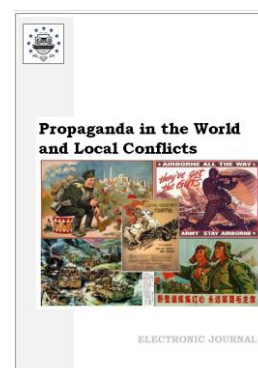


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## Letter to the Editor

### About the Organization of Russian Propaganda in Allied and Neutral States during the First World War

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#### Abstract

This paper examines Russian propaganda directed towards allied and neutral states during the First World War. The attention is paid to the experiences of both allies (England and France) and adversaries (Germany) in the realm of military propaganda. The sources for this study include documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (Moscow, Russian Federation) and the Russian State Military Historical Archive (Moscow, Russian Federation). These documents are introduced into scholarly circulation for the first time.

The author states that during World War I Germany was the first country among the participating nations, which put the periodical press at the service of the state and turn it into the fourth type of weapon. German agents not only in allied countries, but also in neutral ones, managed to create numerous printed publications that formed pro-German public opinion. In 1915–1916, this experience was actively applied by the Entente countries. In 1915–1916, the Entente countries began to actively apply this experience. By the end of 1916, Russian propagandists had planned to widely use not only the press, but also cinema for military propaganda purposes. There was also a project to send officers from each regiment of the Russian Army from the Eastern to the Western Front to build camaraderie between Russian, English, and French officers. However, the events of February 1917 prevented Russia from implementing these initiatives.

**Keywords:** propaganda, First World War, Russian Empire, Entente, 1914–1918.

#### 1. Introduction

The issues of military propaganda during a local or global conflict is of great importance in organizing a stable morale-psychological state of one's own troops and rear, as well as various means of influencing the troops and rear of the enemy, seeking to break their morale and psychological spirit. During the First World War, Germany was the legislator of fashion in the field of military propaganda, calling propaganda (primarily print) the “fourth type of weapon” along with infantry, cavalry and artillery (RGVIA. F. 2003. Op. 1. D. 1484. L. 75). In this work, we will attempt to analyze some initiatives of the Russian military command in the field of military propaganda.

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## 2. Materials and methods

This study relies on documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire (Moscow, Russian Federation) and the Russian State Military History Archive (Moscow, Russian Federation). These documents are being introduced into scientific circulation for the first time.

Methodologically, the study is based on the principles of historicism, systematicity, and objectivity. By applying these principles in conjunction, the events of the First World War and the organization of military propaganda should be considered in the context of related historical events. For example, the history of Russian military propaganda must be viewed in light of the accumulated German experience in this area.

## 3. Discussion

This research topic was actively studied in the early 21st century. As an example, we will only mention some works. Thus, the issues of the Russian right-wing periodical press during the period of the First World War were considered by D.I. Stogov (Stogov, 2011). In turn, L.G. Polyakova addressed the topic of the periodical press as a means of studying the activities of the rear during the First World War. At the same time, the author used the example of the Black Sea Province (Polyakova, 2012).

The topic of Russian military press during the Great War of 1914-1918 was explored by D.G. Guzhva (Guzhva, 2007). S.V. Buryan (Buryan, 2010) also focused on the military periodical press of the Russian army during World War I.

O.Yu. Starodubova (Starodubova, 2014) examined the coverage of the military successes of the Russian army, specifically the Brusilov Offensive, in the Russian periodical press of 1916. Finally, I.V. Kryuchkov studied Austria-Hungary in the reviews of foreign press of the Russian General Staff, based on materials from the end of 1915 (Kryuchkov, 2016).

## 4. Results

During World War I, Russian military officials noticed that German newspapers were almost always more widespread in neutral countries than English or French newspapers. At the same time, German newspapers never contained anything that could compromise Germany, whereas compromising material on their own governments was often published in English and French newspapers. During the war, the German press never questioned the righteousness of their supreme commander. Some freedom of the press was only allowed on issues related to food supply for the population, where different interpretations of government orders and their assessment were allowed. Germans only published limited information about the internal situation of their country, while a lot of information about the situation abroad was published. At the same time, the main articles in individual issues of newspapers were invariably written in a heightened tone, and everything related to Germany was presented in an embellished form (RGVIA. F. 2003. Op. 1. D. 1484. L. 75-75ob.).

During the First World War, even with a delay, the Russian government paid great attention to the issues of promoting the image of the Russian Empire abroad. According to Russian officials, such propaganda should create a positive foreign public opinion in favor of Russia and thereby contribute to the inflow of arms and credit. It is important to note that it was Germany that took this path, dispatching its agents to Switzerland and the United States to create a negative image of Russia in neutral countries.

In both allied and neutral countries, during the first two years of the war, public lectures and cinema had almost no effect on public opinion (AVPRI. F. 140. Op. 477. D. 812. L. 59ob.). However, Russian officials believed that cinema could become a highly effective weapon for propagandists, if used correctly, for example, to popularize Russian successes on the Eastern and Caucasian fronts.

By the end of 1916, the French and British governments had established semi-official committees in Petrograd and Moscow, consisting of military and civilian officials, experienced specialists, and promoters of the film industry. These committees were tasked with disseminating important information about Russian allies and their military-economic potential in the Russian press and society. The experience gained by these committees was significant.

In addition to cinema and public lectures, other propaganda measures were planned, such as sending Russian officers for training to the allies in their theaters of war (AVPRI. F. 140. Op. 477. D. 812. L. 59ob.). This proposal was actively supported by the French and British ambassadors in

Petrograd. According to this initiative, it was planned to send one front-line officer from each infantry regiment, artillery brigade, sapper unit, and cavalry division for three months to England and France: one month was intended for travel and visiting military factories, and two months for staying with the corresponding units at the front (AVPRI. F. 140. Op. 477. D. 812. L. 59ob.-60).

Frontline officers were supposed to travel in groups of about 25 people in special cars from Haparanda to Bergen, and then under the protection of the British to England. During their stay abroad, the officers were to be under the supervision of the British and French military authorities. (AVPRI. F. 140. Op. 477. D. 812. L. 60).

Without any doubt, the proposals of the Russian military officials on the development of propaganda activities were of significant interest, but due to the fact that the revolution took place in February 1917, these proposals were never implemented.

## 5. Conclusion

So, during World War I Germany was the first country among the participating nations, which put the periodical press at the service of the state and turn it into the fourth type of weapon. German agents were able to create numerous printed publications not only in countries allied with Germany but also in neutral countries, which formed a pro-German public opinion. In 1915–1916, the Entente powers began to actively use this experience. By the end of 1916, Russian propagandists had planned to use not only the periodical press but also cinema for military propaganda. There was also a project to send officers from each regiment of the Russian army from the Eastern to the Western front to foster brotherhood between Russian, English, and French officers. However, the events of February 1917 prevented Russia from implementing these initiatives.

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