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**POLITICAL REPRESSIONS OF THE STALINIST REGIME AND  
JOURNALISM OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

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**Abstract**

A comprehensive study of formation of the mass media system and propaganda of the national regions of the North Caucasus after the Bolshevik Party came to power as an ideological tool of the totalitarian regime is a necessary condition for understanding the patterns of development of regional journalism. Journalism was used by the authorities as a tool of socio-political management of society and a means of forming authoritarian-totalitarian thinking. This aspect of the activity of the Bolshevik press system in the North Caucasian regions remains little explored. In addition, in the historical and journalistic literature, the assessment of the activities of regional journalism in the 20–30s of the last century is far from unambiguous. The topic of repression against the small intelligentsia of national regions during the years of the red terror remains a blank spot in scientific research. Journalists became victims of Bolshevik tyranny. In the North Caucasus, during the years of socialist modernization, this stratum was almost eliminated. The leadership of the Bolshevik Party built a rigid vertical of power, using repression against the opposition, most often imaginary. Meanwhile, the time has come when it is necessary to revise some assessments and theses of research carried out in the era of communist authoritarianism. The article attempts to identify the features of the repressive policy of the Stalinist regime against the first writers, publicists, and press activists of the autonomous regions of the North Caucasus.

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## **1. Introduction**

An important component of the Soviet totalitarian regime was party journalism, which played a leading role in the ideological support of mass repression. They were directed primarily against the intelligentsia, which represented the main threat to the power of the Bolshevik party democracy. In the national outskirts, where the educated stratum was just emerging, the consequences of the "red terror" turned out to be especially severe and irreplaceable.

Stalin's tyranny did not bypass journalists, although they made a significant contribution to the manipulation of mass consciousness, the formation of the cult of party leaders, and the justification of the repression deployed in the country. In foreign Sovietology and in the works of Russian historians of the post-Soviet period, the repressive policy of Stalinism to destroy political figures, scientists, engineers, doctors, priests is considered at a sufficient level. At the same time, the issues of persecution of ideological fighters of the party – journalists (in particular, this concerns the North Caucasus) remain in the shadows. These issues are addressed in the works of the Western Sovietologist Avtorkhanov (1976, 1990). His analysis of the Bolshevik Party's practice of forming a system of journalism in the North Caucasus is of informal academic interest primarily because he was not only a witness, but a direct participant in the key events that took place in the North Caucasus in the 30s of the XX century. At the same time, the issues of the history of regional journalism occupy a small place in his vast scientific heritage. The problem of the interaction of authoritarian power and journalism is considered in sufficient detail in the works of Zhirkov (2017), Toboltseva (2004), Goryaeva (2009), Volkova (2013). However, the object of their research was the national policy on the formation of totalitarian journalism, and the issues of its implementation in national regions were practically not studied in these works.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In Russian and foreign historiography, the issues of the organization by the Bolshevik Party of total control over the mass media of the North Caucasian autonomies remain little explored. In the few works on the history of journalism of the region, carried out even after the collapse of the communist regime, there are still stereotypes characteristic of Soviet science. In our opinion, the time has come when it is necessary to revise some of the assessments and theses of these studies, to show to what extent local journalism suffered during the years of mass repression. The relevance of the research topic is also because in modern Russia, against the background of the growth of the opposition movement, there is a noticeable tendency to restrict independent journalism on the part of the state, journalists are increasingly becoming victims of the authoritarian regime. This problem is now particularly acute in the republics of the North Caucasus. It is safe to say that society has not yet fully learned the lessons from the practice of Stalinist totalitarianism.

## **3. Research Questions**

Characteristics of the national policy of the Bolshevik Party in the North Caucasus, in particular, in the field of journalism, forms of ideological support of political repressions of the 1920s–1930s in the region.

#### 4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to determine the contribution of North Caucasian journalism to the formation of the Stalinist totalitarian system, to identify the features of the organization of repression against the leading publicists of the North Caucasus.

#### 5. Research Methods

The methodological basis of the research was the principle of historicism, which allows us to identify the relationship and interdependence of social processes and the functioning of the press in concrete historical conditions. At the same time, the article uses methods of actualization and retrospective analysis when analyzing the representativeness of certain sources and historiographical conclusions.

#### 6. Findings

In the history of Soviet journalism, there are enough examples of using the media to crackdown on dissidents. However, the large-scale repressions unleashed by the Bolshevik leadership of the country during the years of the so-called socialist construction do not go into any comparison. Party dictatorship and party censorship developed exponentially. Everything was decided by party structures, says Zhirkov, starting from the Politburo, its commission: sevens, fives, threes. The Bolshevik Party became a state within a state. The functions of state institutions, including censorship, were usurped by the party apparatus headed by the Politburo. In this supervisory work, a special role was played by General Secretary Stalin, on whose opinion and decision the opinion and decision of the entire Politburo depended (Zhirkov, 2017). Appeals to physically destroy the so-called *enemies of the people* flowed from the pages of publications. In Soviet propaganda, the stereotype of the *enemy* became one of the main ones. It was typical to stick labels. Unfortunately, one of the main, but far from positive roles in the play called *political repression* was played by journalism, in particular the press, writes Vidyaeva (2014). Soviet journalism took an active part in the creation of the cult of Stalin's personality. Praising in every way his foresight, wisdom in the victories achieved during the first five-year plans, she asserted in the minds of the masses the indisputability of his authority. The persistent pursuit of authoritarian ideology by the media contributed to the fact that it penetrated all spheres of not only the economic, but also the spiritual life of society, including journalism (Vidyaeva, 2014).

As a rule, the impetus for the next repressive campaign against one or another *anti-Soviet* group, invented by the party bureaucracy that usurped power in the country, was a speech at party events by Stalin or his close associates. More often, central Bolshevik publications gave the start, the main of which was the newspaper *Pravda*, which acted as a guardian of the principle of party membership, and in the 1930s the principle of *Bolshevik vigilance*. These articles were to be reprinted in the provinces. The incriminating

publications of Pravda were usually accompanied by the adoption of practical measures, which often led to repression against a person, institution, collective during the cult of personality (Zhirkov, 2017).

In the North Caucasus, not only central, but also regional newspapers acted as mentors in carrying out the party line in the local press. They reflected on their pages the spirit of party policy in the field of the press, interpreted the party leadership of the press as a rigid dictate. Thus, the local press under the close control of party committees turned into a tool, into a political press and a means of cracking down on dissent, into a conductor of the ideology of class struggle, into a means of cracking down on those who did not follow instructions and directives (Vidyaeva, 2014). Publications, in fact, became political denunciations, which became the basis for the institution of the case by law enforcement agencies.

Due to the peculiar mentality of the mountain peoples, close social ties characteristic of small ethnic groups, these processes in the North Caucasus had their own characteristics. It cannot be said that the mountain population meekly accepted the repressive policy of the authorities. Tekeeva (2003) writes:

Despite all the conflicts, the mountaineers gradually formed their own worldview, which did not always coincide with the official point of view of the current government. And therefore it was ruthlessly destroyed by loud slogans and total denigration of any dissent through the mass media of the region. (p. 29)

The repressive machine did not bypass journalism. Even diligent execution of instructions *from above* did not save editorial staff and talented publicists. Party committees were often accused of aiding the *enemies of the people* and editing of local publications. This was usually followed by the repressive measures against editors and authors. Thus, the journal *Revolutsia and Gorets* [Revolution and Highlander] indicates: “to be irreconcilable in the fight against deviations and vacillations from the party line (*right, left, nationalism, etc.*) and to achieve class clarity in the coverage of each issue” (Begeulov, 1929, p. 9). The article criticizes the Chechen newspaper *Serlo* [Light], which wrote about social justice in the distribution of land plots, in smearing the class essence of land management policy and the essence of Soviet democracy. The journal calls it to deploy proletarian self-criticism and take the shortcomings of the region under revolutionary fire. Even more went to the Ingush *Serdalo* [Light], which published the recommendations of a specialist for the spring sowing campaign. The newspaper was sharply criticized for the fact that “both materials and blanks are imbued with some kind of *zemstvo*, they speak faintly about the class attitude of the party in matters of sowing and increasing yields, they are purely *agronomic* and too *apolitical*” (Burina, 1929, p. 8).

The journal calls the editorial article in the Karachai newspaper *Taulu jarlyla* [Mountain Poor], devoted to the problems of cattle breeding development in the autonomous region, extremely apolitical. Its main mistake is recognized as “the absence of even a hint about our class policy, about the poor, the middleman, the attack on the kulak, about collective farm construction and its prospects” (Burina, 1929, p. 9).

The body of the North Caucasian regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the newspaper *Kolkhoznaya pechat'* in the article *Implementing Lenin 's national policy* makes a conclusion: “The press of the Circassian Autonomous Region has significantly strengthened and grown...

in the fight against the class enemy – the kulaks and their associates – right and left opportunists” (Babaevsky, 1931, p. 28).

On September 21, 1937, the Karachay-Cherkess regional Committee of the Bolsheviks All-Union Communist Party decided to exclude from the ranks of the party and bring to justice the former editor of *Taulu jarlyla* Gerbekov, "an exposed enemy of the people, who carried out subversive wrecking work in publishing on the instructions of the bandit Kurdjiev." On the same day, at a meeting of the bureau of the regional committee, the article *Karachay affairs* was considered. It was published in the newspaper *Pravda* on September 20, 1937, in which the regional press of Karachay was accused of losing "elementary Bolshevik vigilance." The editor of the newspaper *Къызыл Къарачай* [Krasny Karachay], Mahomet Kipkeev, was removed from office, who, in addition to "blatant political carelessness to uproot bourgeois nationalists," was accused of insufficient party activity and was deemed not worthy of political trust as the son of a mullah. Three months later, with the wording "for clogging the apparatus with alien elements, <...> making technical and political mistakes in the newspaper," Nikolai Visitsky, the editor of *Krasny Karachay*, was also dismissed from work. During the period from 1928 to 1937, the editors of the national regional newspaper were changed fourteen times (Magulaeva, 2010).

Sometimes the press acted as the initiator of repression against its writers. Thus, in one of the issues of Dagestanskaja Pravda, an article *Bourgeois nationalists in the editorial office of Zakhmetkesh* was published (Dadashev, 1937), which gave impetus to the harassment of colleagues from the editorial office of the only Tatar national newspaper in the region.

Bright editorial heads, publicists both in the province and in the center were subjected to repression. A member of the editorial board of *Pravda*, Koltsov, editors of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, Kostrov, Bubekin, publicist writer Tretyakov and many others were slandered and died. At the same time, this specific aspect of the activity of the Soviet press has not been studied enough, which does not allow today to draw lessons from it and avoid their repetition.

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A particularly tangible blow was dealt to the newly born intelligentsia of the national republics. Tekeeva writes that it is impossible not to admit that the national intelligentsia of the republics of the North Caucasus formed in the 30s was represented mainly by people loyal to the Soviet government. At the same time, it was the most ideologized part of the population and was subordinated to the administrative command system that was beginning to take shape.

It pursued a new ideology, used the forms and methods of ideological influence on the masses proposed by the Soviet government, but even as such, she could not avoid the repressions that took place in the mid and late thirties. It is hard to realize, but the press of the region, which has become an instrument of ideological influence on the masses, had to take part in the actual destruction of the national intelligentsia of the republics and regions of the North Caucasus. If it were possible to avoid this

monstrous injustice, the intelligentsia of the North Caucasus would be able to make a much greater contribution to the development of all spheres of science, technology, and art (Tekeeva, 2003, p. 37).

One of the organizers of the Chechen press, Oshaev (1997), assessed the disastrous consequences of repression for the development of national culture:

The ranks of the Chechen intelligentsia were thin, and the level of education was very low. And in 1937–1938, the intelligentsia was so shaken that there were stubs left of it. In particular, out of 12 members of the Union of Writers of Chechen-Ingushetia, 9 people were arrested, 7 people were convicted, 4 people were shot. I myself, a member of the Writers' Union since 1934, spent 14 years in prison, two of them in solitary confinement. (p. 74)

Of the six first editors of the Chechen–language newspaper *Serlo-Leninan Nek*, four were repressed.

Abdi Dudayev, who stood at the origins of Chechen literature and journalism, read his poems written on the death of one of the Bolshevik leaders Sergo Ordzhonikidze at the Republican Congress of writers. He finished the recitation to the stormy applause of the audience. Excited by this reception, he inadvertently mentioned that he would write even better when Stalin died. He paid dearly for these words: he was arrested for allegedly preparing a “terrorist act against Stalin” and shot (Avtorkhanov, 2003).

By 1938, almost all the publicists of the North Caucasus, who were at the origins of national writings, literatures and journalism, were shot or became prisoners of the GULAG. “Undoubtedly, the repressions affected first of all those”, writes Vidyaeva (2014),

Who had already shown themselves as a talented person, distinguished themselves by natural organizational abilities, knew how to unite the masses of people around themselves or any idea, was able to reflect and doubt, was not afraid to express their own opinion. (p. 82)

According to Zhirkov (2017), “no talent and no devotion to the idea could guarantee the free creative work of a publicist and a writer” (p. 63). The reason for the arrest could be an ordinary slander, a false denunciation caused by the envy of a colleague in the editorial office.

However, such vigilant control of fiscal authorities has not always been effective. Although the picture drawn by local newspapers did not correspond to the real state of things, the pages of North Caucasian publications sometimes got articles in which journalists were involuntarily forced to demonstrate the moods of people. So, in the Karachay newspaper *Taulu jarlyla* there was a publication by M. Khalilov about songs of anti-Soviet content that were popular among the people. The author, of course, in order to flagellate these counter-revolutionary couplets quotes excerpts from them:

If we don't drink a bucket of Bolshevik blood,  
We won't get drunk.  
And we will not leave a person in the Caucasus,  
Who will not say,  
There is no god but Allah (Khalilov, 1929, p. 14)

As a result of the permanent repressions of the Bolshevik regime against the intelligentsia, both old, established in the pre-revolutionary period, and nurtured under Soviet rule, serious damage was done to the culture of the peoples of Russia, in particular the field of journalism. According to Grashchenkov (2008):

One can only guess which works of human genius did not see the light, because their authors felt the destructive impact of the administrative system of power. For some, the tragic result of this contact was unwritten books, unplayed roles, unfinished art canvases, crippled destinies, broken biographies. Others had to pay with their own lives. (p. 88)

On the one hand, the press and radio broadcasting acted as an instrument of ideological support for repression, slandering the so-called opposition, in most cases at the behest of punitive agencies. On the other hand, the journalists themselves became victims of the Jesuit policy of totalitarianism. The regime destroyed the most gifted, active publicists. Sometimes their chairs were occupied by the same informers, sycophants, flatterers. writes Zhirkov (2017) writes: “The atmosphere of party permissiveness, bureaucracy, nomenclature, personality cult brought up in society a kind of figure near the journalism, which can be called an ideological, censor's baton” (p. 92).

It is difficult to explain the reasons for such a contradictory policy of Stalinism. It looks as if the Bolshevik Party was chopping down the branch on which it sits, destroying the *fighters of the ideological front* devoted to it. According to the Chechen writer and historian Oshaev, who experienced all the hardships of the GULAG, the party saw a threat precisely in the intelligentsia, which first of all could understand the tyrannical nature of the regime. "Why did Stalin take up arms against the intellectual stratum of our nations and society as a whole? – he recalls. – Because I could not feel calm under the eyes of understanding and thinking people: they would sooner or later start talking. The destruction of the spiritual leaders of the nation, the bearers of its conscience, memory, and roots was necessary for the tyrant to turn the peoples into a population, the population into a herd, and individuals into *cogs* (Kusaev, 2011).

This policy had a particularly negative impact on small nations, due to the low level of education. In words proclaiming the importance of the development of their culture, the party in practice destroyed the intelligentsia, which performed an educational role. For the Bolshevik party, the development of national cultures has never been a priority (Belik & Krysin, 2001). The goal was to spread a new ideology.

As Toboltseva (2004) rightly emphasizes, the implementation of the Cultural revolution by the Bolsheviks was connected not only with the manifestation of humanism and the desire to *liberate people from darkness and ignorance*, but also with the need to introduce the population into the sphere of Bolshevik ideological influence through the press and on this basis to form *an active builder of communism*, which meant members of society meekly fulfilling the instructions of the party leaders.

As a result, the newspaper has preserved evidence that casts doubt on the slogans proclaimed during the years of the construction of socialism about the *universal* support of the Bolshevik regime by the Highlanders. On the other hand, the appearance of such publications in Soviet publications proves that party functionaries, called upon to control the content of the press, were not particularly versed in such issues that require a certain level of education.

Under the dictates of the Bolshevik Party, the initiative was restrained and the independence of newspaper editorial offices and the possibility of displaying the creative potential of journalists were limited. There was no polemic in the publications, the texts were characterized by peremptory judgments, categorical statements, threats, sweeping and unsubstantiated accusations, labeling, calls for punitive bodies and authorities to be removed from their posts, to apply the most severe measures to those who allegedly carelessly treat their duties, do not share the views of leaders. Any attempt to sensibly evaluate the party's projects was regarded as sabotage. "Newspaper pages were filled with slogans, callings, appeals, numbers" writes Tkachenko (2013), a researcher of journalism during the collectivization period. "The presentation of the materials had pronounced signs of propaganda and was characterized by aggressiveness, belligerence and expression" (p. 85).

As a result, the press lost in authority, content, ideological orientation and effectiveness, efficiency of submission of materials, variety of genres, expressiveness and relevance of journalistic speeches, in popularity among readers. Thus, the press, primarily provincial, was losing the positions won in the 20s, especially in the initial period of its development. Khuako (1991) notes that in the 30s, the press was completely absorbed by the administrative and command management system. And in most cases it switched its original functions to the formation of false public opinion. Objective, sincere, vital publications gave way to letters of a denigrating, revealing nature. The *opinion* of people was formed in the highest levels of the administrative and command management system, went down through the press in the form of strict directives, and in response, newspapers widely published *letters of workers* thanking, rejoicing, assuring or, on the contrary, branding – depending on the needs of the day, of the moment. The press became entangled in the networks of various *installations* (Khuako, 1991). As Magulaeva emphasizes, an analysis of the publications of newspapers in Karachay shows that in the late 1920s – the first half of the 1930s, the national press increasingly lost the educational orientation peculiar to it at the first stage of development and developed as an instrument of ideological and organizational support for party decisions (Magulaeva, 2010).

All texts intended for printing were strictly checked for compliance with ideological guidelines. The attention of the censorship authorities focused not only on the content, but also on the grammatical and technical design of periodicals. Even accidental typos and design blunders did not remain out of sight of the guardians of Bolshevik vigilance. The newspaper *Bolshevistskaya pechat* wrote, that a special outbreak of these *typos* and *mistakes* took place in several newspapers after the villainous murder of Kirov, as if a forensic examination had been carried out. These *typos* distorted in the terry-counterrevolutionary spirit the most important materials and political documents (Vigilance and again vigilance, 1936). In the mid-1930s, a real war was declared on *counter-revolutionary typos* in the country.

The party leadership created a myth about allegedly massive attempts to infiltrate the editorial offices of anti-Soviets, *enemies of the people*, priests seeking to seize periodicals and radio stations to conduct propaganda against the Soviet government. The main party body, Pravda, fanned hysteria about this:

Whoever sets out to undermine the socialist system, undermine socialist property, who has planned an attempt on the inviolability of our motherland, is the enemy of the people. They will not receive a single



piece of paper, will not cross the threshold of the printing house to carry out his vile plan. They will get neither a hall, nor a room, nor a corner to poison with spoken words (Freedom of speech and press, 1936, p. 4).

The party's directive body, Bolshevistskaya pechat, instructed "to probe again and again whether there were hidden enemies among the editorial staff, among pseudo-journalists and in the ranks of the author's asset, such as the "journalists" Radek and Sosnovsky, Romm and Bukhartsev, Pikal and Werner and other small henchmen exposed by them. The history of the last years of the struggle against the enemies of the people knows more than one fact of persistent attempts to penetrate the ideological sector, and in particular the press" (Litigation lessons and the press, 1937, p. 5).

## 7. Conclusion

As a result of the permanent repressions of the Bolshevik regime against the intelligentsia, both old, established in the pre-revolutionary period, and nurtured under Soviet rule, serious damage was done to the culture of the peoples of Russia, in the field of journalism. According to Grashchenkov (2008),

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