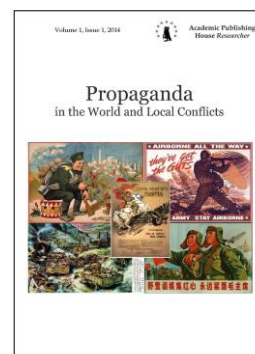


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“How Our Fleet is Different from the Bourgeois One” or Distinctive Characteristics of Propaganda in the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet in the mid-1920s

Dmitry V. Liventsev^{a, *}

^a Voronezh Institute of Federal Service of Execution of Punishments of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation

Abstract

The paper discusses distinctive characteristics pertaining to military propaganda in the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet (RKKF) in the 1920s. It reviews the state of propaganda in the Red Fleet divisions and analyzes the objective difficulties related to attempts to explain the tasks and goals of the Soviet government.

The paper uses documents from the Russian State Navy Archives (St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) as research materials. In addition, materials from the brochure “How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one” by A. Krymov were utilized. Collective monographs used include “Twice Red Banner Baltic fleet”, “Red Banner Pacific Fleet”, “Red Banner Black Sea Fleet” and “Northern Fleet of Russia”.

In conclusion, the author sums up the factors that drove military propaganda efficiency among officers and sailors of the Baltic Fleet in the historical period under review. The author also provides little-known facts about the organization of propaganda activity among Soviet sailors.

Keywords: Baltic Fleet, propaganda, political department, USSR, bourgeois fleet, sailors, officers.

1. Introduction

In 1926, the political department of the Baltic Fleet issued a propaganda brochure by A. Krymov “How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one” which in plain language explained all benefits offered to Red Navy sailors by the service in the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet as compared to the fleets of foreign states. This edition by the Baltic Fleet political department was a perfect example of military propaganda in the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet.

2. Materials and methods

The paper uses documents from the Russian State Navy Archives (St. Petersburg, Russian Federation) as research materials. In addition, materials from the brochure “How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one” by A. Krymov were utilized. Collective monographs used include “Twice Red Banner Baltic Fleet”, “Red Banner Pacific Fleet”, “Red Banner Black Sea Fleet” and “Northern Fleet of Russia”. Along with the sources, the scholarly paper reflected materials of research dissertations by D.V. Liventsev, S.L. Gurinov and A.V. Mursalov.

* Corresponding author
 E-mail addresses: liva2006@yandex.ru (D.V. Liventsev)

The work employed traditional scientific methods to study military propaganda in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet. The author separately made use of general scientific methods. A particular role was played by the historical and situational method in analyzing propaganda techniques used by the Soviet system. The paper also explored agitation efforts among navy servicemen and sailors, designed to explain the immediate objectives of the country's domestic and foreign policies.

3. Discussion and results

The author of the brochure “How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one”, prepared by the political department of the Baltic Fleet, brought before Red Fleet sailors the following problem: “First, we should ask: who serves in the navy – in our Red Fleet or in bourgeois fleets? And where do ordinary sailors come from?

... It turns out that here again – the similarity! In any fleet, be it ours or bourgeois fleets, ordinary sailors are workers and peasants.

... That's right! But it is here where the difference starts.

Let's deal with it by handling individual issues” (Krymov, 1926) (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Soviet patriotic naval poster

It is noteworthy that the year of 1926 can be called a challenging period for the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet (Liventsev, 2007). The Baltic Fleet (Twice red, 1990) and Black Sea Fleet (Red Banner Black, 1987) were weakened and struggled with the aftermath of Civil War and Intervention. In 1926, the government made a decision to liquidate the Naval Force in the Far East due to its small size (Red Banner Pacific, 1981). These adverse circumstances hindered the revival of the Far Eastern naval formation until 1932 (Gorinov, 2010). In the north, the country was yet to begin creating a regular fleet. Only Amur and Caspian river flotillas were in a somewhat better position (Mursalov, 2010).

So, what advantage did the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet had. First of all, the authors said: “Capitalists, landowners, generals and admirals in all countries are forcing workers and peasants to serve in their bourgeois fleets so that the workers and peasants shed their blood only for the predatory interests of rich pockets – masters. Bourgeois fleets exist to attack, not just to defend, to rob other people and not just to protect their own property

... The working people of the Soviet Union are sending their best young people, their sons to the army and the navy to protect the heritage and rights of their fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, the rights of all workers and their own rights” (Krymov, 1926).

Further the brochure drew attention to the officer corps of the bourgeois fleets: “All chiefs and officers there are totally from nobles, landowners and sons of capitalists. Even if a person with a different rank presented himself well during a war, he is still pushed into the background and is not allowed to advance.

... The situation is not dissimilar in France, in America, in Japan, in Germany and in Sweden, yes – anywhere you look at in any bourgeois country. In any place, ordinary workers and peasants are under exclusive command of officers from the bourgeois classes. Our people promoted to commanders come workers and peasants” (Krymov, 1926).

A. Krymov provides statistics that out of a hundred students at Soviet naval colleges 45 will be workers and 37 peasants, and the remaining 18 are children of teachers and Soviet employees (RGA VMF. F. 34. Op. 2. D. 1054. L. 102). The author of the propagandist edition concluded based on the given statistics: “So, the vast majority – 82 people out of every hundred of future Red Fleet commanders – are children of workers and peasants. No sons of the people, who ever oppressed workers and peasants, who grew rich at the expense of the working people, are in any time admitted into naval educational institutions” (Krymov, 1926). (Figure 2)



Fig. 2. Soviet patriotic poster (1924)

According to propagandists at the political department, the horrors of the service in a bourgeois fleet also included corporal punishment. A. Krymov’s brochure contains an image of a lash belonging to an officer of the German fleet, used to punish the lower ranks. Interestingly, similar lashes were mentioned by periodicals in 1914 as part of military propaganda, found on the “Magdeburg” sunk cruiser. By the way, the issue of a liberal system of official penalties in the Russian fleet was debated already in the time of World War I (Twice Red, 1990) (Figure 3).

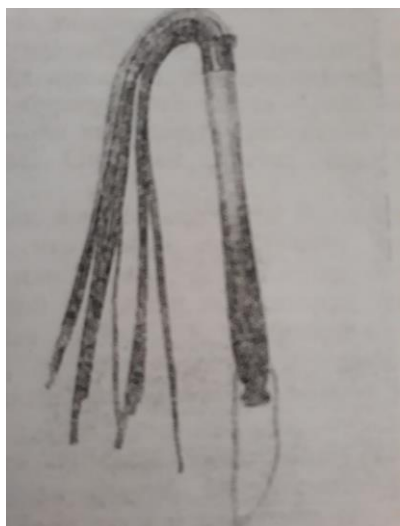


Fig. 3. Whip to punish the lower ranks of the German Navy

Then the Baltic Fleet political department's "How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one" focuses on the means to enforce discipline in the bourgeois fleet and contrasting it with similar relations in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet: "The entire discipline in the bourgeois fleet (and in the army) is based on coercion. All is the will of capitalists and officers appointed by them. Sailors from peasants and workers are forced to fulfill what capitalists wish" (Krymov, 1926).

Of course, the political department also referred to intolerable conditions of service in the Russian Imperial Navy before the October Revolution, leveraging the idea as a standard propaganda method: "Anyone who served in the old Russian fleet has a lot to tell about it. An old sailor can tell you how Kronstadt sailors rendered salutes to the house where the fierce Admiral Viren lived. The admiral used to look out the window, and a sailor could not see him and would pass by without rendering a salute. A harsh reprisal would be at once taken against him. So, just to be safe, frightened sailors also saluted to empty windows! In Revel, a sailor once got careless in a street and did not render a salute to an officer. The latter called him. The sailor, in fear of punishment, decided not to come up and say his surname. He set off running, hoping to escape. Shots thundered behind his back, and the sailor, hit by bullets, fell, bleeding heavily" (Krymov, 1926) (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. The journals "Red Fleet"

According to A. Krymov, a reasonable and conscious discipline was maintained in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet, as both workers and peasants, serving as Red Fleet sailors, believed that their cause was the building of the common good, while a sailor in the bourgeois fleet built a state building for the prosperity of capitalists and members of other exploitative classes.

He separately mentioned the rich cultural and political life of Red Fleet sailors. Unlike a sailor in a bourgeois fleet, a Red Fleet sailor was a full citizen in his spare time and was actively engaged in public organizations. Moreover, the Soviet government sought to re-educate and teach the Red Navy sailor new ways during his service.

To illustrate the efficiency of the efforts made by the Baltic Fleet political department in the field of training and cultural enlightenment of Red Navy sailors, it cited the story of Timofey Kuzmin, born in the Oryol governorate, Mtsensk district. When a peasant lad came to serve in the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet, he could not even write his own family name. As part of the fleet crew, he graduated from the school for the illiterate where he studied writing and arithmetic (RGA VMF. F. 111. Op. 2. D. 585. L. 154). Afterwards, Timofey Kuzmin became an active reader at a local library. Later he was engaged in the ship's bulletin-board newspaper as a regular correspondent. In the fleet crew, the serviceman signed up for a foreign language study group and became a confident a German and English user. At last, the Red Fleet sailor joined a drama group and started to take a course in political literacy. In addition, Timofey Kuzmin took up physical training and personal hygiene.

We should say that despite a certain propaganda packaging of this example, the Baltic Fleet political department did not deviate considerable from the truth. Even in the pre-revolutionary Russia, the service in the Imperial Fleet for a peasant guy was not only a life, but also an intellectual university. Without question, when in the 20s of the twentieth century, when the Soviet authorities looked closely at the training and education of the Red Navy sailors, the results can be described as outstanding.

Of course, A. Krymov's brochure "How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one" also emphasized the role of the Communist Party and the Komsomol as the patron of the Workers' and Peasants' Red Fleet (Figure 5).



Fig. 5. Postage stamp "Komsomolets"

However, the pervading idea was that sailors' consciousness in the bourgeois fleet was "suppressed", while Red Navy sailors were enlightened by the Soviet authorities. The key accent

was put on the prediction that sailors of bourgeois fleets would inevitably open their eyes to subsequently accomplish the world revolution (Figure 6).



Fig. 6. The poster of the propaganda film "Red Fleet"

4. Conclusion

It necessary to note that the brochure “How our fleet is different from the bourgeois one” by A. Krymov successfully fulfilled its military propaganda functions among the sailors of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Fleet. It leveraged an efficient technique of comparing the conditions of daily service in the RKKF with those in bourgeois fleets and the pre-revolutionary Russian Imperial Fleet. In this comparison, the Red Fleet had a significantly better representation as it massively contributed to educational and cultural activities of sailors. The information was given in the context of great care exercised by Komsomol.

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