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SOVIET DISTRICT NEWSPAPERS OF THE NOVGOROD
PROVINCE

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Abstract

In the beginning of the 20th century cooperative printed media began to appear in the Novgorod province in large numbers along with the official periodicals. This resulted from the active development of this movement in Russia. The freedom of the press introduced by the Provisional Government contributed to the emergence of plenty of periodicals. The significant thematic similarity of the agenda of these printed media, mainly writing about important historical events of this period, bound the newspapers in many ways. However, slight differences in the content and formal approaches to work permit us to point out each periodical's distinctive features. The article dwells on the content and design of the Novgorod provincial newspapers of the early XX century. One of the author's objectives is to show the initial continuity and gradual abandonment of printed periodical pre-revolutionary formats. The periodicals appeared during the period of drastic political changes in Russia and became a kind of foundation on which a new type of Soviet printed media and new approaches to presenting information was built. The formation of new types of periodicals was influenced by the position their printed organ occupied. The official newspaper of the Novgorod province "The Bulletin of the Novgorod Council of Workers, Soldiers, and Peasants' Deputies" was a source of official information for the population, which greatly affected its popularity. But its gradual rejection of publishing local news negatively affected the newspaper. At the same time cooperative media had greater freedom in the publication content, but less financial stability.

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Keywords: Councils, Novgorod province, press, "The Unity", "The Novgorod Council Bulletin", "The Peasant-Cooperator"



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1. Introduction

In 1917-1918 the formation and development of Soviet printed periodicals was still largely based on the experience of pre-revolutionary publications. Years later the Soviet press did develop its own style. It is impossible not to take into account the experience of the Soviet press when developing modern mass media.

Having emerged in a difficult period of radical socio-political changes, the periodicals of the Novgorod province that have been closely studied, are said to have fundamentally evolved over a short period of their existence. At the same time, they left a significant mark in the history of the Novgorod region. The newspaper's working methods in difficult social conditions; the implementation of effective forms of influencing the audience, communication with its readers can now be used in modern journalistic activities.

In the years 1917-1918, new types of mass media were being formed. They were in demand until the very end of the existence of the Soviet Union and could be found everywhere on its territory. "In this regard, the issue of the continuity of the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary stages of Russia's development is becoming especially acute" (Akulshin & Grebenkin, 2019, p. 295). "The Bulletin of the Novgorod Council of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies" (also known as "The Novgorod Izvestiya") was chosen in order to expand on the topic. This periodical had been appointed the main official newspaper of the province for more than a year. The author also studied two cooperative periodicals of different districts that appeared at the same time as "The Novgorod Bulletin", they are "The Unity" of Staraya Russa district and "The Peasant-Cooperator" of Cherepovets district. Observation and content analysis methods have been used in the course of study allowing to consider the formal-content characteristics of the chosen newspapers in various aspects.

2. Problem Statement

The emergence and formation of councils throughout the country was chaotic, as it always happens in revolutionary periods. "In March 1917, the majority of Russian liberal and socialist intelligentsia welcomed Emperor Nicholas II's abdication from the throne" (Sushko, 2018, p. 48). But even at that moment when revolutionary events were only gaining momentum, the issue of future power's form and organization arose. The Petrograd Council was created and at the same time the Provisional Committee of the State Duma was formed.

The national crisis caused by the protracted war <...> and the revolutionary events in Petrograd <...> led to the fact that the State Duma took control of the country in order to create a government enjoying the confidence of the population. (Chudakov, 2013, p. 59)

Councils soon began to appear in various parts of Petrograd, and later the all-Russian system of councils began to take shape. "The committees that arose on the masses' initiative became the first truly democratic local authorities. They included representatives of all population groups, organizations and institutions" (Drobchenko, 2014, p. 84). The power then came upwards as larger administrative councils

were elected by subordinate committees. However, there was no uniformity in their activities, which created bias. Despite this, the system was built. Thus, on March 2, 1917, the 179th reserve regiment of the Novgorod province announced the formation of a regimental council of soldiers' deputies (Tropov, 2008, p. 83).

The Petrograd Council created a literary and publishing commission, which launched "The Bulletin of the Petrograd Council of Workers 'and Soldiers' Deputies". "In those days, the council's newspaper was the only periodical published in the capital, which was covered by a general strike. It was also the only means of information for the city residents" (Rachkovsky & Fedorov, 2019, p. 879). Following their example, all the councils tried to launch their bulletins to attract people to side up.

Due to the censorship abolition, the number of printed periodicals was actively growing. "Although military censorship remained intact, civilian, home front censorship was abolished despite the World War I. Editors' arrests and fines were a thing of the past as well as the white spots on the site of forbidden materials in newspapers and magazines" (Kosykh, 2017, p. 99). Back in March, the Provisional Government introduced rights and freedoms for Russian citizens, which they had never had before. Freedom of the press was among them, which contributed to the increase in the number of printed media. Publishers and journalists regarded the Provisional Government's April Decree "On the Press" as the Press law. The very first paragraph was of a particular importance to them, as it read: "Publishing and periodical sales are free. The application of administrative penalties to them is not allowed. This free press position lasted until the fall, when the Provisional Government introduced military censorship, and in March 1918, the Commissariat of Press, Agitation and Propaganda was established, which worked until February 1919 (Dubentsov, 2019, p. 713).

3. Research Questions

- 3.1. Did the editorial policy of the official printed media differ from the position of the cooperative newspaper?
- 3.2. Did the founder influence any of the external and formal content characteristics of the printed media?
- 3.3. How much did the situation in the country affect the work of district printed media?

4. Purpose of the Study

To identify similarities and differences in the editorial policy and formal-substantive characteristics of district printed periodicals at the beginning of the 20th century.

5. Research Methods

Content analysis of periodical issues, including their thematic, genre and author aspects was applied while conducting the study as it is one of the main techniques used for historical studies in the field of journalism. The newspapers under study are stored in the newspaper fund of the Russian National Library, which makes it possible to access the archive of the relevant issues. In addition, formal design characteristic

assessment methodology was used, including its comparative aspect. A quantitative analysis of the reviewed issues of periodicals permitted us to draw additional conclusions.

6. Findings

The party press organs were necessary, first of all, in order to attract as many people as possible, because the preparations for the Constituent Assembly elections were actively underway. These were “attempts made by the authorities to initiate a dialogue with the masses, to influence only their consciousness, without resorting to force methods” (Shilovsky, 2018, p. 196).

In the provinces council members were looking for any opportunity to launch their own press organ, that is, their local bulletin. These newspapers published the most important news about the Provisional Government, as well as various official documents. Such was “The Bulletin of the Novgorod Council”.

The first issue of the newspaper “The Bulletin of the Novgorod Council of Workers, Soldiers and Peasants' Deputies” (“The Novgorod Izvestiya”) was published on April 28 (May 10), 1917, that is, only two weeks after the councils were formed in the province.

The “Novgorod Izvestiya”, in its content, was a universal newspaper, typical for the beginning of the 20th century. One could find there not only educational texts, but also feuilletons, stories, military and city chronicles.

In accordance with the decree issued by the 179th regiment, a call for uniting around the Novgorod Council was already heard in the editorial. The call to donate money to the periodical, subscribe to it and send materials was regularly published on its pages. The contents of the first issue, as well as the subsequent ones, were in one way or another devoted to the Social Revolutionary program. Naturally, this was not spoken directly.

The contents of “The Novgorod Izvestiya” comprised materials reprinted from The Petrograd Council Bulletin as well as their own unique ones. The periodical was filled not only with news from the provincial center but with texts submitted by the readers from different districts. The headings were straightforward and reflected the essence of the texts placed there: “Novgorod Life”, “Soldier Life”, “Workers’ Life”, “Peasant Life”, “Military Life”, “Party Life”, “Letters to the Village”, “Telegrams”, “Latest News”, “From Other Newspapers”, “Letters to the Editor”, “Announcements”, “Little Feuilleton” (Ivanova, 2019, p. 141).

The texts published in “The Novgorod Izvestiya” were written primarily for the general public. It is worth saying that at that time most of the country's population was slightly literate or illiterate at all. Educating was one of the main tasks of the newspaper of that time. Therefore, the authors were looking for an opportunity to make their materials accessible to everyone. For example, in issue 28th of “The Novgorod Izvestiya” the Socialist’s Dictionary was published, which explained such words as “freedom” and “constitution”.

The first seven issues of “The Novgorod Izvestiya” were issued in A3 format, and the subsequent ones, in A2. Over the time, the layout also changed. In the first issue there were only two columns, while in the second there were already three. And by October 1917 four of them had already been formed. There were no illustrations in the newspaper, except for small inserts in advertising blocks. Since February 1918, the newspaper had been published daily, except for holidays. This affected the number of pages in the

newspaper: in 1917, the issues contained 6-8 pages, but then the number did not exceed four. The newspaper was published in the Novgorod provincial printing house.

The newspaper, published in the provincial center, played a key role in the activities of councils at all levels on a provincial scale. Until October 1917, minor changes had taken place in the newspaper. After the October Revolution, the title of “The Novgorod Izvestiya” was also changed: the word “provincial” was added to it, which demonstrated a certain hierarchy. Afterwards, the names of some publishers whom the readers had not been aware of before became known.

In “The Novgorod Izvestiya”, some materials were anonymous, and one can even doubt the authenticity of the name in case the article was signed. Pseudonyms were readily used then. Nevertheless, “in the texts of publications <...> there are obvious stylistic roughnesses. This was the newspaper’s distinctive feature in comparison with other local printed media, in which local intelligentsia with good editorial experience took part” (Kozlov & Semyonova, 2018, p. 8).

The mismatch between people’s expectations after the overthrow of the monarchy and the reality led to new revolutionary events (Mironov, 2017, p. 711). The newspaper had changed a lot since the October events, which still receive conflicting opinions. In the article by Porshneva and Ulyanova, the October events are called a “coup” (Porshneva & Ulyanova, 2018, p. 762), while Nefedov considers them to be a revolution and says that “the few remaining opposition newspapers accused the Bolsheviks of provoking ordinary people with “false” and “empty” promises (Nefedov, 2018, p. 170). The same happened with “The Novgorod Izvestia”: relatively neutral texts about the Bolsheviks became much sharper. Two months after the October Revolution, changes took place both in the editorial office, in the political orientation, and in the publications of the Novgorod Izvestia. Afterwards, the Bolshevization of the periodical took place. And along with this, many official documents were published.

In 1918, “The Izvestia” was in search of a new form of news reporting. In addition, the periodical passed under the influence of the Social Revolutionaries into the hands of the Bolsheviks. But these changes did not allow to create a uniform design for all issues (Rachkovsky & Fedorov, 2019).

Since February 1918, “The Izvestiya” was the only official newspaper in the Novgorod province (after the closure of “The Novgorod Provincial Gazette” on February 1 (14), 1918 (Kozlov, 2012, p. 16)). Short news was then replacing long texts, and the language from “alive” turned into dry and official. Local news was relegated to the background, while foreign news was increasingly appearing on the pages of the periodical. Until March 1918, one could still find there texts sent by readers to the editor, but later the situation changed dramatically and the usual headings and advertising disappeared from the newspaper pages.

As soon as April 1918, the newspaper placed ads calling to send in texts. Such headings as “City Chronicle” and “District Chronicle” appeared. In other words, the editors tried to re-establish contact with readers and publish more local news, which was more interesting to local residents.

Starting with issue No. 88 of February 14, 1918, the content of the publication was shared. The last two pages were occupied by the “Official Part”. “The Novgorod Provincial Gazette” used to subdivide its materials in a similar way. Decrees and appeals were now published in the official part, and analytical materials in the unofficial. But the pages of the newspaper no longer included news from readers: an

administrative-territorial reform was carried out, due to which the province was almost halved. Accordingly, many contacts that the periodical had maintained before were lost.

Within just a year and a half of its existence, "The Izvestia of the Novgorod Council of Workers', Soldiers' and Peasants' Deputies" preferred to focus on all-Russian news, changing the headings and the style of material presentation. A total number of 307 issues had come out before "The Izvestiya" was replaced by "The Zvezda", a party newspaper.

Official provincial periodicals tried to find new forms of presenting information, but as it has been noted above, they could not get away from the councils' central guideline and were forced to work under given conditions. However, the need for additional coverage of current events for an illiterate district audience existed. These functions were performed by non-state newspapers that appeared in large numbers in district cities. The revolutionary transformations in the country stimulated the cooperative movement, which was actively and rapidly developing in the young Soviet country. Cooperative printed media were created to promote these ideas. Though often short-lived, they left a mark in the history of journalism. Among them there are such newspapers as "The Peasant-Cooperator" of the Cherepovets district and "The Unity", a district newspaper of Staraya Russa. The former of these periodicals is represented in the archive by only one number, but is of interest to specialists. The newspaper was published weekly on 12 pages, positioned itself as a political and public newspaper, declaring its task "to unite the activities of cooperatives with the local Council of Peasant Deputies." The newspaper was distributed by retail vendors and subscription. "The Peasant-Cooperator" reported on its publishers to be the Board of the Cherepovets Union of Cooperatives, and the editor - A. I. Gukovsky. Besides, it also indicated the exact address of the editorial office, which was rare at that time. In content, the newspaper also belonged to the universal type, like most newspapers of that period. However, in addition to official messages, various documents and advertisements, the newspaper also contained articles and publications of a cooperative, scientific and literary nature as well as reports on regional life events. In addition to the texts of its own authors, the newspaper accepted readers' manuscripts written "clearly indicating the author's exact address, name and surname. Anonymous articles aren't accepted". Individuals could not only send their articles by mail, but also bring them to a personal reception, the exact hours of which were announced in the newspaper.

The two-column layout of the newspaper was explained by the small format of the page, which distinguished it from the larger "Izvestiya". However, the stylistic design the periodical well fitted the frames traditional for the time, namely lack of decorative elements, zoning on the page with lines and simple frames, emphasizing with a slightly increased bold. The content of the only available issue of the newspaper does not make it possible to systematize it, however it reveals obvious differences from the official press. The war theme, for example, which at that time could not be circumvented in any periodical, was considered through the prism of local problems, raising issues of desertion, meat and butter sales to citizens, etc., and reports from district villages were related to the problems of local economy and rural administration.

However, we have to note common formal features. The headings, as with all newspapers of that period, included both regular ones and individual ones that appeared "on occasion," and did not have a clear link to the column. But each periodical had its own system of arranging materials on its pages, which they tried to adhere to in most cases. This approach was traditional both for official printed media and any other, and was associated primarily with the layout principles of that time.

Another newspaper called "The Unity" which was the joint periodical of the Staraya Russa Council of Soldiers, Workers and Peasants' Deputies and Cooperative Unions was published on June 8, 1917. It existed a little more than six months and released 53 numbers, the last appearing on December 31, 1917. The newspaper had an executive editor F. F. Petunov, who due to a party conflict in October ceased to fulfill his editorial duties. Then, the newspaper was issued by the editorial commission.

The newspaper was published twice a week (Sunday and Thursday), the format was close to A2, the volume was from 4 to 8 pages. The decor consisted of various ornaments used as separators on pages, mainly bird or insect images sometimes accompanied literary materials. Only framed ads significantly stood out and occupied up to a third of a page. The principles of rubrication did not differ from those noted above, but for their own preferences for placing materials on pages.

Despite the fact that a significant part of the newspaper's texts was clearly propaganda, which brought the periodical closer to the official *Izvestia*, a lot of space was occupied by readers' materials sent to the editor's office on various topics, confirming the status of the "public" newspaper, which was marked out since the second issue in the heading. Like all universal printed media, "The Unity" published documents and protocols of cooperative partnerships, texts on pressing issues of district life, including news of a criminal, domestic, family nature along with official announcements. Filling the gaps in its readers' education, the newspaper published educational articles, including political ones. This difficult analytics, confusing for the mass audience of that time, was diluted with literary texts, including poetic ones, mainly created by readers of the newspaper.

It should be noted separately what active citizens were those readers who sent letters to the editor with stories from their personal lives related to current events in the country, trying to describe their biography facts, which became the objects of public attention. Often a readers' controversy ensued right on the pages, supported by the editorial board with the publication of such "stories with continuation". The newspaper focused not only on political, but also on social issues discussed by readers: lack of money and food, shortage of goods, and drunkenness in villages. The thematic and genre palette of this periodical is much wider than that of the newspapers presented above, i.e. the degree of universality of "The Unity" is higher than that of most such periodicals. It allows to say that the newspaper initiated the transition from universal publications of the early XX century to the mass periodicals of the Soviet period.

7. Conclusion

Despite certain differences in the content of the examined newspapers, there is a significant similarity both in the external their design and substantive and thematic part. This is understandable in an acute socio-political situation which those periodicals existed in. The First World War, which the country was drawn into, as well as the revolutionary transformations within it, had a significant impact on all spheres of the population's life. The press was only a reflection of the problematic situation, trying to cover other topics on its pages, pushing the limits of readers' interest. The official "Izvestia", which gradually rejected readers' materials, failed to rectify the situation with feedback until the end of its existence, despite appeals to the audience. Having lost interest in official reports, the public had the opportunity to read and speak out about their own problems on the pages of other newspapers.

However, this interest did not save the newspaper from economic collapse: an illiterate, poor audience could not ensure the continued existence of newspapers. If the official press had some financial advantages, then cooperative media were in a far weaker position, which ultimately led to their closure in spite of having ambitious plans.

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