

Methodology of Soviet Anti-Religious Propaganda in Georgia and Printed Media (1953-1964)

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Abstract

At the current step of investigation the complex study of Soviet Union has a great importance and the research of anti-religious propaganda and methods have a important place in this study. In this paper the role of Georgian printed media in the atheistic agitation during the rule of Nikita Khrushchev is discussed. The paper emphasizes the basic trends, the relation between religion and science and the issue of Vatican. The paper analyzes the Soviet vision of Media of Vladimir Lenin and Nikita khrushchev.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Georgia, Religious Policy, anti-religious propaganda, Printed Media

Introduction

For the study and understanding of Georgian reality and the role of printed media in Soviet anti-religious policy, newspapers "Communist" and "Young Communist" have been chosen; selection of the above newspapers has been conditioned by the fact that these publications used to be significant periodicals of the country, reflecting country's current political course of that period. It should be noted that in press, there is clearly seen individual attitude of the government towards the current processes of the country, what should also be of great importance as the media is the most suitable means for establishing ideological unity with masses. Accordingly, Soviet Georgian government was trying to spread State ideology in the society using media.

It's commonly known fact, that under totalitarian regime the freedom of speech was not actually available throughout the country and spreading of information in the society was entirely implemented by the means of media, being controlled by the central government; and the Soviet Union, with its whole State form, is recognized to be a typical totalitarian State.

It is noteworthy that during that period, the Soviet printed media (especially central publications) still had its readers in the society and was ranked high in daily Soviet life. In this case, we rely on the research of Katherine Eaton, a well-known scholar, according to which the "press, in spite of the fact that it was not trustworthy, was the only means of information for the vast majority of population, especially in the villages" (Eaton, 2004). The subject of our study is the Soviet anti-religious policy of 1953-1964 and methodology of its propaganda using printed media.

1. Soviet Vision of Media (Lenin bases)

Prior to delving deeply into the research subject, it's advisable to become familiar with Vladimir Lenin's views regarding the press, as in all other fields of thinking, there as well his opinions became the leading ideological core on which the Soviet State and its ideology has based. In the Soviet Union, the press was an important means of agitation. Its role was determined still before revolution by the main ideologist and direct executor of the Soviet state, Vladimir Lenin. In 1901, in his famous article "Where to begin?" Lenin was writing: "The role of a newspaper, however, is not limited solely to the dissemination of ideas, to political education, and to the enlistment of political allies. A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator, it is also a collective organizer" (Lenin, 1949:13). Moreover, during describing a special role of a press Lenin stated that „political newspaper is one of the most important preconditions for participation of all classes of modern society in political life of the country“ (Lenin, 1951:228-229).

The Soviet ideology has been established according to the above-mentioned views; it did not even reject but confirmed direct communication of the printed media with central government - „The Soviet printed word is a powerful weapon of communist party.

By means of the press, the party daily influences consciousness and mind of workers according to Marxist-Leninist ideology and its scientific policy, incline them towards solving of vitally important tasks. During the whole period of its history, our press used to bravely struggle (and still struggles) for implementation of a policy of communist party and Marxist-Leninist theory; it used to incline our people towards great revolutionary transformations in the country. Following various historical stages, tasks of the press have been changing; its public functions were being improved, principles of its activity were being established and enriched. Only the main purpose of our printed word remained unchanged –it was an ideological force of communist party“ (Gagoshidze, 1969: 83-84). From the above it is clear that the Soviet printed media, with its essence, was a direct supplement to the political course of the government and had the function of spreading its ideological policy into the society at large.

1.1. Nikita Khrushchev's Attitude towards Printed Media

Based on the fact that the subject of our study is Nikita Khrushchev's period of governance, it is necessary to get acquainted with his opinions regarding printed media; in order to understand appropriately his views, we herein present a quote from his speech in front of the journalists, in which we clearly see his attitude towards printed media: "Dear comrade journalists! We call writers the party assistants. Writers not to be offended if I say that you, journalists are not only loyal assistants, but also subordinate active fighters in this great work. You are really inseparable with the party, as soon as we need to explain and implement the decision, we will turn to you" (Khrushchev's speech, 1959:2). As it's seen from the given fragment, Nikita Khrushchev's vision does not differ from Lenin's one, and it is an actual follower of his ideas.

2. Legal Aspect of Nikita Khrushchev's Religious Policy

On July 7 1954, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union has adopted a secret resolution on "On Major Shortcomings in the Scientific-Atheist. Propaganda and on Measures to Improve It" (Issues of ideological, 1961:61-65), which on the one hand became the determinant of Nikita Khrushchev's anti-religious policy and on the other hand of de-stalinization. This document, despite touching only the issues of ideological work, clearly shows attitude of the government towards the editorial policy of printed media. First of all the resolution shows that the Central Committee requires atheist work not only on the level of party organizations but also on the levels of trade union, education, culture and central and local state publishers. This resolution is distinguished by aggressive, categorical tone and is drawn up according to anti-religious stereotypes of the 30s.

The resolution widely reflects the basic principles under which the anti-religious policy would be implemented in the country. Particularly interesting seems to be the fact, that in the resolution there is clearly stated – "the party carries on Lenin's way and cannot consider religion to be a personal record" (Issues of ideological, 1961:63), and there no mentioning of Stalin while such practice remained nearly unchained in Soviet Union till 1953; moreover, special attention is given to the fact, that in atheist policy, during World War II, definite mistakes have been made and clergymen immediately used this opportunity; all these can be considered to be quite dangerous (Issues of ideological, 1961: 62). In scientific literature, there is a reasonably stated that with this decision de-stalinization policy of Nikita Khrushchev really began and not with the well-known XX Congress of the Communist Party when Stalin's cult was condemned (Bociurkiw, 1965: 312-330; Jones, 2006: 1-18). From our part we can say that all these is not unusual at all, because religion had one of the central positions in the ideological policy of the Soviet State, and the first blow to Stalin's policy was made exactly in this direction, and the most important thing is that Nikita Khrushchev considered himself to be a follower of Lenin's policy what provided for legitimation of his power among internal party elite and among broad society as well. In our case the most interesting is a 9th item of this resolution, in which there is stated: "Assign central and local newspapers and magazines to carry systematic atheist propagand and to publish appropriate popular materials and best works of the lecturers" (Issues of ideological, 1961: 65). It was a direct order for printed media, which should activate its work in this direction. Therein, very important is interesting observation of French scientist Marianne Seydoux according to which, a number of anti-religious periodical publications nearly doubled after Nikita Khrushchev came to power (Seydoux, 1970: 126-127).

3. Printed Media

Generally, when we talk about atheist content articles published in printed media, we consider it necessary to group them as follows 1) articles of pure agitation character; 2) articles about correlation of science and religion,

3) informational articles about religious and State policy of Vatican; the latter, besides ideological, have foreign-diplomatic relations with Soviet Union.

3.1. Atheist Agitation-Propaganda in Soviet Georgian Media

The first publication of atheist themes published in Georgian printed media dates back to August 25, 1954, when newspaper "The Communist" published an article entitled "Spread Widely Scientific-Atheist Activities"; the article widely conveyed the basic principles that would be developed during anti-religious agitation; a special attention in propaganda would be given to use of scientific achievements cover Be baptized on the promotion of the use of scientific achievements - "In antireligious propaganda we should widely use great achievements of Soviet science, technology and culture; we should explain to workers the origin of the universe, regularity of natural phenomena, human origin, to talk about astronomy, arrange lectures, speeches and conversations on antireligious themes, reveal the reactionary character of religion" (Let's spread, 1954:1). All these clearly show that anti-religious propaganda was quite large-scale and in this process the government actively involves scientific circles and also starts to use press reviews; one of such reviews with a general title "Let's strengthen scientific-atheist propaganda", considers antireligious processes that took place in the media; newspaper "Communist", as a leading printed matter of the country, takes on itself coordination of current processes; besides achievements, it always reflects revealed defects and searches ways for its elimination. „carefree attitude of newspapers towards scientific-atheist propaganda is no way reasonable. Each regional or city newspaper and all our press is responsible to carry permanently and diligently scientific-atheist propaganda" (Let's spread, 1954:3). Herein there is also stated that printing of scientific articles and anti-religious literature (of various sources) is not enough at all. Newspapers should more widely elucidate local themes, which would show feebleness of religion (with concrete facts and examples) and its obvious discrepancy with scientific data. Antireligious propaganda in press would be of offensive character. Newspapers would convince the workers in harmfulness of the religion. All this work must be done by newspapers not in erratic manner, but systematically, with courage and use for it various newspaper genres: propagandist letters and reviews on atheist literature, essays and Feuilleton, correspondence and remarks. Newspapers would assist local party organizations in strengthening anti-religious propaganda. The above clearly shows the attitude and function that has been given to the press in terms of anti-religious propaganda.

3.2. Correlation of science and religion in Georgian Soviet printed media

Particular attention was paid to the relationship between religion and science, which indicates that government policy would become a scientific atheism. Such approach was not new for the Soviet system, it already owned such experience¹, and it seemed that Nikita Khrushchev has decided to recover the policy being forgotten from 30-ies (Ilic, 2009:116).

V. Prokofiev's (C.Phil) article "Science and Religion" served for dissemination and promotion of scientific-atheist ideology in the society; the article particularly emphasized advantage of the science over religion. „Science is a special form of public consciousness; it studies objective world and its laws, explains reasons of various phenomena. Science explains the effect of main laws of the nature and the society. The laws of science show the objective processes of nature and society that happens against the will of the people" (Prokofiev, 1954:2). There is also said that religion, in comparison with the science, "is based on implicit belief and rejects experience and observation" (Prokofiev, 1954:3). And as a result, recognizing an advantage of the communist State, there is given conclusion: „The Soviet science –the most leading science in the world –serves the people, it fights for further development of culture and economy of the socialist country and for improvement of soviet people's welfare. Soviet science is organically and inseparably connected to life, practice, struggle for communism, and it fights against idealism and religious ignorance" (Prokofiev, 1954:3). This article is an explicit confirmation of government's religious policy and its main direction to fight against religion by means of science. The same idea is put in the article of G.Chelidze "Religion, the Enemy of the Science"; there again we see contradiction of religious and scientific views. „Religious convictions, as other superstitions, explain the nature and the society in distortion manner; while the science is based on knowledge, practice and facts" (Chelidze, 1954:2).

¹ For scientific atheism of pre Khrushchev period see: Beemans, 1967: 234-242.

3.3. Publications on Vatican themes

Publications, issued on the themes of Vatican are particularly interesting; , as it has already been noted, all these, besides the church policy, had a significant foreign diplomatic load, as it is absolutely obvious that Vatican presented to be an important political figure under the cold war. The point is that the official Vatican, as it is known, ab origin had negative attitude towards Bolsheviks' coming into power and criticized the totalitarian policy of the Communist government. After completion of World War II, when the world was divided into two, opposition (capitalist and socialist) camps, catholic church revealed its attitude with decree issued by Pope Pius XII in 1949 – “on excommunication of communists and its followers” (Acta Apostolicae, 1950:195), his implacable stand towards communism was obvious; thus, criticism of Vatican’s policy became of great importance for Soviet government; such situation has been preserved during governing of Nikita Khrushchev as well and quite active propaganda against catholic church was being implemented,² what, of course, found response in Georgian press as well.

On August 24, 1954 in the newspaper “communist” there was published an article of V. Sheinman –“Vatican, Serving the Imperialism“ (Sheinman, 1954:3-4) the article reflects attitude of the Soviet government towards the Pope - „Vatican supports aggressive, reactionary policy of leading circles of United States aimed at preparation of war against the Soviet Union and begins preparation for implementation of this policy. Vatican mobilizes its forces to support Americans, stirring up a war“ (Sheinman, 1954:3). Such pathos is seen throughout the whole article of I. Stvolinsky “Vatican, the Worst Enemy of the Workers“; in the article the author conveys impressions, received after visiting a museum of the history of religion and atheism³ and on its bases he speaks about fatal policy of Vatican (Stvolinsky, 1954:2-3).

Conclusion

Thus, the Soviet anti-religious methodology in Georgia was most visibly expressed on the example of printed media; moreover, the press became one of the most important means of agitation, in which quite diverse anti-religious processes used to take place. It was totally in correspondence with officially adopted resolutions of central government. Reflection of the viewpoint of propaganda of anti-religious policy of Nikita Khrushchev period in Georgian press was not characterised with particular aggression; it’s true that it was completely focused on anti-religious themes, though it was obvious that the government was trying to transform the society by means of the science.

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² For relations between Vatican and Soviet Union during Khrushchev period see: Dunn, 2016:153-170.

³ State museum of religion and atheist was founded in 1932, on the territory of Kazan church; during soviet period it presented to be an important center of atheism study and popularization; (Shakhnovich, Chumakova, 2014:37).

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