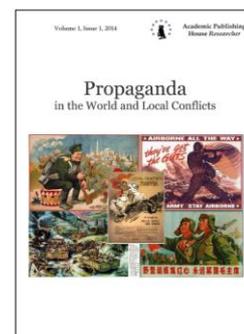


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Dynamic Lighting Atrocities Occupiers and their Collaborators in the Soviet Press in 1943: the Question of the Preparation of the Information Krasnodar Process

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Abstract

The article examines the processes of mediatization that accompanied the trials of war criminals in the USSR. As an example, a first public trial of accomplices of the Nazi invaders, held in July 1943 in the city of Krasnodar. Content analytical research publications in the regional newspaper "Bolshevik", covering the problems of enemy atrocities in the temporarily occupied territories of the Soviet Union, allowed to reveal the role of the Soviet print media in the preparation process of Krasnodar. This role was to discharge hatred of the enemy on an emotional level; objective basis for this and acted statistics detailing the atrocities of the Nazis in the liberated from the occupation of the territories of the country. Dynamics of publications on this topic are also stimulated by the need to produce the desired effect in the international community, to respond to the provocation "information events" by the Nazis.

Regarding the process of presentation of Krasnodar in the Soviet press it concluded that it was distinguished by the magnitude, integrity and compliance with the ideological standards. This feed topics of war crimes in the territory of the USSR and the coming retribution for them possible to effectively tackle current domestic and foreign policy objectives.

Keywords: The Second World War, the German fascist invaders, collaborators, crime, Krasnodar trial in 1943, the Soviet newspaper, media policy, content analysis.

1. Introduction

A severe shortage of sources on the topic has been reported by researchers involved in exploring the preconditions for and the dynamics and consequences of the Soviet Nuremberg Trial, the term used to denote a series of open trials of the Nazi German invaders and their Soviet collaborators, commencing with the Krasnodar trial held July 14 through 17, 1943. The trial's official documentation (i.e., materials from the interrogations and court proceedings) has been declassified only partially (Astashkin, 2015: 98), while doubts have also arisen over its credibility (Sorokina, 2005: 50). As for unofficial sources (e.g., notes from trial participants), historians have, generally, been skeptical about locating and introducing these into scholarly discourse (Bourtman, 2008: 246). Faced with this state of affairs and guided by their objectives, present-day researchers exploring the Soviet trials of Nazi war criminals have resorted to sources like documentary films covering such trials and made attempts to locate and get in touch with eye-witnesses and actual participants in those cases (Voisin, 2012). In any case, research is complicated by the time distance

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and the well-known fact of the mythologization of events of the World War III period, something that has remained entrenched, even after the change of regime, both in Russian public consciousness and in academic historiography. The above complications should, however, not thwart researcher efforts in this respect and, as is pointed out by I. Bourtman, "...should not lead us to overlook Soviet military tribunals as a topic for research – as Western scholars have tended to do". The analysis of these court proceedings, in Bourtman's view, may not only contribute to a number of "histories" (World War II and Holocaust) but also shed light on the Soviet system itself (Bourtman, 2008: 246; Brody, 1994). No less productive than the study of the matter's judicial aspect is the examination of the processes of mediatization which accompanied the trials of war criminals held in the USSR. These open trials may have had a strategic significance from the perspective of the Soviet leadership's media policy, and, consequently, bringing to light its aims, functions, instruments, and effects appears to be of a certain scholarly value.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Those exploring propaganda materials on war criminal trials may find it worthwhile to make organic use of content-analysis of texts from the Soviet media. The primary unit of analysis in this study are newspaper articles, news reports and stories published in the *Bolshevik* (the press organ for the Krasnodar Krai Committee, the City Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), and the Krasnodar Krai Council of Workers' Deputies; circulation – 60,000 copies) which cover instances and provide estimates of atrocities (acts of violence and crimes) committed by the Nazi German invaders and their collaborators. By covering the year 1943, the study makes it possible to examine the situation in its dynamics and, what matters the most, "relative" to the events of the Krasnodar trial.

2.2. The study's methodological basis is grounded in the principles of objectivity and historicism, which presuppose taking an unbiased approach to the analysis of issues under study, assuming a critical attitude toward sources drawn upon, as well as examining specific phenomena in the context of specific historical settings. A comparative-historical method has made it possible for the author to compare the Krasnodar trial with trials held in other regions across the nation that followed it.

3. Results and discussion

It is worth concurring with D.Yu. Astashkin in that the open trials of the Nazis and their collaborators held in the USSR stand in the shadow of the Nuremberg tribunal (Astashkin, 2015: 98). For this and a few other reasons (a shortage of sources and a lack of variety in them; the ideological factor preventing you from taking a well-rounded look at issues related to collaborationism), the topic has seen too little research on the part of national historians. And no exception, in this respect, has been made regarding the 1943 Krasnodar trial either. The trial did receive some coverage in an article by G.S. Stepanenko (Stepanenko, 2010: 161–165), which is focused on the topic's legal aspect. It is also worth noting that there is a special publication available that is based on an array of "declassified documents" dealing with arranging and staging the trials of collaborators in Kuban in 1943 (Kuban during the Great Patriotic War, 2005: 417–423). When it comes to exploring the Krasnodar trial, it, definitely, pays to draw upon some of the summarizing works by lawyers regarding individual criminal liability for war crimes committed in the USSR during World War II (Epifanov, 2001), as well as works on collaborationism (Kovalev, 2009). As for interest in the topic on the part of foreign scholars, the issue of the first open trial held in Krasnodar has been researched by I. Bourtman (Bourtman, 2008) and V. Voisin (Voisin, 2012).

There has clearly been a paucity of research into the way these trials were presented in the Soviet media at the time. A rare publication lending itself to this area of research is the article written by D.Yu. Astashkin which covers the open trial of the Nazi war criminals held in Novgorod in 1947 (Astashkin, 2016: 8–11). It may be worth assuming that it becomes necessary to monitor the publications on atrocities committed by the Nazis once one makes an attempt to figure out the way information on those was communicated to the population (how often, in what volumes, in what form, etc.) across the chronological timeframes "before" and "after" the trial, which took place in July 1943 in the city of Krasnodar. It is not unlikely that this kind of analysis might actually help clear away some of the fog regarding the issue of whether or not the media policy pursued by the

Soviet government was a perfectly deliberate step from the outset or whether or not it, rather, was developing spontaneously, under the influence of specific circumstances.

ПЕРВЫЙ СУДЕБНЫЙ ПРОЦЕСС

по делу о зверствах немецко-фашистских захватчиков и их пособников на территории гор. Краснодара и Краснодарского края в период их временной оккупации

14 июля в гор. Н. на Северном Кавказе в Военном Трибунале под председательством полковника юстиции г. Майорова Н. Я. и при государственном обвинителе генерал-майоре юстиции г. Яценине Я. И. началось слушание дело о зверствах немецко-фашистских захватчиков и их пособников на территории гор. Краснодара и Краснодарского края в период их временной оккупации.

По настоящему делу преданы суду по обвинению в преступлении, предусмотренном ст.ст. 58-1 „а“ и 58-1 „б“ Уголовного Кодекса РСФСР (измена родине): Клазов И., Котомцев И., Ластовина М., Мисаи Г., Набокс Ю., Павлов В., Парамонов И., Пушкарев Н., Речкалов И., Тищенко В. и Тучков Г.

Обвиняемые защищают по назначению от суда члены коллегии защитников – Назаревский А. И., Якуненко В. И., Казначеев С. К.

В вечернем заседании Военного Трибунала было оглашено обвинительное заключение.

Обвинительное заключение подробно воспроизводит жуткую картину массовых убийств ни в чем неповинных советских людей, которые были тысячами уничтожены немецко-фашистскими захватчиками, временно оккупировавшими Краснодарский край.

Данными предварительного следствия установлено, что все эти убийства, зверства, насилья и грабежи проводились частями и карательными органами 17 немецкой армии под командованием генерал-полковника Руоф.

Непосредственное руководство и осуществление всех этих зверств было возложено на краснодарское гестапо, во главе с шефом гестапо немецким полковником Кристианом.

В состав гестапо входила особая карательная команда тайной полиции под наименованием „Зондеркоманда СС-10-а“, которая непосредственно и осуществляла все эти злодеяния.

Следствием установлены факты: издевательства над арестованными и сожжения заключенных, содержавшихся в подвалах краснодарского гестапо; массовых убийств больных Краснодарской городской больницы, Березвской лечебной колонии, а также детской краевой больницы, расположенной на хуторе Третья речка Кочеты, Усть-Лабянского район.

Наконец, следствием установлены факты удушения окисью углерода на специально оборудованных автомашинках – „душегубках“ многих тысяч советских людей.

„Зондеркоманда СС-10-а“ представляла собой карательную команду гестапо, насчитывавшую около 200 чел. Начальником указанной „Зондеркоманды“ являлся шеф гестапо – немецкий полковник Кристиан, а его непосредственными помощниками в деле истребления советских людей были немецкие офицеры: Раббе, Бесс, Сарга, Сальге, Ган, Эрих Мейер, Пашен, Винц, Ганс Мюнстер, немецкие военные врачи тюрьмы и гестапо – Герц и Шустер, а также сотрудники гестапо – переводчики Якоб Эйкс и Шертерлаан.

Кроме того, гестапо были завербованы и принимали участие во всех зверствах привлеченные в качестве обвиняемых по настоящему делу предатели – Тищенко В., Тучков Г., Речкалов И., Ластовина М., Пушкарев Н., Мисаи Г., Набокс Ю., Парамонов И., Котомцев И., Павлов В., Клазов И.

Произведенным расследованием установлены следующие конкретные факты злодеяний, совершенных в Краснодарском крае немецко-фашистскими захватчиками.

Вскоре после занятия Краснодара, в результате систематических облав и массовых арестов мирных жителей, подвалы краснодарского гестапо были до отказа переполнены заключенными. Никакого следствия по делам этих сотен и тысяч ни в чем неповинных людей не производилось. Арестованные подвергались самым изощренным пыткам и избиениям, причем судьбу их лично решал своей властью шеф гестапо полковник Кристиан, который и давал приказы о физическом уничтожении арестованных.

Начиная с осени 1942 года, немцы начали применять для уничтожения советских людей специально оборудованные автомашины, которые получали известность среди населения под наименованием „душегубки“.

„Душегубки“ представляли собой крытые 5-7-тонные грузовики серого цвета с дизель-мотором. Эти машины были обиты внутри оцинкованным железом и снабжены в задней части кузова двухстворчатой, герметически закрывающейся дверью. В полу кузова находилась решетка, под которой проходила труба с отверстиями, соединявшаяся с выхлопной трубой мотора. Отработанные газы дизель-мотора, содержащие окись углерода высокой концентрации, поступали в кузов машины, вызывая быстрое отравление и смерть от удушения помещенных внутри людей.

По нескольку раз в неделю, а в январе месяце, перед отступлением немцев из Краснодара, по два-три раза в день „душегубки“ загружались арестованными из подвалов здания гестапо, помещаемого по улице Орджоникидзе, 61. Погрузкой обычно руководил заместитель шефа гестапо, он же начальник гестаповской тюрьмы, капитан Раббе. Перед этим арестованные раздевались, а затем по 60-80 человек загружались в „душегубку“, дверь которой герметически закрывалась, и машина, простояв несколько минут со включенным мотором, направлялась к противотанковому рву, расположенному за заводом измерительных приборов. „Душегубку“ обычно сопровождал конвой полицейских из „Зондеркоманды СС-10-а“. В противотанковом рву производилась выгрузка и беспорядочное закапывание людей, которые были уже умерщвлены газом в пути следования машины. В машину обычно загружались мужчины, женщины и дети совместно.

Несмотря на то, что немцы пытались закопиривать этот чудовищный метод истребления советских людей, с течением времени жители, проживавшие по соседству с гестапо, а через них и местное население, узнали о назначении этих машин.

Узнали также о „душегубках“ и арестованные, которые при посадке в машину начали оказывать сопротивление, оглашая двор гестапо криками и воплями, в связи с чем их вталкивали в машину посредством насилья. Крики несчастных вскоре

(Окончание на 2 странице)

Fig. 1. Bol'shevik. 1943. № 147(1744). 16 iyulya.

It stands to reason that in presenting the issue of Nazi crimes committed in the temporarily occupied territory of the Soviet Union through 1943, the Soviet print media were following the objective course of events; as the Red Army liberated the nation's towns and villages, it exposed ever-newer crimes committed by the enemy army, with this information becoming available to the unlearned population – mainly, through the newspapers. However, one may rightfully assume that over time, in terms of volume, form, and placement, these materials were bound to be regulated increasingly more thoroughly, with a “natural approach” of sorts (i.e., a disposition to put out the latest facts about the enemy's atrocities in a mostly unprocessed or quite erratic fashion) gradually giving way to sound structuring and thorough changes in the content of the majority of publications. The latter relied now increasingly more upon reports of atrocities, included upbeat clarion calls, and ended with conclusions.

Among the publications featured in the Bolshevik in the month of January, 1943, there are 9 items dealing with the issue of “atrocities”. These, for the most part, are news items from special correspondents for TASS, stationed with the army in the field, that are based on their own eyewitness accounts or those of someone else who had been to the occupied areas. Half of the materials relate the atrocities committed by the Nazis in Kuban's stanitsas, and the other half – those committed in other regions of the Soviet Union. Most of the time, materials of this kind appeared on the newspaper's second page, in its lower portion (known to be of relatively lesser significance for the readers). In January, there were no front-page stories or news items of state concern dealing with the subject. It was only once that as many as 3 articles were combined into an issue's topical collection (a sign of the topic's priority).

It is characteristic that while the terms “brutalities (atrocities)” and “brutes (beasts)” were actively used in the paper's headlines, they were hardly ever utilized in the actual texts. The definitions employed in the texts in relation to the Germans and Romanians are a lot more diverse and, as a rule, reveal the actual specifics of their crimes: “murderers”, “rapists”, “plunderers”, and “incendiaries”. Used as generalizing terms are the words “occupiers” and “thugs”, while the term “henchmen”, which later became highly popular with the Russian press, is not used that often yet.

МЕСТЬ НАРОДА

Судебное следствие закончено. Прокурор—генерал-майор юстиции Яченин произнес блестящую обличительную речь, полную гнева, которым переполнены сердца всех сидящих в зале суда, всех трудящихся, всего нашего народа.

Вновь невидимо встали на скамье подсудимых не пойманные еще немецкие злодеи в мундирах тайной полиции, вновь с презрением упоминались имена проклятых навеки немецких офицеров, оставивших на кубанской земле свои кровавые следы.

Точно под лучами прожектора стал виден шеф гестапо полковник Кристман, ариец, умевший насиловать женщину в своем кабинете, пытать советских граждан в подвалах, вешать людей в станциях и городах, рассылать страшную машину «душегубку» то в больницу, то в колонию, то за детьми...

В луже крови, с засученными рукавами стоит этот ненасытный палач перед нашими глазами. Он не мог найти утешения в крови. Он смеялся, когда вешали девушку в хуторе, лично «планировал» рейсы «душегубки». Полковник германского гестапо не гнушался ничем: ни пытками, ни насилем, ни убийствами. Всюду он успевал. Лично вешал, лично убивал, лично насилывал женщин в своем страшном кабинете.

Офицер германского гестапо Герц, напавший на себя благородный халат врача, разрезал по больницам и руководил истреблением больных в «душегубке».

Этот подлец, осквернивший звание врача, спокойно наблюдал, как сажают маленьких детей в страшную серую машину, спокойно глядел на горящих в подвалах гестапо людей и так же спокойно смотрел в глаза матери, молящей о спасении своего ребенка. Очень спокойно... Когда дети были удушены и выброшены в яму—доктор Герц вернулся в детскую больницу, поужинал, выпил вино и уехал на новую «операцию».

Капитан Раббе—знаток, своего грязного дела, мастер пыток, ловко набросивший петлю на шею девушке в хуторе Курундупе, командовавший на виселицах станции Крымской, как на параде, бывший женщиной ногами в грудь,—типичный немец, в совершенстве познавший искусство истреблять людей.

Офицеры Босс, Сарго, Сальге, Винц и другие—каждый на своем посту,—у виселиц, у ям, у «душегубки», в подвалах,—с немецкой аккуратностью вешали, расстреливали, душили, загоняли иголки под ногти, скальпировали, насиловали, издевались над русскими, над советскими людьми.

Они не сидят еще на скамье подсудимых, не пойманы пока. Они еще издеваются над русскими, украинцами, белорусами, душат своими костлявыми пальцами наших детей, матерей, братьев, роют еще ямы для своих жертв, льют кровь и шагают по трупам.

Но предупреждение, сделанное по их адресу советским прокурором, прозвучало грозно!

Они будут пойманы. Настанет час, когда палачи и их Германия будут держать ответ за свои злодеяния перед нашим народом.

А для этих уже час настал. Они пойманы и избиты.

С презрением смотрят на них все. Никто не верит их раскаяниям.

Изменники! Это страшное слово, как приговор народа, повисло над их головами.

И поэтому, когда один из подсудимых в последнем своем слове просит суд оставить ему жизнь и послать на фронт,—в зале слышится движение, шум, реплики. Кто-то кричит:

— Обойдемся!

Предателей Тищенко, Речкалова, Пушкарева, Мисана, Напцока и других, сидящих на скамье подсудимых,—никогда не забудут краснодарцы, анапцы, гостогавцы, никогда не забудут рабочие, колхозники,

отцы и матери удушенных детей, жены расстрелянных мужей, братья повешенных девушек. Никогда. Их имена будут прокляты навеки. Ибо они сами, сознательно, добровольно лизали пыльные сапоги Кристмана, сами закапывали замученных советских людей, надежно охраняли «душегубку», вталкивали в нее женщин и стариков.

Сейчас эти людишки хотят предстать жертвами коварных методов гестапо, безвольными людьми.

Никто им не верит.

Каждый раз, когда подсудимый старается найти смягчающее его вину обстоятельство, в зале слышится шум.

Это и понятно. В зале сидят люди, знающие краснодарскую яму у завода измерительных приборов, люди, нашедшие там своих детей, отцов, матерей. В зале сидят живые свидетели «душегубки», за которую особо ответит гитлеровская Германия.

Сегодня утром к зданию театра, в котором происходит судебное заседание, подошел старик Никита Иванович Бронник. Он обратился к часовому с просьбой:

— Пустите меня в зал. Я хочу слышать приговор над убийцами моей жены и моей дочки...

В зале много таких.

Председатель Военного Трибунала—полковник юстиции Майоров читает приговор суда. Зал вслушивается в каждое слово. Приговор с неумолимой последовательностью говорит о трагедии, которую пережили невинные советские люди.

Военный Трибунал приговорил: повесить Тищенко, Речкалова, Пушкарева, Мисана, Напцока, Котомцева, Кладова и Ластовину; сослать в каторжные работы Парамонова, Тучкова и Павлова сроком на 20 лет каждого.

Это приговор советского народа, приговор честных до ей. Поэтому он был встречен аплодисментами и шумом одобрения.

М. МЕРЖАНОВ.

Fig. 2. Bol'shevik. 1943. № 149(1746). 18 iyulya.

As for those who collaborated with the Nazi German invaders, there are just two articles talking about this, although the information provided about those people is quite detailed (their names, addresses, and social background and the elements of their crime). Considering the fact that it was not customary at the time for the Russian newspapers to make public the names of German military personnel involved in committing specific villainies, the “portraits” of collaborators may have been of great interest to their readership. An interesting fact is that the authors of those articles made it a matter of necessity to bring up the “dirty past” of the collaborators, which was already tainted with anti-Soviet sentiment. For instance, one was able to learn that the chief of police of the Nizhnebakanskaya stanitsa, named Kurs, had worked as a police officer back under the Tsar, while village chief Pobegailo had been in jail for engaging in counterrevolutionary activity (Bolshevik, 1943: January 14, January 29).

On the whole, the Bolshevik's January materials are characterized by a denunciatory tone, although the authors do not always provide a conclusion to their stories. Thus, for instance, the retaliation motif is present in just 4 items out of 9, while it was not very clear what kind of retaliation was expected; what *was* clear is that it was up to the Red Army to do the retaliating, which it could do en passant in the course of liberating the country's regions. As regards things like the reasons behind the atrocities, the need to apply legal sanctions to war criminals, and making appeals to the international community, the authors mention none of that and seem to be focused on just informing the public of the specifics of those crimes and their victims.

In February, the Bolshevik registered the largest number of publications on the topic of atrocities by the Nazi German invaders, which was due to the uncovering of facts about them in the course of liberating Krasnodar and other populated localities within Krasnodar Krai. There was an information breakthrough not only in terms of quantity (26 publications) but quality as well; in

addition to a few one-off publications about the Nazis' inhumane atrocities, the newspaper also ran 3 copious topical collections about them (always published on the second page). These collections were related content-wise to front-page items featured in specific issues ([Bolshevik, 1943: February 13, February 17, February 26](#)). These materials had iconic titles which combined the topics of Nazi atrocities and due retaliation for them. The retaliation motif was also given more relevance via 2 large illustrations (an extremely rare practice for the paper to adopt at the time) aimed at amplifying the topical blocks. These drawings ("Warrior, Retaliate!" and "The Joy of Liberation") unequivocally suggested that the aggrieved population pinned its hopes on the army.

The issue of criminally prosecuting the Nazi German invaders had still yet to be brought up, although reports of atrocities, drawn up on site, were now featured in the paper on a regular basis. Instances of collaborating with the Nazis were also passed over, the sole exception being the article "Traitor" featured in the 'Out of the Courtroom' section, devoted to the case of military driver Barikov. By tradition, the story emphasized the collaborator's kulak background, although it did not say anything about the crime's elements ([Bolshevik, 1943: February 27](#)). It was reported that the NKVD military court sentenced the criminal, as a traitor to the homeland, to death by firing squad. Thus, it was for the first time ever that the Bolshevik carried a story on court proceedings in the case of a collaborator. This, however, did not result in such stories appearing in the press often in the months that followed – there were no materials on collaborating with the enemy published in the period from March to June.

Virtually all of the February materials covered the developments in the Nazi occupation of Krasnodar Krai. The newspaper featured stories depicting the gruesome atrocities committed in the cities Kropotkin, Goryachy Klyuch, and Armavir and in many Kuban stanitsas. Some general outlines of crimes committed by the occupiers in the very capital of Kuban were provided in the front-page article "Our Krasnodar!" and the article by editor-in-chief I.I. Yudin "Krasnodar Today", and already on February 26 the paper published the first-ever news item containing some specifics on the victims of those crimes ([Bolshevik, 1943: February 14, February 21, February 26](#)). Concurrently, many of the articles harped persistently on the need to restore the region and its living conditions back to normal. The authorities were thus getting the minds of the people set on dealing with the issues at hand, with the trend intensifying toward the summer, the time of crop harvesting.

Despite a decrease in the frequency of appearance of materials on occupier atrocities committed on Soviet soil in the Bolshevik's March issues, as compared with February, a total of 16 publications, there was an upsurge in the sentiment of hatred toward the invaders, with victim statistics getting more copious. Firstly, attention was revived to atrocities committed by the enemy in other parts of the country. This applies to Smolensk Oblast and, especially, a neighboring region, where atrocities were committed on a major scale. The story of how persistently and methodically the Nazis were "destroying the city of Rostov-on-Don" (based on incomplete estimates, there were 18,000 casualties) took up the Bolshevik's front page of the March 16, 1943 issue (a reprint of the front-page story from the Pravda newspaper and the Atrocities on Rostov Soil Report) ([Bolshevik, 1943: March 16](#)).

Secondly, the paper's March publications reflect in a more detailed and documented fashion now the atrocities committed by the Germans in the territory of Kuban itself. Quite representative are the titles of the paper's front-page stories ("We Shall Retaliate!" and "We Shall Retribute the Murderers!"), which are becoming increasingly more spiteful and saturated with calls to action. In its publications, the paper is citing specific reports of atrocities committed in certain populated localities and eyewitness accounts by the victims' relatives. It is in March that the paper publishes photos of the bodies of victimized residents of Krasnodar, i.e. a month and a half after the city was liberated. Right then it also makes public the number of people murdered in various ways: 13,000 women, old people, and children ([Bolshevik, 1943: March 21, March 28](#)). However, the issue of bringing the criminals to justice is still too far on the back burner. No names of these criminals have been provided in the press as yet. Whilst the Atrocities on Rostov Soil Report indicts German city-major Major General Kittel, who was in charge of the mass decimation of the area's civilian population, the Krasnodar City Committee Report has yet to bring charges against anyone specifically.

The above-ascertained trend toward "nurturing a bitter hatred of the enemy" will remain the Bolshevik's top objective through the following months, although there is a marked decline in the

number of publications on atrocities. Thus, for instance, through April 1943 the paper published 11 materials on Nazi atrocities in the temporarily occupied territory of the Soviet Union and just 5 of them dealt with atrocities committed on Kuban soil. On the other hand, it is in April that the Soviet press (including the Bolshevik) ran a series of stories that rebutted and parried the charges of committing the Katyn Massacre brought by the ministry headed by Goebbels. The author has already spoken about this “information excuse” as a factor for the change in the stance of the Soviet leadership which may have sped up the staging of the first trial of war criminals ([Tazhidinova, 2016: 285–293](#)).

Indeed, it is of importance in the context of this topic that the exposure of the “slander and provocations of Goebbels cuisine” on the matter took up a significant place in the Soviet press. And the Bolshevik regional newspaper, obviously, did not stay on the sidelines; through April 1943, a third of its materials dealing directly or indirectly with atrocities committed by the Nazis in the Soviet Union was devoted specifically to providing a response to the “wretched fabrications of the German Fascist henchmen” regarding the mass graves outside Smolensk. These materials, obviously, got into the regional press from the central one (News items from Sovinformburo and TASS; front-page articles from the Pravda and Izvestia) ([Bolshevik, 1943: April 16, April 20, April 21, April 27, April 28](#)). Curiously enough, the Soviet leadership’s take on atrocities committed by the German Fascist invaders inside their country was expressed in those materials more lucidly than it was done in many other publications dealing with these very atrocities. Whilst most of the period’s materials were dominated by the propaganda component, here information was delivered in an analytical manner, with attempts made to come up with logically well-structured responses to the Germans’ accusations.

In the spring, the paper displayed a new trend by announcing a couple of activities covering the topic of atrocities: photo showcases to be set up on the streets of Krasnodar, at the Pushkin Krasnodar Krai Library, and at the Sochi Krai Studies Museum and a collection of materials on Nazi atrocities in Kuban to be released by the Bolshevik publishing house (circulation – 8,000 copies, price – 1 ruble) ([Bolshevik, 1943: April 13, April 17, May 30](#)). This channel of the paper’s activity “worked” to facilitate the information-related and emotional preparation of the trial, the time for which was drawing nearer.

In May, the Bolshevik ran 9 stories on atrocities committed by the Nazi German invaders, 6 of them (a front-page article and a topical block accompanied by a photograph) published in the paper’s May 12, 1943, issue, which marked three months since the liberation of Krasnodar. Still, it is worth noting that on the cusp of the spring and summer one witnesses a marked decline in the Bolshevik’s coverage of the topic of Nazi atrocities – which figures, considering the mobilization-mindedness of the Soviet press. Firstly, much had been said on the topic at that point already and it was time the paper focused on the other major objective – to encourage the krai’s working people to engage in restoring its economy and helping the front (all the more reason being the time of crop harvesting drawing nearer). Secondly, the Soviet press was keenly addressing the more pressing issues on the national agenda – the second state loan and the results of the war’s two years gone by. Anyhow, the Bolshevik brought up none of the atrocities topic in a period of a month and a half (May 13 through June 25), and, in essence, it was virtually impossible to predict at that point the nearing of the first-ever Soviet military tribunal trial of war criminals in Krasnodar based on publications run in the region’s major newspaper at the time.

Only in late June, i.e. just two weeks before the trial, the Bolshevik started giving the public a taste of the upcoming proceedings. The most general hint of the intention to “bring the German villains to justice” was provided in the June 26 issue (a reprint from the Pravda). It neighbored with the copious material “From ESC [Emergency State Commission]” presented in the form of several reports of an investigation into crimes committed by the occupiers in the various regions of the country, including the plunder of cultural valuables in Pyatigorsk and mass murders of the civilian population in Kursk and Kharkiv Oblasts. The Emergency State Commission spoke of the personal liability of a number of individuals from the German command for the war crimes committed (with no collaborators being mentioned). An item that focused the public’s attention on the activity of the Emergency State Commission was lengthy material on the work of the Krasnodar Krai Committee concerning the ascertainment and investigation of atrocities committed by the German Fascist invaders ([Bolshevik, 1943: June 26](#)).

As far as the actual period of July 1943, which saw the staging of the USSR's first-ever open military tribunal trial of war criminals, throughout the proceedings the topic of atrocities was limited to just the materials of the trial itself. These materials passed copiously through four of the paper's issues, being complemented with some concomitant material along the way (a front-page article and several opinion pieces by prominent correspondents visiting from Moscow) ([Bolshevik, 1943: July 16, July 17, July 18, July 20](#)). As a matter of fact, the final countdown of hours before the trial commenced back on July 13, 1943, when the paper's first page ran a communication from the Emergency State Commission on atrocities committed by the German Fascist invaders in the city of Krasnodar and Krasnodar Krai. The document summed up the main body of information on atrocities committed by the occupiers in the krai and featured the names of some of those who did it (12 Nazi Germans and 5 Soviet traitors). It concluded with the words: "The ECS has submitted all of the materials it received dealing with the monstrous atrocities committed by the German Fascist invaders in Krasnodar and Krasnodar Krai to the Public Prosecutor of the Soviet Union so as to get these crimes investigated and bring the guilty to justice" ([Bolshevik, 1943: July 13](#)). And, although the communication listed the names of just 5 collaborators (the number ultimately reaching 11 defendants, as we know now), with two of the names written incorrectly, the events developed quite rapidly, the high-profile trial being just 24 hours away.

The historic materials of the Krasnodar trial, held July 14 through 17, found reflection not only in the nation's regional print media but all of the Soviet media as well. To this day, these materials remain the main source of information on the course and characteristics of the first open Soviet military tribunal trial of war criminals, which explains the particular interest in them among researchers. No less important is the other layer of information which, as was mentioned earlier, accompanied the trial materials – opinion pieces purposively focused on the defendants ("henchmen"). Considering the fact that the photos of these individuals never really got into the Soviet press (one of the distinctive characteristics of the Krasnodar trial), the actual content of this information appears to be of particular importance in research.

To help cover the first trial of collaborators with the Nazis, the authorities enlisted the services of top newspaper journalists. It, above all, is worth mentioning special correspondent for the Pravda Elena Kononenko, who would virtually rivet her attention and that of the readership to the defendants' bench, which featured "11 members of a hit squad and spies from SS-Sonderkommando 10a, led by German henchman Colonel Christmann". An important fact is that at the end of the article the reader is suggested to visualize someone else behind the backs of the arrested collaborators – "those who are not present in the courtroom today but whom the Soviet people are trying likewise...". Thus, the bottom-line was that the Krasnodar proceedings represented also a "trial of the whole of Fascist Germany" and next to the 11 defendants there should have stood General Ruoff, Chief of the Krasnodar Gestapo Colonel Christmann, or henchman doctor Herz, i.e. those whom the punishing hand of Russian justice had yet to get hold of ([Bolshevik, 1943: July 17](#)). In the pursuit of maximum justice for all those occupiers who were found guilty of atrocities committed in Kuban, Kononenko was followed by another prominent journalist – combat correspondent for the Pravda Martyn Merzhanov ([Bolshevik, 1943: July 18](#)).

Of particular significance is the issue of the effects of the Krasnodar trial, which may be determined through content-analytical research. As for overcoming the "internal dissonance", which the authors construe as the topic of collaborationism being an uncomfortable one for the government to discuss, the sufficiently keen public interest in the topic's coverage (drummed up via the Krasnodar trial) was making it possible now to remove it from public discourse (where it was brought up rarely and unsystematically as it was) – so as to stop sowing doubts in people's minds and distracting them from resolving the issues at hand. In this regard, it is revealing that through the remaining portion of 1943 (i.e., more than 5 months) the Bolshevik hardly runs any stories on acts of collaboration committed in the region. The only exception is making public the names of several traitors who worked for the Germans in the city of Novorossiysk ([Bolshevik, 1943: October 3](#)). That being said, acts of collaboration that took place outside the region within the chronological timeframe under examination are mentioned in the paper just once – when in December 1943 it publishes the materials of the Kharkiv trial, taking part in which as a defendant, alongside a group of Nazis, is SD Sonderkommando driver M. Bulanov ([Bolshevik, 1943: December 17, December 18](#)).

However, apart from domestic political issues, which the Soviet government normally resolved using the print media, there also were foreign political ones to tackle. The latter could be

pushed into the foreground, as often was the case through the momentous, in many respects, year 1943. Based on the findings of this study, the overall dynamics and character of publications on the topic run in the Soviet press were determined, in large part, by an orientation toward drawing the attention of the international community to the issue of atrocities that had been committed by the Nazi Fascist “henchmen”, were still being committed, and were even getting more severe in light of the war’s nearing finale.

4. Conclusion

Thus, the findings of the author’s content-analysis of materials published in the Bolshevik regional newspaper through 1943 attest to an amplification of the “policy of retaliation” propaganda. The period under review (especially, the first half of 1943) witnessed a massive heightening of hatred toward the enemy at the emotional level; the objective basis for this was a body of statistics and detailed accounts of atrocities committed by the Nazis in areas that were being liberated from German occupation. The dynamics of publications on the subject were also stimulated by the need to produce the necessary effect in international circles and provide a response to provocative “information excuses” on the part of the Nazis. It goes without saying that the Soviet leadership’s primary objective, which it intended to resolve through, inter alia, its media policy, was to prevent the Nazi “henchmen” from fleeing their responsibility to face criminal charges for their inhumane deeds.

The USSR’s first open trial of war criminals, held in Krasnodar in July 1943, made sure the subject of the Nazis’ criminal responsibility became a standing item on the global agenda. The presentation of the Krasnodar trial in the Soviet print media was distinguished by its scale, integrity, and full alignment with the era’s ideological standards. It was this way to deal with the topic of war crimes committed on Soviet soil and retaliation awaiting such war criminals that helped the government resolve effectively most of the issues related to the nation’s internal and foreign affairs.

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