the sake of man!” “All for the good of human!” This is the most important thing for ideological work. To rush from person to person, around a person, their

mood, psychology, worldview, then we will be able to really solve production problems. With this method, we can strengthen the unity of word and deed, the unity of ideological and organizational work” (TSGAIPD SPb, n.d. c, pp. 43-44).

7. Conclusion

The appeal in the political propaganda of the 1950s and 1960s demonstrates that it was not frozen and stagnant, it was characterized by a dynamic that was expressed not only in the search for new meanings and methods of communicating them to people, but also in the desire to demonstrate to the population that the gap between theory and reality is not so great.

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