

## On the problem of the publication of the periodical press in German in the South of Russia (1920-1930)

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**Abstract.** The article is dedicated to the periodical press in German and the state policy in this respect on the example of the publications in the South of Russia (1920-1930 XX century). It is noted that the German structures set up under the party and state organs of power were chiefly engaged in the circulation of the press published in some towns of the country. The Russian Germans in the period under consideration showed little interest in the communist press. Religious literature published abroad was in great demand among them.

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### Introduction

The Russian (Soviet) Germans (Russlanddeutsche) both in the Russian Empire and in the USSR in certain periods were in the first top ten of the most numerous peoples. According to the 1897 census, 1.8 million Germans lived in the Russian Empire. According to the 1926 All-Union census, there were over 1.2 million of them in the USSR [1]. Among the dispersed ethnic groups of the South of Russia the German population in terms of its size was second only to the Armenian population. According to the 1926 All-Union census in the North Caucasus territory there were 93.9 thousand Germans [1].

According to the 1939 census, in the USSR the number of the Germans constituted 1.4 million people, including those in the RSFSR – 862 thousand (around 120 thousand – in the South of Russia) [2].

In the pre-Soviet period the natives from Germany participated in the formation of the publishing business in Russia and for many decades they had been the leaders in this branch of activity. The center of the Russian German-language periodical press was Saint Petersburg and Moscow. The first Russian revolution exercised influence on the expansion of the geography of the German press. Later it appeared in the province. For example, in the Caucasus region very popular among the Germans was the “Kaukasische Post”, published from 1907 to 1914 in Tiflis [3]. The First World War exposed the Germans to repressive measures, including their resettlement from the frontline districts inland. The German periodical press was either axed in all areas or it was under severe censorship.

### German-language periodicals in the South of Russia (1920s-1930s).

After the February revolution and during the Civil War in different parts of the country they

resumed the publication in German of newspapers and magazines of various ideological orientations [3, 4].

In the North Caucasus in the pre-Soviet period not a single newspaper in German was published. The problem of the organization of the newspaper in the German language emerged after the establishment of the Soviet power in the South of Russia, and with the start of the work of the special structures for the affairs of the national minorities. The defining role among them was played by the German communist sections.

They were intended to “replace” the “informal” cultural-educational and charitable organizations operating in the colonies that were out of the party and state control, and to neutralize the religious associations.

The organs of power, particularly the German sections, were made directly responsible for the regular provision of the German population with the literature in the native language and for the realization of the publishing business.

In connection with the fact that the All-Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) was relying on the export of revolution to Germany, it could not leave the German population of Russia and, in the first place, the German prisoners of war that could have become the bearers of the “world revolution” without the “party’s” attention. The Central Bureau of the German communist sections (CB) of the Council Committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (b) becomes their headquarters, and the newspaper “Die Rote Fahne” having been published in Moscow since 1919 – its main organ [5].

The Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Germans in the Volga area with the center in Pokrovsk (from 1931 – Engels) was to have become the outpost of the export of revolution. The newspaper “Der Kommunist” became the printing organ of the

party's regional committee and the executive committee. In 1919 the newspaper was renamed "Nachrichten" and it started to be published in Marksstadt, and in 1922 the editors moved to Pokrovsk [6].

Besides the circulation of the press that was released under the aegis of the Comintern, the Central Bureau was made responsible for the organization of the new editions. To achieve the general coordination of the press in German and its circulation the Central Bureau in January 1921 set up a literary department. Under its aegis at the beginning of the 1920s the following newspapers were published: "Die Rote Fahne", "Die Neue Zeit", "Hammer und Pflug" and others [6]. Only in 1920-1921 under the leadership of the Central Bureau they circulated 17 thousand copies of newspapers and tens of thousands of brochures [7].

The German national sections of the North Caucasus were supplied in abundance with the materials and the press directly from Moscow. Thus, in August 1922 alone, the German sections regularly received "Die Rote Fahne" and "Hammer und Pflug" [8].

The results of the mass famine of 1921-1922 and the transition to the new economic policy (NEP) limited the resources of the party to publish literature in the former large editions and spread it for free.

So, due to a sharp cut in the subsidy for the publication of the press in German its edition was considerably reduced. Some of the newspapers were closed down. In order to improve the image of the newspaper among the peasants, in December 1922 the Central Bureau decided to replace the newspaper "Die Rote Fahne" for the magazine "Die Arbeit" [9].

On the contrary, the German colonies of the North Caucasus received in the "roundabout ways" "the anti-Soviet press" so much wanted by the population. The press published by various religious organizations was the most preferably read [6].

These and other similar editions, according to the leaders of the Central Bureau of the German sections, were the main cause of the lack of popularity of the party newspapers and magazines.

The reduction in the supply of literature and periodical press from the Center provoked a debate among the German party activists over the expediency of the publication of a newspaper in the North Caucasus [10].

In September 1924 the meeting of the workers of the national minorities of the North Caucasus territory determined the tasks on the intensification of the work among the dispersed ethnic groups [11]. In January 3, 1925 at the sitting of the secretariat of the territorial committee they made a decision to convene in January, 15 the meeting of the secretaries of the territorial German sections. The

meeting passed the decision to organize the bureau of the German section [12]. The territorial executive committee was proposed to introduce under its organizational department the permanent post of the instructor to work among the German population headed by the subdepartment of the national minorities of the territorial committee [13].

The organization of the German sections promoted the intensification of the planned work among the German population in the territory.

In June 1925 the German section held a non-party conference of the German colonists, whose organizers once again proposed for the purpose of the "intensification of the propaganda" the publishing in the North Caucasus territory of a newspaper in German [14]. However the Center considered it inexpedient to spread the subscription campaign to the periodicals and literature published in Moscow, the UkrSSR and in the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Germans in the Volga area.

Indeed, the stabilization of the economic development in the middle of the 1920s made it possible to publish on the territory of the USSR around 10 periodical editions in German.

The following data show what newspapers the Germans in the South of Russia "subscribed" to in the middle and in the second half of the 1920s. Among the circulated newspapers: "Hammer und Pflug"; "Der Landmann"; "Nachrichten"; "Rote Jugend"; "Unsere Wirtschaft"; magazine "Die Arbeit" [15].

In 1926 the Territorial committee for the national minorities a new list of the periodicals recommended for the subscription by the German educational organizations of the North Caucasus. It contained: "Deutsche Zentralzeitung", "Nachrichten", "Unsere Wirtschaft", "Das Neue Dorf", "Rote Jugend", "Sei bereit!" and others [16]. The periodicity, edition, format and even the name of the newspapers were constantly changed [6, 5].

All those newspapers were extremely politicized. However they were contrasted with the magazine "Unsere Wirtschaft". The editors tried to adhere to the scientific line of the magazine. In the last two years the magazine was edited by the journalist and historian Johann Schmidt. In December 8, 1926 at the meeting of the Bureau of the regional committee of the All-Russian Communist Party (bolshevik) Schmidt was subject to severe criticism for the publication of the materials "harmful for the party". Finally, in 1927 the magazine was closed down [17]. In 1937 a repressive action was taken against Schmidt [18].

Under the aegis of the Central Bureau of the German sections, in addition to the periodical press, other literature was also published, chiefly political,

and textbooks. Thus, for example, in 1924 the leaders of the Central Bureau and the German section under the Central Publishing House planned to publish in 1924-25 around 114 printer's sheets of peasant, political and science-fiction literature [6; 19]. From the middle of the 1920-s the All-Union Central Publishing House alone published in the German language around 500 printer's sheets per year. As a rule, all the literature over the agreement between the Central Publishing House and the German-language State Publishing House was published in Pokrovsk (the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Germans in the Volga area) where up to 1922 there was its own German-language State Publishing House. The literature published there due to its low quality, quite often lied long in the warehouses. The printed matter in the German language, published in the German language in 1925-1927, by 1929 had been realized only by 65% [6; 20].

On the contrary, the Germans showed interest in the non-communist literature and periodicals, in the first place in the religious editions, particularly in foreign ones. Besides, the USSR published five religious magazines in the German language. If the whole edition of the Soviet and party periodicals in German hardly amounted to 20 thousand copies, then the whole edition of the religious press distributed in the German settlements, by March 1928 had amounted to around 17 thousand copies [21].

Due to the official registration in the North Caucasus territory of the German village soviets and the national region there arose the problem of the publication of a newspaper in the German language. The authorities expected the population of the national village soviets in "recognition" of the local territorial autonomy to respond with the total collectivization and demonstrate the uncompromising struggle with the Kulak community and the religious associations. However, various committees after the inspection of the German settlements noted, that the Germans were in no way in a hurry to participate in the socialist construction and preserved their traditional self-isolation. The 1929 reports noted that a number of the village soviets remained without the "communist influence" and "the priest-and-kulak counterrevolution" had built a solid nest" there [22]. In this connection The 7<sup>th</sup> All-Union meeting of the German party sections (June 1929) passed a decision to "double" the general number of the subscribers to the German newspapers that came out in the USSR.

The centralized financial support of the German press had made it possible by the end of 1929 to publish across the country 12 newspapers and magazines [6].

Practically in all the German settlements they published wall newspapers. In a number of places they would grow into "factory newspapers" that were published in a considerable edition. It was exactly the case in 1931 in Velikoknyazheskaya colony [23]. The leading article of the territorial newspaper "The Hammer" says: "The network of the factory newspapers in the German language is constantly growing. For example, in the settlement Leninfeld (former Velikoknyazheskaya) of Nevinnomyssk district, they publish every five days a factory newspaper "Zum Sozialismus" in the German language [24].

So, the newspaper "Zum Sozialismus" became the first of the well-known factory newspapers in the North Caucasus.

However, the "main" German newspaper in the North Caucasus became the official organ of the Wannowskoje German district.

The German district was founded in February, 1928. The center of the district was village Wannowskoje. In 1926 Wannowskoje became the center of the national village soviet [23].

At the beginning of the 30s the USSR passed a decision to organize in all the districts the newspapers – the official organs of the district committees of the party and the executive committees. In Wannowskoje district such a newspaper appeared in 1932. It got the title "Kollektivfahne".

As the Germans in the district did not constitute absolute majority, the newspaper was published in two languages. But the "German part" could be considered national only in terms of the language. The real needs of the German (as well as of the Russian) population were not presented in this newspaper. The "Kollektivfahne" on its pages branded the Kulaks and praised Stalin.

Until the middle of the 30-s the "Kollektivfahne" was small in format and only from April 1935 it became four-paged. The financing of the newspaper was realized from the residual funds. To improve its material situation the editorial board attempted to organize the issue of the printed matter through the orders from various organizations. However it was strictly prohibited to issue books, magazines, bulletins without special permission from the District Press Administration [25; 26].

The quality of the newspapers also left much to be desired and there were big problems with the subscription. The newspaper was not interesting for the Germans.

During the Big terror the German periodicals became the means for denunciation and defamation, the tools by which "the anti-Soviet and counter-revolutionary elements" were exposed and persecuted. The newspapers published the speeches of "the

working people” who lauded the Soviet state system. This loyalty, however, did not help to preserve the national educational establishments, village soviets and districts (in May 4, 1941 the Presidium of the supreme Council of the USSR issued the decree on the liquidation of the Wannowskoje national district) [27]. Since spring 1939 the issue of the newspaper the “Kollektivfahne” had stopped.

The Hitlerite aggression against the USSR predetermined the fate of the Russian Germans in the European part of the country, who were subject to the deportation to the eastern districts. The Germans of the North Caucasus, including 43 thousand from Stavropol (Ordzhonikidze) territory, 34.2 from Krasnodar territory and 33 thousand from Rostov region were forced to leave the habitable places.

### Conclusion

After the collapse of the USSR the German-language periodicals started their new stage of development. The majority of the editions became independent. However in the market conditions they were unable to pay their cost and do without subsidies. This problem to a considerable degree is being solved at the expense of the support from Germany’s governmental and commercial structures, which cannot but influence their content. Besides, the printing periodicals received such powerful rivals as radio, television, the Internet. A whole number of the leading German newspapers (“Moskauer Deutsche Zeitung”, “Zeitung für Dich” and others) regularly come out online. One more problem. A considerable number of the Germans at present have lost their native tongue and even their national identity. In this connection a whole number of the German mass media have switched to Russian. A paradoxical situation has arisen: in the first Soviet decades the German periodicals were national in form and socialist (de-national) in content, but at present they are their polar opposite – the periodicals national in content are in their majority published in Russian. But all these problems exceed the limits of the chronological framework of the topic under consideration.

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