

**WORKING-CLASS AND RURAL CORRESPONDENTS'
TASKS ACCORDING TO THE VIEWS
OF THE 1920s SOVIET LEADERS**

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Abstract: The authors consider working-class and rural correspondents' movement in soviet Russia as a political control institution, analyze the speeches of the soviet state officials of the first decade of its existence and the decisions of party and state bodies which became the theoretical basis of this political control institution and show that victims among working-class and rural correspondents seemed quite acceptable and even necessary from communist ideologists' point of view for the sake of general victory in socialism construction.

From the first years of its existence the soviet state (in the person of its leaders) considered the press as the most important instrument of class dictatorship which remains valid till it serves not only for carrying out ideas, slogans and resolutions top-down but also for expressing opinions, estimations and criticism. Already the VIIIth congress of the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks), which took place in March 1919, considered “the exposure of the crimes of various officials and organisations and the indication of soviet and party organizations mistakes and shortcomings” [11, p. 116] (*here and hereinafter the translation is ours – the authors*) as one of the main priorities of the party-soviet press. Local authorities formulated this task more specifically: “It is necessary to write notes about party members' crimes. Thus we can mark those who hang on to the party. Many rural communists commit such dealings that they should be better acquainted with a public prosecutor's assistant” [5, f. 1244, s. 2].

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It is evident that the above mentioned problems were considered to be more topical than economic ones, that is why there was the obvious preponderance of unmasking materials in periodicals pages up to the end of the 1920s.

Thus, for example, from October 1924 till March 1925 public prosecutor's office filed 394 criminal suits due to the working-class and rural correspondents' notes published in the pages of Morshansk district newspaper "Red Ringing" [6, f. 1244, s. 11 об.]. During only 6 months of 1927 "Tambov Peasant" editorial board got 3980 notes. 487 (12 %) of them caused investigation and more than a half, as inspection showed, rightly signaled about different abuses and shortcomings. As a result criminal and administrative proceedings were instituted against 121 people [23]. In whole in the country only public prosecutor's office instituted 488 criminal proceedings in 1927, 968 – in 1928, 1188 – in 1929 [9, p. 39].

It is doubtful whether such impressive figures, telling about soviet printed matters efficiency in control functions implementation, were possible, if the authorities couldn't organize the wide movement of freelance (working-class and rural) correspondents, which became one of the most powerful political control institutions in the 1920s.

The following figures, for example, tell about working-class and rural correspondents' movement scale. By 1926 "Peasant Newspaper" communicated with 2019 "newspaper friends' circles" on-site. "Working-Class Newspaper" got 400–500 working-class and rural correspondents' letters every day that allowed publishing some issues on eight pages [10].

Organizing working-class and rural correspondents' movement the authorities took measures on publishing the enormous number of the methodological and specialized periodicals for working-class and rural correspondents. Altogether by the first five-year plan there were issued about 30 working-class and rural correspondents' journals and 40 newsletters [10, p. 81]. All these issues tried to raise working-class and rural correspondents' authority. For example, the first issue of Tula journal "Throng" writes about a rural correspondent with respect: "Now he is spoken about seriously. Because he is among the first builders of new village, he is the best ally of the soviet rule. A rural correspondent in a village is acknowledged by both friends and enemies. The first consider him as their best defender, assistant in common cause; the second – hate him fatally" [4, p. 3].

The most famous proletarian poets and writers created the image of a working-class and rural correspondent – hero in their works. V.V. Mayakovskii in his poem "Rural Correspondent" (1924), particularly, proclaimed: "Your pencil / shoots more correctly / than a rifle / and pierces / better than a bayonet".

V.I. Lenin's works "Great Initiative", "What to Begin with?", "Letter to Comrades", "Party Organization and Party Literature", N.I. Bukharin, A.I. Rykov, G. E. Zinov'ev, N. K. Krupskaya and L. B. Kamenev's speeches served to prove the necessity of readership connection with periodicals (citation corpus was modified according to intraparty struggle results).

L.D. Trotskii devoted several quite solid works to working-class and rural correspondents. As an experienced orator and political essays writer he allowed giving not only political but also professional pieces of advice to working-class

and rural correspondents. First of all, L.D. Trotskii summoned correspondents “to awaken the dozing thought of the most backward mates”. However, even for him a newspaper is “a powerful correction of state machine work”, it gets vast masses involved in checking state work and gradually prepares them for the participation in management itself through working-class and rural correspondents’ movement. From L.D. Trotskii’s point of view, a working-class correspondent “is not just a newspaper employee, no, he is a new and important element of the soviet constitution, he supplements governmental bodies activity, counteracts their bureaucratization”, he is “a public consciousness body, which watches, which exposes, which demands, which insists” [25]. It is important to emphasize that L.D. Trotskii considered working-class and rural correspondents, first of all, as ideological fighters winning over “the right and possibility of the mobilization and up-bringing of working peoples’ public opinion in behalf of revolutionary dictatorship and socialist building” [24].

I.V. Stalin was gradually becoming more and more cited author (“Press as a Collective Organizer”, “The Further You Get”, “Against Self-Criticism Slogan Vulgarization”, “To Peasant Newspaper” and others). I.V. Stalin’s talk with the employee of the journal “Working-Class Correspondent” (1924) was of special importance for the working-class and rural correspondents’ movement development. I.V. Stalin stated: “Working-class and rural correspondents can play the role of the mouthpiece and the champion of proletarian public opinion, the exposé of soviet community shortcomings, the tireless fighter for our building perfection during press development only as an organized force”. He wanted to see working-class and rural correspondents, first of all, as “the fighters for the elimination of... shortcomings, the commanders of proletarian public opinion”. I.V. Stalin thought that their newspaper work must be controlled by party newspapers: “Newspapers editorial boards connected with the party must manage working-class and rural correspondents directly and ideologically and censor correspondence” [22, p. 261–262]. Though, from the very first years of the soviet rule the expansion of newspapers correspondents’ network of province, district and lower levels was directly guided by the party. Periodicals of various purposes and scales were the champion of party ideas concerning working-class and rural correspondents’ movement development.

Today a lot of people are surprised by the fact that the newspapers of those times consisted mainly of working-class and rural correspondents’ materials. But we must take into account that the soviet press was dilettantes’ concern over the years. New journalists were trained directly while working. The basic criterion of their professionalism was neither journalistic mastery nor objective information possession but the consent with soviet rule policy.

Working-class and rural correspondents’ attraction as authorities’ (as a rule, superior ones) secret agents, giving them broad supervisory functions, was caused, first of all, by the absence of the organized systematic control of central authorities over local ones, by the incompleteness of command line formation, by the frequent “transfers” of personnel and, most importantly, by their low qualification.

The level of the political and general culture of local officials was low and the authorities took active interest in the real situation on-site, thus inciting working-class and rural correspondents to snitching. “If Ignatovka village is a

thousand versts away from the center, how can the central authorities get to know that the tax is exacted from this village incorrectly or that local authorities abuse their position without a rural correspondent's help?" – asked the central journal "Rural Correspondent" [12, p. 1]. The press organ of Tula Province Committee of Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) "Vanguard" proclaimed not without reason: "Working-class and rural correspondents' institution is the revolution great army reconnaissance party". The journal spoke about "the importance of patrols, their number and quality" [1]. The two-day meeting of the Secretary General of the Central Committee of Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) I.V. Stalin with the delegates of the 1st All-Union Rural Correspondents' Congress, which was held on the 14th–15th of March 1925 is still more significant. The delegates told that before the beginning of the talk I. V. Stalin had directly stated that a rural correspondent was eyes and ears of the party, its first assistant and had asked to tell the truth frankly, not to feel shy and be afraid of nothing [7, f. 1, s. 10].

Stalin's reaction to the numerous stories about the outrages of the party-state bureaucracy on-site was very strict. A peasant woman from Livny district of Orel province told about the injustice while levying agricultural tax: "They take everything from the poor. And everyone unintentionally thinks: so much blood was shed but nothing changed in the village" [7, f. 1, s. 7–8].

During the meeting with rural correspondents I. V. Stalin demonstrated that he himself was ready to protect every correspondent if necessary. It is evident that I.V. Stalin understood that authorities couldn't radically change the situation on-site but were obliged to show that tireless struggle with abuses was carried on just due self-preservation instinct.

During the talk I.V. Stalin was able to create his image as a common people's defender, for whom any unjust deed on-site is a heart ache and a material for reflections and heroic actions. He was indignant with the fact that unaffiliated people had no admission to party and Komsomol meetings ("feel shy before honest peasants") [7, f. 1, s. 10] and pointed at the RSFSR Constitution: "People wrote this Constitution and the same people will change it" [7, f. 14, s. 12]. He reacted to the criticism of the delegate from Bobrovsk district of Voronezh province M. Sitnikova concerning local authorities by sending the telegram to Voronezh, and just the next day the peasant woman admirably told about her offers realization [3].

I.V. Stalin stated at the meeting: "Many people on-site don't understand the goals and tasks of the soviet rule. They must be turned out, and we can do it only together. We can't see from Moscow everything that takes place on-site. In our villages not all people are like those who oppress you. So, find a persistent, honest man and work in councils more actively" [7, f. 14, s. 8].

At the end of the talk Stalin also showed his actor talent: "We have good communists, – looking at women – rural correspondents – begged their pardon, – but also rotten communists. Try to eliminate all the disorders, outrages on-site, in a district, in a province. If you fail, write to me. My address is simple: "Moscow. Kremlin. To Stalin". And added a little later: "Stamps are not necessary, I'll get, anyway" [7, f. 14, s. 19].

Tambov rural correspondent A. Lavrinov, persecuted in his native village for local officials' criticism, not for nothing admired the party leader's wisdom:

“It’s nice to deal with you, comrade Stalin, on-site – it is lethally dangerous. They are all for one...” [7, f. 14, s. 17]. Central soviet leaders with the help of working-class and rural correspondents were able (at least, in part) to distinguish between the dissatisfaction with concrete officials’ actions and the ideas about soviet rule as a just, popular and taking into account average citizens’ opinions one.

In fact letters to newspapers turned into official appeals to competent authorities. Public prosecutor’s office was to check working-class and rural correspondents’ notes when they told about abnormalities or faults. Lipetsk district congress of working-class and rural correspondents officially turned to local public prosecutor’s office with the request to use also the notes in wall newspapers and to react to the published notes in the same newspapers. Attention was paid to the necessity to organize the show trials on the cases revealed due to working-class and rural correspondents’ notes [8, f. 38, s. 17].

Working-class and rural correspondents understood that it was not enough to tell about bad work in order to awake state authorities’ interest: political matter was necessary, at least, the reference to culprits’ non-proletarian origin. That is why they didn’t just accuse a village library and reading room head (“he doesn’t work”), but added: a kulak’s son [8, f. 62, s. 33]. They saw crime not so much in the fact that Komsomol members celebrating the 1st of May got drunk and began to indulge in lust for all to see as in the fact that they simultaneously celebrated Easter saying “Christ is risen” [8, f. 62, s. 65, 100].

In such context it is not surprising that such position of working-class and rural correspondents and party leaders caused the animosity of those who directly or indirectly was hit by “print word”. By 1930 about 300 working-class and rural correspondents were killed [9, p. 75–76]. One of the most famous crimes of the 1920s was the rural correspondent G. Malinovskii’s murder in Dymovka village of Odessa province [2, p. 100].

In connection with the events in Dymovka I. V. Stalin spoke at the sitting of the Organizational Bureau of the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) on the 26th of January, 1925, having characterized the press workers as “the barometer, reflecting the shortcomings of our building work”. I.V. Stalin told about working-class and rural correspondents: “These people, for the most part impressionable, burning with truth spark, willing to expose, willing to correct our shortcomings at any expense, people, who are not afraid of bullets, – these people, in my opinion, must form one of the main key factors in revealing our shortcomings and correcting our party and soviet construction work on-site” [20, p. 22]. Thus I.V. Stalin gave to the working-class and rural correspondents’ movement on-site one of the main roles in political control system, at the same time repeatedly emphasizing that rural correspondents murder itself is not important at all. “...Either we together with unaffiliated peasantry, together with our soviet and party workers on-site will criticize ourselves in order to perfect our work or peasants’ displeasure will accumulate and burst open in the form of rebellions, – I.V. Stalin emphasized. – Keep in mind that under the new conditions of New Economic Policy new Tambov or new Kronstadt are not at all ruled out” [20, p. 21]. From I.V. Stalin’s point of view such rebellions are possible in the future if “we don’t learn to overcome and open our sores” [20, p. 22–23]. In this

connection victims among working-class and rural correspondents seemed quite acceptable and even necessary for the sake of general victory in socialism construction. At least, according to I. V. Stalin's understanding it was a lesser evil in comparison with mass peasant rebellions.

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Задачи рабочих и сельских корреспондентов в воззрениях советских лидеров 1920-х годов

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Ключевые слова и фразы: власть; жертвы; законодательство; информация; политический контроль; рабочие и сельские корреспонденты; печать.

Аннотация: Рассмотрено движение рабочих и сельских корреспондентов в Советской России как институт политического контроля. Проанализированы выступления руководителей советского государства первого десятилетия его существования, решения партийных и государственных органов, ставшие теоретической основой данного института политического контроля. Показано, что с точки зрения коммунистических идеологов, жертвы среди рабселькоров выглядели вполне допустимыми и даже необходимыми ради общей победы в деле строительства социализма.

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