

WLC 2016 : World LUMEN Congress. Logos Universality Mentality Education Novelty 2016 |
LUMEN 15th Anniversary Edition

The Mutiny on the Russian Battleship Potemkin in the British Press

Ștefan-Cătălin Trofin^{a*}

* Corresponding author: Ștefan-Cătălin Trofin, , trofincatalin@yahoo.com

^aPhD. Candidate, „Al. I. Cuza” University, Iași, Romania, trofincatalin@yahoo.com

Abstract

<http://dx.doi.org/10.15405/epsbs.2016.09.128>

The beginning of the twentieth century heralded the major changes that the autocratic Russia of Czar Nicholas II would have to manage. The precarious existence of the peasants and the majority of the townspeople, coupled with internal and external conflicts had turned The Russian Empire into a powder keg ready to explode. A first sign of this explosive situation was shown on 22nd January 1905, "the bloody Sunday", when soldiers of the imperial guard opened fire on unarmed protesters, who demanded only to hand the Tsar a petition expressing their discontent with the living conditions, they were subjected. The news of the massacre at the gates of Winter Palace was spreading rapidly causing shock and terror in the hearts of the people and also the desire to bath in the blood this injustice and with it the entire autocratic Tsarist regime. The news reached the ears of sailors aboard *Potemkin* battleship, amplifying the already present spirit of revolt among the crew because of the poor conditions and the intransigence of the commanders. The tension was high and the revolt requires only a trigger that was produced on 27th June 1905 when the crew protested and refused to consume altered food. The officers who intervened brutally to punish the leaders of the mutiny were killed, others were taken prisoner. So, the sailors took control of the vessel. Needing fuel and food *Potemkin* Battleship was first directed to Odessa, but he was banished, and then to Constanta. Aware of the gravity of the events in Russia and interested in the fate of a rival power, at the time, the British have turned with interest the attention of the facts that the British press has presented in detail throughout the crisis, manifesting rather sympathy for the courage of the *Potemkin* sailors.

© 2016 Published by Future Academy www.FutureAcademy.org.uk

Keywords: The Mutiny on the battleship Potemkin; Great Britain; British press; Romania; international relations.

1. Introduction

Submission for analysis of events from the early twentieth can create perplexity for the general public, especially because the mutiny on the Russian battleship Potemkin received wide exposure in both art and historiography. But we believe that for this reason it is necessary the reassessment of issues that in different historical periods, were either presented from a perspective of a doctrine and ideology, or were shown in an incomplete and deficient way, being obscured those matters that did not fold the ideological profile of the moment. The Potemkin uprising was one of those events used by the political power of the moment to legitimize itself and to articulate the ideological speech before a society in a constant search of heroes.

Presenting the events of the summer of 1905 in a romanticized way, booth in press, literature, cinema or historiography, of various historical periods, had altered the actual substance of the mutiny on Potemkin, so this is one of the main reasons we propose a critical reevaluation of the topic by analyzing the media in a foreign country, booth rival and hostile, following its positioning in relation to an event that reveals the internal difficulties of Czarist Russia and its vulnerability in the Russo-Japanese war.

2. Method

The main goal of this research is to analyses the perception of the British press on the mutiny on the Russian battleship Potemkin, because British media watched with great interest the events in the summer of 1905 for several reasons. The government in *Downing Street* considered Russia its main rival at that time, because she was threatening the safety of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits, so the safety of the shortest routes to India. The British authorities also feared that Russia will support the revolutionary movements in North India that would have jeopardized her position in the most important of her colonies. Furthermore, the subject of the mutiny on the Potemkin was highly publicized in the media of that time across mainland, so, the *Fleet Street* could not be outdone. And last, but not list, Britain was facing similar internal problems. At the beginning of the twentieth century Britain's main internal problem was the widespread poverty in her big cities. In the most important European metropolis at that time peoples were starving and dying because of misery, and this state of affairs had led to numerous strike movements, especially in the docks.

For this purpose, we propose to study and analyze a substantial number of articles in the British newspapers of that period and to observe which was the general opinion of the press about the revolutionary events in the Tsarist Russia in general, and the mutiny on the battleship Potemkin, particularly. We also intend to analyze the reports concerning the interaction of the crew on the battleship Potemkin with the Romanian authorities in Constanta.

For achieving the proposed objectives, we will use the observation method, the historical method, the contextual analysis method and comparative critical method.

3. Review of Literature

As we stated previously, while leftist government of Russia the historiography has paid great attention for the mutiny on Potemkin. Proofs in this matter are works like: A.P. Platonov, *Vosstania chernomorskogo flote v 1905*; V. V. Maksakov et al. (eds), *Krasnyi arkhiv—istoricheskii zhurnal*; I. P. Voronitsyn, *Iz mraka katorgi 1905-1917*. And the later works of B. I. Gavrilov, *V bor'be za svobody: Vosstanie na bronenostse Potemkine* and P. Kardashev, *Burevestniki, revoliutsii v rossii i flot*.

Western historians, as Robert Zebroski observed (2003, p. 9), have treated the Potemkin mutiny as „an isolated incident that does not warrant closer examination”. Therefore, the pages dedicated to the uprising on the battleship Potemkin can be found in the works dedicated to a wider problem, like the revolutionary movement in Russia: Richard Hough, *The Potemkin Mutiny* ; John Bushnell, *Mutiny amid Repression* ; Abraham Ascher, *The Revolution of 1905*; Leonard F. Guttridge, *Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection*; Gerald D Surh, 1905 in St. Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution; Christopher M. Bell & Bruce A. Elleman, *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective*.

Although the uprising on the battleship Potemkin received an ample exposure in the Russian and international historiography the references concerning the press coverage, especially the Western press, are very sketchy and insufficient for us to shape an opinion on how the events were perceived by the public opinion in those countries. Therefore, a study that focused especially on this issue should be, we believe, welcomed.

4. The background of the events

After the defeat in the Crimean War, the tsarist authorities engaged in an ambitious naval program meant to transform Russia in a great naval power, that could resist the British or the French fleet, in the case of war (McLaughlin, 2003, p. 117-118). But without an educated middle class, that could provide technically proficient personnel to operate and maintain the sophisticated shipboard machinery, the Russian navy had to be made up mostly of peasants, but also with some better educated workers, many of whom had a „radical past”, harboring revolutionary sympathies (Zebroski, 2003, p. 10).

The brutish, and humiliating life conditions on the ships, and the longtime of conscription, arouse the feelings of anger and frustration in the minds of the sailors, now united in the new ideal to overthrow their officers traditional rule, that looked so much alike the tsarist authority (Zebroski, 2003, p. 11), that orchestrated the massacre on „Bloody Sunday” (Surh, 1989, pp. 165-167). The Russian navy, unlike the army, remained highly aristocratic in organization. The naval officers' corps remained an „impermeable elite controlled by the tsar”, and the accession of sailors without noble descent was prohibited (Zebroski, 2003, p. 13).

But the most serious problems for the sailors, and, also, the triggers of the mutiny were the poor quality and quantity of food. Even if in the documents the diet looks pretty decent, in the reality the food was far worse. Deficient in meat and vegetables, the food was often outdated and altered (Zebroski, 2003, p. 11).

In fact, the food issue, was a source of growing tensions between officers and sailors, for some years. In July 1903 the tensions escalated into near mutiny when the sailors on the *Berezan* stopped performing their duties to protest against tainted meat in the borscht. But after several hours of negotiations, the officers listened their requests and they were served fresh food (Zebroski, 2003, p. 12). The escalation of the situation was avoided, but not for too long.

In the morning of 14/27 June 1905 some sailors on the premier battleship of the Black Sea fleet, *Prince Potemkin Tavricheskii*, found that a „foul odor was coming from the galley”. The source of the bad smell was their day meat, which appeared to be altered and teeming with maggots. The bad news quickly spread among crewmembers, whom agreed to launch a passive boycott against eating the borscht with the spoiled meat (Zebroski, 2003, p. 16). Their idea has annoyed the officers, who ordered the sailors to eat the borscht or face punishment. Some of them refused, causing uproar. To avoid an escalation of the disobedience the culprits had to be punished. So, one of the leading figures of the disobedience, Grigory Vakulinchuk (Bascomb, 2007, pp. 44-46), an *Tsentralka* founder member, was shot and killed (Bascomb, 2007, p. 84).

This act has caused an outburst of anger. Several officers were killed and the rest of them were shut away in the cabins. After the disarming of the officers and their closure in cabins, Afanasy Nikolaevich Matiushenko, the other leading figure of the mutiny, seized control of the ship (Zebroski, 2003, p.18).

Having sensed trouble aboard the *Potemkin*, the commander of torpedo boat, No. 267, that escorted the battleship, Lieutenant P.M. Klodt von Iurgensburg, tried to flee to safety, but was stopped by Matiushenko and his colleagues (Zebroski, 2003, p. 18).

So, after a spontaneous uprising, the sailors on the *Potemkin* were in possession of the battleship, but they had no idea what to do next. Realizing that running a ship it's not as easy it might seem, the mutineers tried to persuade their colleagues to join their efforts, even if they knew there were some that opposed. The last ones were convinced by force. Then, the mutineers had elected a ship's commission that had three main purposes: "to act as a forum to set policy; to supervise the running of the ship; and to keep the mutiny alive until the rest of the fleet could follow suit" (Zebroski, 2003, p. 18).

The main goal for Matiushenko and his colleagues was to spread the fleet-wide mutiny, and to join the strike in Odessa. The sailors hoped that their example will be followed and that it would spark sympathetic revolts in the Black Sea region and throughout all of Russia (Zebroski, 2003, pp. 14, 18).

The mutiny on *Potemkin* had taken by surprise both the tsarist authority and the Bolsheviks, or other radical parties, that missed a great revolutionary opportunity. The Russian authorities were devastated by the news of the Potemkin uprising, fearing an inflammation of the situation in and around Odessa region. So they exemplary mobilized to give a firm reply to the mutineers (Zebroski, 2003, pp. 19-20).

Britain, a rival of Russia at that time, watched with great interest the events on *Potemkin*, that revealed a wide-ranging weaknesses of the autocratic empire. So, the British Ambassador to St. Petersburg and, especially, the *Fleet Street* have allocated an increased interest and an expanded space presenting the events in the Russian Empire.

5. British media perception of the mutiny on Potemkin

One of the first and most detailed accounts of the Potemkin incident occurred, on 16/29 June 1905, in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*. Under the title „Starling news from Odessa. Mutiny on Russian warships", the journal reported: "The city is in a state almost of stupefaction, for it is in momentary fear of being bombarded by a Russian warship in possession of mutineers. The mutinous ship is the Prince Potemkin, the newest and most heavily armed battleship of the Black Sea Fleet. She arrived in the roadstead last night with a torpedo boat in company. Both vessels were in full possession of the mutineers and both were flying the red flag of revolution in place of the Imperial Standard and the national colors" (1905, June 29, p. 7). Next, there were presented the reasons of the revolt, „the abominable character of the rations served out to them", the moments of confrontation, the killing of the officers and the takeover of the battleship command by the insurgents.

But, the main attention was focused on the repercussions of the *Potemkin* mutiny on the city of Odessa, and the possibility that the mutiny would expand both in town and on the crews of the military vessels that were to be brought to the Odessa for suppressing the mutiny. „This afternoon the mutineers signaled to the naval and military authorities on shore demanding that ample supplies of provision should be sent out to her. If, it was added, the supplies were not sent by sundown the mutineers would bombard the city. The heavy guns of the great battleship are even now trained on the defenseless city. The Governor has telegraphed urgently to Sevastopol for a squadron of the Black Sea Fleet to be sent at once, but the townspeople are not reassured by this action, as they are in mortal dread that the bombardment may take meantime. There is also some reason to fear that if other warships come here they will merely join mutineers. Then the city will be helpless between a hostile mutinous fleet and fifty thousand men ashore" (1905, June 29, p. 7). After that, there were mentioned the intensification of the strike in Odessa, favored by the presence on the *Potemkin* mutineers, and the solemn funeral of the mutiny leader on the battleship, that „had perished for the truth", according to his colleagues.

Similar accounts have appeared in the *Western Times*, under the title „Serious Mutiny. Crew Capture a Russian Battleship" (1905, June 29, p. 4), in the *Aberdeen Journal*, entitled „The Russian Disorders. Mutiny on a Battleship" (1905, June 29, p. 5), and in the *Edinburgh Evening News*, under the title „The mutiny on a Russian Battleship" (1905, June 29, p. 3).

Gloucestershire Echo mentioned as the primary cause of revolt „the Russian methods of discipline" that „have brought things to a pretty pass at the important Black Sea port of Odessa". „The circumstances which have led up to this desperate situation are painfully simple. There is naturally a good deal of disaffection in the Russian Navy, and it has recently been fanned by events at home, bad treatment, and brutal methods of repressing complaints", concluded the author of the article (1905, June 29, p. 3).

More interested in the character and the evolution of the movement from Odessa was the *Nottingham Evening Post*, that reports: „It may fairly be said that the mob have devastated the entire harbor. All the warehouse and four or five Russian steamers have been burned. Several Cossacks have been killed and some 300 of the rioters. The military are rapidly restoring order. A great amount of merchandise has been destroyed" (1905, June 29, p. 4).

The news of the mutiny shocked Tsar Nicholas II, who immediately met with his cabinet to devise a plan for suppressing the rebellion. They had decided to send three battleships, a light cruiser, and four torpedo-boats to capture the *Potemkin*. But their task was not as simple as it seems. At the first confrontation with the mutineers, about 40 members of the crew of the battleship *Georgii Pobedonosets* (*St. George the Victorious*) seized control of it and joined the *Potemkin* in mutiny. But the overwhelming majority of *St. George's* crew opposed the mutiny, so the mutineers were obliged to surrender. At the same time, the training ship *Prut*, with a crew of 175 men, led by *Tsentralka* activist A.M. Petrov, wanted to join the *Potemkin* and to spark a fleet-wide mutiny, but their efforts were thwarted by the torpedo boat *Zhutkii* and the destroyer *Stremitelny*, who forced it to surrender. Demoralized by the failures of their fellow mutineers, and lacking coal and provisions, the sailors on *Potemkin* headed for the Romanian port of Constantza, to resupply (Zebroski, 2003, pp. 20-21).

This development of events was widely reported by British press. Thus, on 17/30 June, the *London Daily News* wrote: „Vice-Admiral Kruger, with four warships from Sevastopol, is expected at Odessa this evening. His orders are to summon the *Kniaz Potemkin* to surrender, and if she refuses, to sink her; after which he is to assist in the restoration of order in the town”. It was also mentioned the possibility of spreading the rebellion into the other military ships brought in Odessa to force the *Potemkin* to surrender: „The events at Odessa, Libau, and, according to the latest advice, at Reval, reveal such a state of disaffection that even in official circles it is doubted whether the gunners of the Black Sea warships will fire on the *Kniaz Potemkin*. On the other hand, should the crews mutiny and lead the rioters against the soldiery, they would form an armed and organized force which would most probably be joined by a section of the troops” (1905, June 30, p. 7).

In conclusion, the *London Daily News* had drawn attention to the impact of the latest events on the Tsarist authorities and on the empire's public image: „The news has opened the eyes of those who hitherto been most obstinately blind to the danger threatening the country. A reaction has now come, and a revolution is not only admitted as possibility, but the word is even being applied to the present occurrences. It may be said without exaggeration that the Odessa mutiny has made a far greater impression on the ruling classes than the defeats in Manchuria and the annihilation of the Baltic Fleet combined” (1905, June 30, p. 7).

Besides the interest awakened by an insurrection broke out in one of the rival Powers, and the compassion for its victims, the British press was very interested in the situation of citizens and goods from „the Island”. „This aggressive movement caused great excitement throughout the city, and added fuel to the disturbances which had already begun. *The Standard* correspondent at Odessa, wiring late last night, says: The quarantine station, the harbor warehouse, stores, offices, and some of the Russian shipping have been fired by the revolutionary bands in the town. The whole of the buildings are in flames, which are now brilliantly illuminating the whole portion of the city toward the sea. All the foreign ships are preparing to slip their mooring in the case of need. (...) Great anxiety prevails in English shipping circles with regard to the position of the many British vessels now at Odessa” (1905, June 29, *Lincolnshire Echo*, p. 2).

The terrifying news from Odessa had created anxiety, also, in the House of Commons, so the Members of Parliament had requested answers and explanations about the safety of the British citizens

and their property: „Sir Albert Rollit asked the Prime Minister whether any precautionary measures were intended to be taken regarding the matter for the protection of British lives and shipping and other property in the Black Sea” (1905, June 30, *Aberdeen Journal*, p. 6). But Mr. Balfour gave a vague answer „it is difficult to say what precautions can be taken regarding disorders which take place in a town not under British jurisdiction” (1905, June 30, *Aberdeen Journal*, p. 6).

The Concern of the Members of Parliament was entitled, because at the time of the revolt, in the port of Odessa there were a significant number of British ships: „The following is the list of merchant steamers in Odessa harbor: *Iran, Orestes, Cranley, Omega, Para, Frederick, Knight, Eastfield, Thistledu, Soldier, Prince, Jelunga, Florio Rubattino*, and *Austrian-Lloyd* boat, and a steamer belonging to the *Messageries Maritime Company*. Most of the foregoing vessels are British, but it is thought likely that some of them have been able to leave the port” (1905, June 30, *Manchester Courier*, p. 7).

Russia was on a powder keg but she was still trying to keep up the appearances, so after sending its warships in Odessa, the Tsarist authorities hurried to announce through diplomatic channels that the insurgents had surrendered and the situation was under control. The news was immediately published in the British press: „Mr. Keenan, United States Consul at Odessa, telegraphs to the State department that firing there ceased soon after the arrival of the Admiral Kruger's squadron today, and the *Kniaz Potemkin* surrendered immediately without firing a shot” (1905, July 1, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, p. 6). *London Daily News* also reported that the revolt was suppressed: „The naval mutineers at Odessa have tamely surrendered to Admiral Kruger's Squadron without firing a shot. The Russian *moujik* has no stomach for real revolution when it comes to facing the gun which his fellow-peasant will fire at him when commanded by his superiors. Odessa has been partially destroyed, and hundreds of its citizens killed in this abortive attempt at revolt. The authorities having now gained the upper hand it is to be presumed that scores, if not hundreds, of rioters and sailors will suffer for their temerity by a slow death in the prisons of their country” (1905, July 1, p. 7).

Only two days after the assurances from the Tsarist authorities, the British press reported that the *Potemkin* battleship had escaped from „Kruger's ambush”, and headed for the port of Constanta (Kustendji). „The telegrams received from Odessa during the weekend have been contradictory in the extreme, but a message received early this morning from Kustendji, on Dobrudja, Roumania, points to the single conclusion that the rebel battleship *Kniaz Potemkin* has escaped from Odessa accompanied by a torpedo boat and another vessel, and is now in Roumanian waters. The report that she had surrendered, sent to Washington in an official message, was probably supplied to the American Consul by the authorities at Odessa, the latter still persisting in the statement that the vessel has been rescued from the hands of mutineers” (1905, July 3, *Manchester Courier*, p. 7).

On Sunday evening, 19 June/1 July, the *Potemkin* and No. 267 reached into Constantza harbor. A delegation composed of Major N. Negru, the Port Commandant, and his assistant, went out to meet the sailors. The mutineers on the *Potemkin* presented their situation and submitted a list of provisions they needed. They had, also, asked the Port Commandant to deliver 15 envelopes containing proclamations to the various European consulates in Constantza (Zebroski, 2003, p. 22).

In the brief proclamations the mutineers had mentioned the reasons for their revolutionary action and they guaranteed safe passage to all foreign vessels in the Black Sea, stating that their quarrel was strictly with the Russian government. Major N. Negru agreed to forward the letters to his government, guaranteeing that, at a minimum, an envelope would be delivered to the British consulate (Zebroski, 2003, p. 22).

On Monday, 21 June/3 July 1905, *Dundee Evening Telegraph* had presented a brief account about the battleship *Potemkin* entry into Constantza harbor and the insurgents encounter with the Roumanian port authorities: „The rebellious crew of the battleship *Kniaz Potemkin* accompanied by torpedo boat 267, anchored of Constantza within the three-mile limit this evening, firing the usual salute. The commander of the Roumanian Black Sea Division boarded the *Potemkin* and was received with the customary salute to his rank by a deputation of sailor. No officers were visible, and the sailors stated that their plans for future were not yet decided. Meanwhile they requested to be allowed to buy the necessary provisions and to take in water, which they were permitted to do pending the receipt by the Roumanian authorities of instructions from Bucharest” (1905, July 3, p. 2).

In the same day, *Gloucester Citizen* insisted on the demands of the insurgents and the possibility of them been granted political asylum: „The demand made on the Roumanian authorities for the supply of the ship's needs is likely to be an embarrassing one. The right of asylum in foreign territory by political refugees is well understood. But the case is somewhat different when the said refugees have purloined so tangible a piece of Tsar's property as a first-class battleship” (1905, July 3, p. 3).

The *Edinburgh Evening News*, pointed out that among the sailors had aroused diverging opinions about their future conduct: „Much excitement prevails on board the *Potemkin* owing to a difference of opinion among the leaders, some of whom want to land in Roumania, while others propose that they should return to Russia and join the other mutinous ships” (1905, July 3, p. 3). *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* had also mention the inflaming situation aboard: „The mutineers (...) have found the Roumanian authorities at the port of Kustendji, acting under orders from the capital, firmed to deal with than they expected, and are now in an extraordinary predicament. Yesterday they were without coal and without food, which were refused. (...) The Captain of the Port later offered terms to the mutineers, viz., to give up their ships, land without arms, and be treated as foreign deserters. These conditions, when submitted to the mutineers, raised serious dissensions on board the battleship, many being for accepting them, and others for returning to Odessa and bombarding the port” (1905, July 4, p. 7).

Taking advantage of the apparent Russian weaknesses in suppressing the mutiny, the Austro-Hungarian press reported somewhat ironic that Russian authorities waited for Romania, to resolve a situation that they had been unable to solve. *Dublin Daily Express* took account about their Austrian colleagues, presenting also the firm position adopted by the Roumanian authority in full contrast with the clumsiness of the Tsarist Vice-Admiral: „The Vienna correspondent of the *Morning Post* declares this to be the prevailing belief in the Austrian capital, and Hungarian as well as Austrian newspapers are quoted as affirming that the *Kniaz Potemkin* was cheered by all the crews of Admiral Kruger's squadron when steaming defiantly out of Odessa Roads. It would see as if Russia was likely to be ultimately indebted to the Government of Roumania for doing for her what she has so egregiously

failed to do for herself in bringing the mutinous battleship once more under authority. The crew of the *Kniaz Potemkin* have certainly been placed in a dilemma by the action of the Roumanian authorities at Kustenji, under the orders sent them from Bucharest. Having steered their ship to Kustenji, the mutineers required food. They received, however, only the conditional Assurance that if they would give up their ship and come ashore as foreign deserters they could count on the privilege of asylum, but that while they retained possession of a warship belonging to a foreign State they could not be permitted to obtain food or other supplies in a Roumanian port” (1905, July 5, p. 4).

The authorities answer did not please the mutineers, so they left the Roumanian territorial waters: „Under such circumstances it will be no easy matter even for the enterprising crew of the *Kniaz Potemkin* to make their way back from the inhospitable port of Kustenji to the vicinity of their friends and sympathizers at Odessa” (1905, July 5, p. 4).

In the days that followed, news and contradictory rumors were coming from all directions with an amazing pace. *Portsmouth Evening News*, noted in the 5th July edition, that the *Potemkin* has arrived in Theodosia and „has asked for coal, provision and a doctor” (1905, July 5, p. 5). The information was strengthened a few lines further: „the Russian sailors state that the *Stremitelni* came straight from Odessa, which proves that the *Kniaz Potemkin* has taken another direction” (1905, July 5, p. 5).

But in the same day, *Aberdeen Journal* asserted that: „The *Kniaz Potemkin* took on board over 1000 tons of coal before leaving Odessa” and „she is therefore able to continue cruising for some weeks” (1905, July 5, p.5). *Sheffield Evening Telegraph* also noted that the battleship was seen in the port of Odessa (1905, July 5, p. 3), and *Lancashire Evening Post* indicates that „the crew of the mutineer battleship *Kniaz Potemkin* yesterday raided a village in the vicinity of Odessa and seized a number of cattle which they took on board” (1905, July 5, p. 2).

We don't know where the confusion came from but the next day the majority of the British press announced that the mutineer battleship had arrived in Theodosia, Crimea, and „had asked for coal, provisions, and a doctor” (1905, July 6, *Western Times*, p. 4). The crew have also „issued a declaration to the foreign Powers informing them that a decisive struggle has begun against the Russian Government, and adding: *We consider it our duty to declare that we give a complete guarantee of inviolability to foreign ships navigating the Black Sea and to foreign ports thereof*” (1905, July 6, *Western Times*, p. 4).

So the *Potemkin* steamed into Theodosia on 22 June/4 July. On 6 July they have received on board the town representatives, demanding „the delivery of 500 tons of coal, besides supplies of meat, lard, cattle, mineral oil, tobacco and matches, within 24 hours, during which time the crew would remain on board. In case of non-compliance with this demand, the authorities were informed that the inhabitants would be given notice to quit the town, which would then be bombarded” (1905, July 7, *London Daily News*, p. 7). The governor agreed to deliver the provision, „but refused to supply the coal on the ground that there was none in the town”. The authorities' decision has annoyed the mutineers, so, the next day, at nine o'clock a group of armed sailors landed on the shore of Theodosia. But they were met by infantry fire. „Two of the occupants were killed, while seven sprang overboard, but were saved” (1905, July 7, *London Daily News*, p. 7). The incident was also reported by the *Northampton Mercury*: „She endeavored to seize some colliers, but troops fired on the mutineers from the shore, and they

abandoned the attempt. The *Potemkin* however, seized some coal from a British steamer” (1905, July 7, p.8).

Hunted by an entire Russian fleet, and putted to flight by the Theodosia's authorities, the demoralized ship's commission decided to return to Constanza, „with the exception of Matuschenko, the leader of the mutiny, who resisted for some time, and wished to blow up the ship” (1905, July 10, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, p. 6).

On 25th June/ 7th July, the *Potemkin* steamed into the harbor and surrendered the battleship to Romanian authorities (Zebroski, 2003, p. 23). „The Roumanian flag now floats over the *Kniaz Potemkin* and the consort torpedo boat” headlined the *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, on Monday's edition, 10th July 1905. „A deputation from the *Kniaz Potemkin* rowed ashore this morning, to treat the terms of surrender, and they were received by the General Commanding the district, the Commander of the Roumanian Black Sea Division, and the port captain”, wrote the *Aberdeen Journal* (1905, July 10, p.5). „They offered to surrender the *Kniaz Potemkin*, and the torpedo boat on the same terms as were offered to them by the Roumanian authorities last Monday”, continued the Scottish newspaper, adding that the mutineers wished to offer the possession of the battleship to the Romanian Government. But the offer was, naturally, declined.

The population of Constanța sympathizes with the mutineers, and had received them well, in the disapproval of a Russian agent which reported that the sailors were „greeted as hero's ant as criminals as they should have been” (Zebroski, 2003, p. 23). The surrender took place at one o'clock, the mutineers would convey to any frontier they choose, being set at liberty (1905, July 10, *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*, p. 6).

One with another the Tsarist authorities were satisfied that an embarrassing episode was over. In this regard, The London „Express”, Odessa correspondent alleged: „I have excellent reasons for stating that the end of the *Potemkin* affair is highly satisfactory to Russia, and that indeed a quiet hint had been conveyed to Roumania that such a settlement would welcomed in St. Petersburg. Russia will, no doubt, make show of indignation at Roumania for her *unfriendly act* in setting the rebels free, but all such representations will be received, as the French say, with *the tongue in the cheek*”. (1905, July 10, Dublin Daily Express).

6. Results

As stated in the introductory chapter of this work, most often the media perception, based on the impressions of the moment - fruits of fleeting emotions and passions - differs from the critical analysis of historiography. In some cases, an event with a minor political importance can benefit from overexposure in the media, the actors involved, the purpose and the results, being modest compared with the record newspaper articles. We believe that the same thing has happened in the case of the mutiny on *Potemkin*.

Being perceived as a sign of vulnerability in the wall of tsarist government by the rival powers, the Russian sailors revolt has aroused great interest for the British press, which offered huge titles and generous columns in its pages. But the odyssey of the Russian battleship and its „fearless” crew, that had risen against arbitrary tsarist administration, had to end relatively quickly and without fanfare.

Hunted by the powerful Russian fleet led by the vice-Admiral Krieger and chased away with gunfire in Odessa and Theodosia, the mutineers on the Potemkin had to surrender in the hands of the Romanian authorities, just days after refusing their offer. Beyond the media mystification, the mutiny on Potemkin was an unsuccessful attempt to determine a general strike in the Black Sea and then across all Russia. Therefore, despite their glorification by the British media and by the population of Constanta, who received them like heroes, the leaders of the mutiny failed to persuade even their own comrades on the ship, and about triggering a general strike, it proved to be an illusory plan from the beginning. So we believe that the analysis of the articles dedicated to the mutiny on the battleship Potemkin by the British press showed that the emotion of the moment may give to particular events an unduly high allure, and this ascertainment may serve to the historian in positioning toward to information provided by the press, in analyzing the facts.

7. Conclusions

The mutiny on the Potemkin showed to a great public the serious problems faced by the Russian state and society in the early twentieth century. Even if the mutiny on Potemkin has not reached its goals, the profound political, economic and social problems would escalate over time, and in 1917 they would give the coup de grace to the autocratic power on St. Petersburg. As has been demonstrated, the British press has watched closely the events in Russia, because of the aversion of the two Great Powers, and also because Britain faced similar problems, even if not so severe as those in the eastern empire. The rivalry between the two states made the stories in the British press to be favorable for the insurgents, until the conclusion of the mutiny, presenting them as victims of the Russian autocratic regime. However, after the agreement with Russia in 1907, the British government and press have shown more tolerance on the political and legislative excesses of their new allies, the vehement tone and criticism being directed with predilection towards the German-speaking Powers of the Triple Alliance.

References

- Aberdeen Journal
- Dublin Daily Express
- Dundee Evening Telegraph.
- Edinburgh Evening News
- Exeter and Plymouth Gazette.
- Gloucester Citizen.
- Gloucestershire Echo
- Lancashire Evening Post
- Lincolnshire Echo.
- London Daily News
- Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser.
- Northampton Mercury
- Nottingham Evening Post
- Portsmouth Evening News
- Sheffield Evening Telegraph
- Western Times,
- Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer,
- Bascomb, N. (2007). *Red Mutiny: Eleven Fateful Days on the Battleship Potemkin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

- Zebroski, R. (2003). The Battleship Potemkin and its Discontents, 1905. In Bell, C. M., & Elleman, B. A., Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective. (pp. 9-31). London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd.
- Surh, G.D. (1989). 1905 in St. Petersburg: Labor, Society, and Revolution. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.