

The Jewish Topic in the Soviet Media: Political Environment, Priorities and Heroes

Dmitry Strovsky

Abstract

This article examines the evolution of the Soviet media in relation to the “Jewish topic”, which has become an integral part, albeit not very visible, of their common content. In the Soviet years, the subject of Jewishness was limited to connotations and never came to the fore. Nonetheless, it did exist in the Soviet media, albeit subtly, and often acquired hidden outlines. The main attention in the article is therefore paid to the stuff which for a few decades centered on situations that in one way or another involved Jewish circumstances, as well as to names of journalists of Jewish origin, who worked in the media and greatly influenced public consciousness during different periods of national history. The author envisages processes and events of Soviet life that affected the above topic, and predetermined the professional priorities of Soviet journalists. These occurrences affected the evolution of the entire media process in the country. Consequently, the article promotes strictly academic generalizations, and contains elements of essays that are very important for reconstruction of real situations in certain periods of Soviet history. In the meantime, the article serves as a well-structured representation of diverse empirical material being useful for studies in political science, sociology, media history, as well as other humanities.

Keywords: Communist ideology, Soviet propaganda, Israel, “Jewish issue” in the USSR, anti-Semitism, “rootless cosmopolitanism”, media, samizdat

Dr. Dmitry Strovsky – Ariel University; dmitryst@ariel.ac.il

Introduction

Life in Israel for every repatriate seems dissimilar to his previous experience. This became obvious for the author in the example of media history, which defined his academic background in Russia for almost thirty years. Here, in the Holy Land, Russian media history began to be visualized through the prism of Jewry, which somehow became new. It is not that the “Jewish topic” was extremely distant for the author during his long work at the Ural Federal University in Ekaterinburg. Yet, this theme had never been specific.

In Israel everything turned out to be different.

One of the author’s first lectures at Ariel University was devoted to Soviet propaganda during WWII, and a couple of slides projected the pictures of radio presenter Yuri Levitan and writer Ilya Erenburg, without whom that period of Soviet history cannot be considered perfectly complete.

“They are Jews”, happily pronounced one of the female students sitting on the front row.

“Jews, indeed”, added a few voices almost in unison.

The students in class were very curious about Levitan and Erenburg. It was unlikely to be the same if the talk was about people of a different nationality. This is how, by and large, the Israelis treat the world – by snatching out “their” individuals and events from the entire context. It is no exaggeration that such a psychological tendency cements Israeli society and promotes common priorities as necessary for survival of this multi-cultural community, like it was in the past.

The pivotal purpose of this article, however, is not to investigate the issues of Jewry or Judaism in Soviet Russia, but to envisage how the Soviet print media informed its audience about Jews. By these media, the author means those that circulated from the early 1920s until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the meantime, the main task is not to identify quantitative indicators (for instance, by calculating a number of publications), but to sort out substantive trends that were inherent in the press coverage of the “Jewish theme”.

Even so, it is impossible to comprehensively expose the issue under consideration; it is too large for any article. Besides, the topic cannot be understood straightforwardly: except for some pieces of evidence, Jews did not occupy a special place in the Soviet media content, and there was never a mention of their nationality. Moreover, the topic has been entirely removed from public discourse. To be certain, in most cases “Jewish connotations” were submitted through the Aesop language, and the contributors never disclosed their national origins. Nonetheless, except for media texts, it is important to envisage the professional priorities of journalists and writers, Jews by origin, who at different historical stages contributed to the Soviet press with their articles and literary works on the above theme. The unity of the above two aspects – the media content and national identity of the contributors – allows us to shed light on the “Jewish topic” in the Soviet media.

The coverage of this topic in the Soviet media had nothing to do with journalism information centered on the idea of comparing pros and cons, and thereby coming to balanced conclusions about situations. Most comments and articles were determined by manipulative methods of influence. Manipulation as a socio-political phenomenon is seen as spiritual domination over the individual, who is oblivious to it, or thinks of it as a manifestation of her own interests and desires. This phenomenon can also be perceived as spiritual violence against an individual or a social group, which is most often realized in a non-violent way (Yermakov, 1995, p. 18). According to Lippmann, manipulation constructs a special world that has little to do with the real. This happens not only through the content, but also via an emotionally colored background (Lippmann, 1965, pp. 214–225). Another researcher, Brown, fairly argued that transmission of mass information facilitates changing the consciousness of people, often even in a veiled form (Brown, 1964, pp. 3–10).

With regard to the media, manipulative influence can take numerous forms. They include deliberate omission of information; excessive emotionality of texts caused by the need to focus on selected facts; multiple repetition of the same ideas; frequent references to the ideological and political priorities of the actor,

etc. During the coverage of the “Jewish topic”, all these trends influenced mass information which was ideologically colored and provided far from objective backgrounds. The article is based on the principle of historicism, involving the study of political realities in accordance with their evolution. The author is selective about the facts taken for consideration. At the same time, different historical stages create a unified picture of the role of the Soviet media in the reflection of the “Jewish topic”.

Following the Communist Line

There were not many persons of Jewish origin working for media in the first Soviet decades, compared to employees of Russian nationality. In the meantime, every editorial office always recruited Jews. From the author’s calculations related to the period from 1921 to 1925, about a quarter of 120–160 journalists working in such main political newspapers as *Pravda*, *Izvestia* and *Trud*, were Jews.

This was mostly determined by the officially proclaimed policy in those years. In the 1920s, Soviet Russia lived with the idea of fighting anti-Semitism. Many publications called this phenomenon harmful and shameful for the new political conditions. Central outlets, such as *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, *Krokodil* (“The crocodile”), and the literary journal *Molodaya gvardiya* (“The young guard”) were actively involved in writing about this topic. Intolerance of anti-Semitism was also strongly supported by Soviet intellectuals such as writer Maxim Gorky, poets Vladimir Mayakovsky and Nikolai Aseev, and many others, who repeatedly published articles on this topic (anti-Semitism...). In 1929, a historian and co-editor of the pre-revolutionary Jewish Encyclopedia, Samuel Lozinsky, published a book titled “The social roots of anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages and modern times”, where he called anti-Semitism “the legacy of the former regime”, which deserves to be “resolutely struggled [against]” (Lozinsky, 1929). Thus, the then Soviet Jews were not yet oppressed by the political system.

Jews were suitable for the craft of journalism, due to their high educational

level. Historically they have always been considered to be the *people of the book*. Every Jewish boy before the 1917 Bolshevik revolution was required to go to cheder and to read the Torah and the Talmud, as well as literary works of Russian writers. Therefore many of them also wrote well.

Jews participated in the revolution and contributed to the Bolshevik press – not only because of their educational level. Similarly, they could join the White Army, which also promulgated numerous publications. Meanwhile, the White movement for Jews was firmly associated with the tsarism, which long before 1917 introduced the Pale of Settlement (a western region of Imperial Russia beyond which Jewish permanent residency was forbidden) and restrictions preventing Jewish youth from getting university degrees. Besides, the pre-revolutionary authorities stimulated severe pogroms and humiliation of these people, who were scornfully called *zhidi* in the Russian Empire. Therefore, Jews had no respect for the former powers. As Maxim Gorky unambiguously wrote in 1919, Jews used to live “with unquenchable faith in the triumph of truth”, without which “there can be no man, but only a two-legged animal” (Gorky, 1919).

When the Soviet government proclaimed equality for nationalities, most Jews immediately supported this idea and completely rejected their Jewish roots. Their origins almost impetuously ceased to mean anything for them in the struggle for the ideals of the world revolution. From now on, these people belonged only to the Communist ideology, promoted through the Soviet media. Some of the Jews were so actively linked with the media that they were even engaged in shaping the theory of new journalism. The main issue raised within this theory concerned the content of media in the new political environment.

At the first Congress of the Union of Journalists of Russia in 1918, the editor-in-chief of *Izvestia*, Yuri Steklov (Oshiy Nakhamkis), spoke about two types of publications: one aimed at the Party’s activists, and another at ordinary readers. The mass audience, in his view, was unready to immediately understand serious themes, and therefore the media did not have to limit themselves only to high-level publications. This debate was joined by Jews Yakov Shafir (1923, 1927a, 1927b) and Michael Levidov (1927), who saw media as a great force for social

transformation, and therefore considered different types of print media to be important for the then political environment. In addition, the above theorists stood for the recognition of the class nature of journalism, and saw the latter being supportive of basic attitudes of the Party (Zhirkov, 2003).

After the mid-1920s, following more obvious politization of life and a recruitment of young apparatchiks into the party organs, a new wave of anti-Semitism arose in the USSR. The Soviet press, however, preferred not to pay attention to it. Official Soviet propaganda claimed that anti-Semitism was a “legacy of the past” brought to the city by backward elements from the countryside. Meanwhile, the facts proved that it was mainly generated by the clash of various social forces in the major cities. One more reason for the anti-Semitic spirit was advanced by the widespread belief that the power in the country had been seized by Jews (while Jews accounted for 5.2% of the members of the Communist Party in 1922, and in 1927, only 4.3%). Anti-Semitism also increased in connection with the advancement of Church values in 1922: a significant number of the commissioners were Jews. The wave of renaming cities and streets in large cities had no less of a negative effect. For example, Yekaterinburg became Sverdlovsk, Elizavetgrad and Gatchina were renamed Zinovievsk and Trotsk, etc. (Sovetskii Soyuz).

Consequently, the Bolshevik Party gradually seems to have increased criticism of Jews. All Soviet journalists of Jewish origin were strongly advised to choose pseudonyms, so that Jewish names would not be noticed.

Many readers of the 1930s did not even know that Stalin’s favorite Jewish journalist, Mikhail Koltsov, was originally named Fridland, as was his brother the legendary newspaper cartoonist, Boris Yefimov. In Mikhail Koltsov’s articles and sketches there was no the “Jewish theme”. The only exceptions he made were in the reports from the “open” trials in the mid-1930s, where G. Zinoviev (Radomysl’sky), L. Kamenev (Rosenfeld), G. Sokolnikov (Brilliant), and other prominent Bolsheviks were prosecuted. When criticizing and even ridiculing the defendants in all other cases, M. Koltsov never specially mentioned their nationalities, in accordance with the early Stalin statement that “the Communists,

as consistent internationalists, cannot but be irreconcilable and sworn enemies of anti-Semitism” (Stalin, 1931).

Boris Yefimov acted differently than Koltsov. He produced satirical pictures against those being criticized by the system. One could not but recognize many Jews among Yefimov’s visual images. He drew numerous images of Lev Trotsky in a gleaming pince-nez, with an unpleasant face and a hooked nose, so that nobody doubted his nationality. In addition to Boris Yefimov there were many other Jewish cartoonists who contributed to the press. Perhaps the best known of them were Lev Brodaty and Yuly Ganf, who developed their drawings in the satire journals *Begemot* (“Hippopotamus”) and *Krasniy Voron* (“Red crow”), among others. Along with news items and articles, those drawings were an important part of Soviet propaganda.

In the first post-revolutionary years, many Soviet Jews were in charge of the leading Soviet newspapers. For instance, *Krasnaya gazeta* (“Red newspaper”), the main Bolshevik publication in Petrograd, was headed by Moisei Volodarsky (Goldshstein), who was also the Deputy Chief for the local Cheka (secret police). In turn, the popular peasant newspaper *Bednota* (“The poor”) was edited by Lev Sosnovsky. Personally, he was less odious than Volodarsky, and did not seem to have participated in mass executions. However, their fates (like those of many Soviet journalists of Stalin’s time) were tragic. If Volodarsky fell by the bullet of the enemy of the revolution as early as in 1918, then Sosnovsky’s life ended in the 1937, in the period of great purges.

The fate of many other journalists unfolded in those years in the same way. For example, Jakob Belsky (Bilenkin), a native of Odessa, in the early 1920s served in the Odessa gubcheka (a regional unit of the secret police), but was sent to “strengthen the press”. In the 1930s, Belsky became a deputy editor of the satire journal *Krokodil* and worked there until 1937, when he was accused of espionage and shot (Kiyanskaya, 2015). In 1939, the same fate befell Karl Radek (Kopel’ Sobelson), one of the leading Soviet ideologists and a journalist who became one of the defendants in the second Moscow trial. Later Radek was sent to a remote detention center, where he perished.

In the Soviet era, Jews who rejected their national roots seemed to become the worst anti-Semites. The most odious figure in the then Soviet journalism was, probably, David Zaslavsky, who worked for *Pravda* for over forty years. Zaslavsky could write a spirited eulogy, *Jews in the USSR*, where Jewish culture was perceived as “an integral part of Soviet culture”, and simultaneously produce a set of creepy chauvinist essays under the title “Teachers-Saboteurs”. There he severely criticized professors and teachers from Ukraine who became “the ideological enemies of the Soviet power” – “The defendants stood for the kulak economy, for the restoration of private property [...] were in fact the ideologists of Ukrainian kulaks” (Zaslavsky, 1930, pp. 4–5). Among those being undermined were Jews, too.

All Soviet journalists believed that spirited criticism of “insufficiently good” people could eradicate the hardships of life. The editor-in-chief of *Pravda*, Lev Mehlis, under whom Zaslavsky worked in the 1930s, was undoubtedly among them. Mehlis was appointed to this position in May 1930, when he was in charge of the Press Department of the CPSU’s Central Committee. Although Mehlis never even graduated from a school, he was a man of great capability. Under him, *Pravda* fiercely began to fight opportunists of all stripes. Mehlis showed a special zeal in defending principles of the Party work. Having served at *Pravda* as the editor-in-chief for almost eight years, Mehlis made a significant contribution to the public exposure of Jews Grigory Zinoviev, Lev Kamenev, and many other prominent members of the Party.

In the Fight Against “Rootless Cosmopolitanism”

By the mid-1930s, the loyal attitude toward Jews in Soviet society had come to naught, albeit without a clear manifestation in the media. It was a fairly cynical position on their part: to proclaim certain ideas without referring to the main reasons for their protection. This approach was very common for the Soviet media throughout their history. The use of the above-mentioned Aesopian wordings

that deliberately shunned language with purely Jewish connotations created the impression of dealing only with certain shortcomings, without expressing strong criticism of Jews as such. The reality, however, clearly showed that all these evaluations fit into the system of state anti-Semitism.

The first signs of this situation were identified during the struggle against formalism in art in the 1930s which was widely reflected in the media. The situation, however, became more alarming in the late 1940s, when a famous political campaign against “rootless cosmopolitanism” started. Thousands of Soviet writers, artists, and musicians of Jewish origin were ostracized. They were considered to have no homeland, and therefore to be best suited for the role of “evil and merciless” cosmopolitans trying to ruin the framework of socialism in the USSR.

The campaign commenced on January 28, 1949, when *Pravda* published the article, “On one anti-party group of theater critics”. With great fury the main Soviet newspaper accused Moscow critics Y. Yuzovsky, A. Gurvich, A. Borshchagovsky, and some others of defending bourgeois art. “These critics have lost their responsibility to the people”, wrote *Pravda*. “They are the bearers of a deeply repugnant cosmopolitanism hostile to the Soviet man; they hinder the development of Soviet literature and break down its progress. They are alien to a sense of national pride” (Ob odnoi...). Looking at their names everyone had to understand: Namely, Jews were dreaming about destroying Soviet culture. In turn, in the early 1950s, *Pravda* severely criticized cinema producers, also for their lack of “national pride”. The first of those being rebuked were Leonid Trauberg and Evgeniy Gabrilovich, who allegedly despised the “peaceful and healthy development” of Soviet life. Remarkably, a few years earlier, in March 1943, Gabrilovich had received a welcome letter from Stalin for his caring about the Red Army. Yet, that did not save Gabrilovich from subsequent criticism. The Soviet government could initially praise a person and then attack him with ease, also publicly.

The incessant exaggeration of the “Jewish theme” in the media facilitated the infinite decline of morality among journalists. Vladimir Vdovichenko, the editor-in-staff of the newspaper *Soviet Art*, at first struggled with the idea of “rootless

cosmopolitanism” only within his publication, but then he enlarged the scope of his activity. When the CPSU’s Central Committee accused him of superficial content in his newspaper, Vdovichenko sent a note to the Politburo member Georgiy Malenkov, in which he viewed the above-mentioned critics as a “branched Zionist conspiracy”. “In no field of art”, Vdovichenko noted, “do we have such an unhealthy position with criticism as in music. Groupism, theoretical disorder, concealment of cosmopolitans and formalists, unscrupulousness, intrigue – this is what characterizes, to a large extent, the current state of musicology and music criticism. The situation here, in my opinion, is so serious that the press alone cannot be sufficient. It is likely that administrative intervention will also be required” (*Zapiska*). The note enumerated 83 people, all with Jewish surnames (Kostyrnichenko, 1994, p. 56).

It was a time when some members of the journalistic community fiercely accused their colleagues of cosmopolitan predilections, while others were victims of these prosecutions. For instance, in a Party meeting in *Pravda*, held in early 1949, columnist Yakov Marinin (Khavinson) blamed a few of his colleagues for creating a “nationalist group”, involved in the “provocations initiated by external imperialist forces”. As a result, a few experienced journalists were expelled from *Pravda*. Among them were the head of the economic department, S. Gershberg, the head of the information department, L. Brontman, a leading reporter, B. Izakov, and some others. No one cared about the fact that the newspaper risked loss of quality. In addition, some prominent journalists, also Jews, were abruptly reprimanded. David Zaslavsky, mentioned above, was rebuked for his “hidden” ties with the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, already defeated by this time. A few months later, the editor of the satire magazine *Krokodil*, Grigory Ryklin, was let go from his job (Rabinovich, 2014). He was deemed guilty of getting his outlet into the hands “of irresponsible satirists”, like the Jews Leonid Lench, Emil Krotky, Boris Laskin, and others (Kostyrchenko, 2003). The situation resembled the relentless Moloch, which was endlessly destroying people’s lives.

It is difficult to say nowadays how the “cosmopolitans”, most of whom were Jews, cursed by *Pravda* and other central print media, felt in the 1940s. Today

they are irrevocably gone. However, the author personally remembers one of the “cosmopolitans” from Sverdlovsk (now Ekaterinburg). Bella Dizhur was severely criticized in 1949, in the midst of this campaign, by the regional newspaper *Uralsky Rabochiy* (“Ural worker”) for her “openly apolitical” position.

Dizhur was a good poet and children’s writer. The following occurred many years after that memorable campaign of persecution of Jews. In the 1990s Dizhur lived in a small New York apartment bought for her by her son, the world-famous sculptor Ernst Neizvestny. She was already about 90 by then, but her memory was still amazingly alive, remembering all the details of her life including that article in *Uralsky rabochiy*. “Before, I believed in journalists”, Dizhur claimed in our conversation, “but in 1949 I realized that was nonsense. Why would they be goodhearted if life around them was moving in a different direction?”. These words even today have not lost relevance: Journalists cannot remain “white and fluffy” in terms of life being distorted by their pen.

The apotheosis of the struggle against the “rootless cosmopolitanists” was the satirical article “Pinya from Zhmerinka”, published in the magazine *Krokodil* in March 1953. Pinya Mirochnik, the director of an enterprise from Zhmerinka, is surrounded by many relatives of Jewish origin engaged in active fraud under the protection of the district prosecutor (Ardamatsky, 1953, p. 13). Ardamatsky provided no evidence of fraud by Pinya and his entourage, and the story was a vivid confirmation of anti-Semitic attitudes.

The Soviet media became even more hysterical during the so-called “Doctors’ plot”, which was described in January 1953. It was declared that the Kremlin’s physicians planned the murders of Stalin and other members of the Politburo. Most of those being accused were Jews. A “conspiracy” was thwarted by a medic, Lydia Timashuk. *Pravda* wrote with delight that Timashuk’s behavior “became a symbol of Soviet patriotism, high vigilance, and courageous fight against enemies of our homeland” (Chechetkina, 1953). However, almost immediately after Stalin’s death in March 1953, all charges against the “doctor-pests” were dropped, and the Lenin’s order that was initially handed to Timashuk was taken back (Soobshcheniye ob Ukaze, 1953).

The Enemy Will Not Pass !

Speaking of the anti-Semitic policy promoted by the Soviet press, it is impossible not to dwell on their biased attitude towards Israel since the emergence of this state in 1948. On the one hand, the coverage demonstrated manipulative approaches that were already ingrained in the media: biased presentation of information, increased emotional stimulation in the absence of sufficient facts, labeling, etc. On the other hand, the focus on the Israeli issue was a reflection of the pronounced state policy in the media towards the “unfriendly” country.

For many years, until the mid-1980s, journalists wrote about Israel only critically or with undisguised sarcasm. Without forethought, the media tended to portray Israel as constantly stealing something from the world: freedom, democracy, the ideals of socialism, etc. It was impossible to understand from the print media how exactly it was done. The information contained only carefully chosen data added to a great deal of negative emotion.

Soviet journalists at that time could not get first-hand news from Israel. Due to the lack of diplomatic relations between the USSR and Israel, none of the correspondents were able to enter its territory and to interview politicians. Consequently, all media reports were based only on facts obtained from foreign sources, but turned upside down in their conclusions. Therefore, inconsistency and the far-fetched nature of the press were obvious. However, if the opportunity to interview Israeli politicians had existed, it would have been of little use. Listening to political enemies had never been a tradition of Soviet journalism, and the enemy had to be treated with contempt only.

Meanwhile, the USSR and its media did not always neglect Israel. When in 1948 the UN made a decision about the emergence of the State of Israel, the attitude of the Soviet press toward this was extremely positive. The Soviet leadership actively supported this idea, hoping that Israel would become a Soviet outpost in the Middle East. During the War for Independence of 1948, initiated against Israel by the neighboring Arab States, *Pravda* clearly noted that “the Soviet public cannot but condemn this aggression” (May 29, 1948).

A similar idea was repeated numerous times by *Pravda*, which called Israel a country fighting for peace.

The USSR had not only political, but also economic interests in Israel. The Holy Land was believed to have a lot of natural resources. Therefore, initially the Soviet media supported Israel. However, Israeli land, unlike that of neighboring Arab countries, turned out to be empty. Israel, in turn, did not become a reliable partner of the Soviet Union, either. Almost immediately after its emergence, the country began to drift towards the U. S. and its Western allies. By the early 1950s, this became especially noticeable, and greatly offended Stalin. From then on, the Soviet media became increasingly intolerant of Israel. On May 15, 1952, *Pravda* published a report from the UN session saying that a speech by the Israeli representative was “neglectful” toward the neighboring Arab States. The next day, on May 16, *Pravda* informed its audience about American interests in Israel and the two countries becoming close.

In March 1953, *Pravda* first used the words Zionism and Zionists. The latter, according to the content, were responsible for killing representatives of the peaceful Arab population. At the same time, this information lacked sufficient data for confirming this statement. It was impossible to understand from the media who the Zionists really were, what their program was, and why they were hostile to the Soviet political system. Such limited information was dictated solely by political incentives. If the Soviet leadership had attempted to explain to its citizens the essential meaning of Zionism, then it would inevitably have had to discuss its main purpose: to bring all living Jews into the Holy Land. This would have destroyed the values embedded in the minds of the Soviet people, in particular the idea of patriotism as understood by Soviet ideology. As a result, the Soviet leadership turned the topic of Zionism into a set of propaganda clichés.

In the autumn of 1956, the Soviet press appealed to the Israeli “aggressors”: “Hands off Egypt!” *Pravda* pointed to the atrocities committed by Israel, with England and France, against the “innocent population” of this country (November 10, 1956). Since then the vocabulary of the Soviet media became increasingly hostile towards Israel. On December 17, 1956, *Pravda*’s news item “On the Suez

Canal” used the term “Israeli military”. Another term, “occupied territories”, that appeared as an accusation against Israel, also had a purely negative connotation. Although it was clear that these territories were inherited by Israel after the above-mentioned War for Independence (1967), the Soviet press entirely ignored the pros and cons of this situation.

This slant provoked negativism towards not only Israel but also towards Soviet Jews. Simultaneously, Soviet society could not carry on an equal dialogue with the press. Different opinions about Israel were welcomed only if they coincided with the political line of the CPSU Central Committee. In these circumstances, the media, as before, could not express independent viewpoints on this issue, which once again confirmed their full dependence on state interests.

The Thaw

If Stalin had not died in March 1953, it is still unknown what would have happened to the Soviet Jews. Literary critic A. Borschagovsky (1994) wrote that railway tracks were ready to carry Jews far away from Moscow and Leningrad. One way or another, the death of the “father of nations” stopped all this.

The previous control over journalists and the topics they addressed continued to exist; therefore it was impossible to see a newspaper issue filled with Jewish names. Yet, gradually the situation started to ease. This feeling was fueled primarily by the literary magazines trying to understand what happened to the country under Stalin. The symbol for the mood at the time was the story by Ilya Erenburg *Ottepel'* (“Thaw”), published by the magazine *Znamya* (“Banner”) in May 1954.

An engineer, Sokolovsky, Jew by origin, fears for his life. His daughter lives abroad, and God forbid if the neighbors find out about it. The fate of Doctor Vera Scherer is imprinted by the “Doctors’ plot”, and she cannot recover from fear. Another engineer, anti-Semite Zhuravlev, exclaims that “no one can trust them”. As shrewd readers recognize, it is again all about the Jews who were ready to

secretly do harm and to hide their true nature. Erenburg was a very controversial man. Yet, while fearing the consequences for himself, he hit the system in the gut. He struck a nerve in Jewish souls as well, which emitted groans and whines.

Unsurprisingly, the system responded fiercely to Erenburg. Writer Konstantin Simonov in his article in *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (“Literary gazette”) in July 1954 openly laid out the failures of this novel. Instead of showing Soviet life blossoming and joyful, Simonov noted, it looked gray, dull, and nondescript in the story, and could not be regarded as typical (Simonov, 1954). At the Second Congress of the Union of Writers of the USSR (1954), another literary guru and future Nobel Prize laureate on literature, Mikhail Sholokhov, said that Erenburg painted with too broad a brush in his work and was arrogant regarding Soviet life (Sholokhov, 1954).

In fact, Erenburg could not speak openly, and *Ottepel* only sketched the problem of anti-Semitism in the country. Yet, this was enough for him to be publicly trampled on, regardless of his previous merits. Meanwhile, Erenburg was almost the first Soviet intellectual to speak about the moral responsibility of a writer to society. The same idea was expressed by another Jew, the critic Vladimir Pomerantsev, who titled his article “On sincerity in literature”, which came out even earlier, in December 1953. Pomerantsev wrote that many books and plays of that time abandoned honesty in their outlook, which made life appear artificial (Pomerantsev, 1953). Undoubtedly, many contradictions came from the then party leader Nikita Khrushchev himself. “I left him with a bitter taste: his intentions are good, but everything depends on the ‘information’ – whom he listens to and believes”, wrote Erenburg (Rubashkin, 1990, p. 419).

In 1957, Nikita Khrushchev paid an official visit to Britain. Daniil Kraminov, a Jewish *Pravda* correspondent, was the first to inform people of this event. He immediately turned on the political elite of England for its “pro-fascist sentiments” and its desire to “prevent people” from seeing the Soviet leader (Kraminov, 1957). David Zaslavsky acted on the temptation to do the same. Most of Zaslavsky’s essays were based only on the news supplied by the TASS Information Agency. Khrushchev loved to call Soviet journalists “assistants to the Party” (Khrushchev,

1959), and both Zaslavsky and Kraminov looked like puppets who were ready to fulfil any assignment from “above”. All Soviet journalists behaved similarly; however, Jews seem to have served this system even more zealously, due to their historical memory developed under certain political conditions.

Krushchev’s thaw was full of both pros and cons. Among its good points, it is worth remembering the initiative of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, as the first newspaper in the country to start a dialogue with readers on socially important issues. Among those who participated in these talks was Ilya Erenburg. It was he who in September 1959 authored the comment in response to the letter written by a woman named Nina.

After graduation Nina went with her husband to a small town. Life in a new place was sad: there was nowhere to go after work. Nina, meanwhile, did not want to plunge into this life and addressed a shrill question to *Komsomolskaya Pravda*: How can one live more fully in these hopeless conditions? Erenburg approached Nina’s feelings seriously. “There is a kind of humanity in her”, he concluded, “that challenges dryness and indifference, without which life is a series of bleak movements” (Erenburg, 1959).

We talked about Krushchev’s thaw many years ago, in September 1996, with the world famous sculptor, Ernst Neizvestny. As a former soldier in WWII, he also needed in the 1950s a human language, without pathos and hurrah-patriotism. “I wanted the Jewish intelligentsia”, recalled Neizvestny, “to become an active participant in this process of purification of the past. Yet, the intelligentsia did not find the strength to speak openly on what it was whispering in kitchens – about repression, the Holocaust, the eternal Russian anti-Semitism. The Jews did not realize their right to raise these questions fully after what happened to them. They attached themselves to conformity”.

The authorities did everything to diminish the thaw as quickly as possible. In February 1961, the “veto of silence” was imposed on the Jewish author, Vasily Grossman, and his novel “Life and fate”, which contained hard-hitting evaluations of Stalin’s years. The security bodies seized all copies of the manuscript, including the one that was stored in the literary journal *Noviy Mir*, where the novel was

going to press. In his letter to Khrushchev, Grossman wrote about freedom for his book. Freedom, however, came only after 28 years, when the novel was finally published (Belaga, 2012). In the early 1960s the Soviet media still could not speak openly about the afflictions of Soviet society. Under Khrushchev, the theme of anti-Semitism did not reach a noticeable level, either.

Only young Yevgeny Yevtushenko with his poem “Babi Yar”, published in September 1961 in *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, broke the silence about the Holocaust (Yevtushenko, 1961). Shortly after this, Valery Kosolapov, the editor-in-chief of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, was dismissed, and everyone knew what the Party bosses could not forgive him for. At a meeting with people in art and literature, on March 8, 1963, Khrushchev put an end to this issue: “The Central Committee receives letters expressing concern about the fact that some works show the situation concerning Jews in our country in a perverted form [...] In the poem [“Babi Yar”] [...] only the Jewish population was portrayed as the victims of fascist atrocities [...] We do not have a ‘Jewish question’, and those who invent it, sing from an alien voice” (Aksyutin, 2010).

Agranovsky and the Others

The Khrushchev thaw, to a great extent, is personified by the monument erected on his grave by sculptor Ernst Neizvestny at Moscow Novodevichye cemetery. Both sides of Khrushchev’s head are decorated with white and black marble blocks, which seem to reflect pros and cons of Soviet life during his time.

In the late 1950 and early 1960s, the country formally tried to cleanse itself from Stalin’s legacy, but the media were hesitant to openly speak about it. Anti-Semitism seems to have declined, but, in fact, it was still alive. Perhaps one of very few exceptions to media silence was Moscow *Izvestia*, which in 1959 became headed by the very young Alexei Adzhubey. Having married Khrushchev’s daughter Rada, he received a carte-blanc for everything he did, including the selection of personnel.

It was Adzhubei who recruited the Jewish Anatoly Agranovsky, whose father, Abram, worked for this newspaper before WWII. Agranovsky wrote so vividly that no one could compete with him. Each of his essays raised social problems and was written with impeccable style. Agranovsky never defended the powers and was not a “destroyer of the system” either, but he remained a humanist and a great example for the other journalists of *Izvestiya*, such as Yegor Yakovlev, Vladimir Nadein, and Boris Reznik, all Jews by origin. In their essays and reports, it was impossible to find any mention of Jewry. Yet, the energy with which they approached life confirmed their Jewish character as compassionate toward others.

The inconsistency of domestic policy during Khrushchev’s thaw can be observed through the example of literary journals. Khrushchev inspired the appearance in *Noviy Mir* of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s novel, “One day in the life of Ivan Denisovich”, and later graciously treated the prose of Vasily Grossman, Emmanuil Kazakevich, Anatoly Gladilin, and other writers of Jewish origin. They all greatly opposed Stalinism, like Khrushchev himself. However, after a while the leader realized that unlimited freedoms hindered his ability to rule. “Who is going to decide?”, Khrushchev asked at one of the meetings with intelligentsia. “People should decide in our country. But who are the people? It is a Party. And who is the Party? We are. So we’re going to decide. I’m the one” (Romm, 1989, p. 140).

Party committees operated this way, sometimes using “soft”, but more often, rough pressure. Any non-standard action had to be condemned. The fate of the literary almanac *Taruskiye stranitsi* (“Tarus pages”) vividly proved this.

The resolution of the CPSU Central Committee and the USSR’s Council of Ministers “On literary almanacs” stimulated the production of such publications. Following this, the Kaluga book publishers headed by Roman Levita decided to release such an almanac. It included poems by Naum Korzhavin (Mandel), Boris Slutsky, David Samoilov, prose by Yuri Kozakov, Vladimir Maksimov, and many others. In the fall of 1961, *Taruskiye stranitsi* was released, but instead of 75,000 copies there were only 31,000, apparently due to the almanac’s content. Only a set of names with *pyataya grafa* (“fifth point” – a line in the passport that

implied an obligatory identification of all citizens according to ethnicity) could have provoked fear in the powers.

In December 1961, the Kaluga newspaper published an article, “For what and to whom?”. Its authors, the head of the department of the Pedagogical Institute, N. Kucherovsky, and associate professor, N. Karpov, saw its content filled with a “lack of clear thoughts and the presence of content abstractions” (Kucherovsky & Karpov, 1959). The Moscow *Literaturnaya Gazeta* also published a critical article about the almanac (Osetrov, 1962). Following this, Roman Levita, the editor of the almanac, was fired.

This story was typical for Krushchev’s time. The officials were intolerant of any moves creating unpredictable scenarios. So pushing one more Jew out of the editorial office was part and parcel of this standard. That is how society operated in those years: walking on the razor’s edge and wondering when another similar situation will come up. As for Khrushchev himself, he was dismissed in October of 1964, and secretly sat down to write his memoirs in which he admitted having an improper attitude toward culture. Obviously, if Khrushchev had not been in power, then the fate of Soviet culture would have been different, along with the fate of Soviet Jews.

Literaturnaya Gazeta and its Inhabitants

The influx of Jews into the media was controlled throughout the whole Soviet period. Perhaps the only exceptional publication was the weekly *Literaturnaya Gazeta*. In the 1940–1950s, this outlet purposefully covered the activity of the Union of Writers of the USSR. Changes became obvious in the early 1960s, when it began to be edited by Alexander Chakovsky, a Jew, who served in this position until 1988 (almost a record in Soviet press history). Without exaggeration, Chakovsky turned out to be an outstanding editor who managed to bring to the office especially high class professionals of Jewish origins – Yuri Rost, Evgeny Bogat, Arkady Vaksberg, Anatoly Rubinov, Olga Tchaikovskaya, Iona Andronov, and Victor Veselovsky. Although the editorial office included people of different

nationalities, the number of Jews here was more significant than elsewhere. Chakovsky managed to break the personnel policy authorized by the political powers and took matters of staff on himself.

The following would have been unlikely to happen if *Literaturnaya Gazeta* had been an ordinary publication. Yet, the chief editor turned it into one of the best newspapers of the day. Although Chakovsky was known as a conformist and deeply afraid of reprimands from the Party's Central Committee, he succeeded. Party leaders also wanted to show, mostly to the West, the existence of freedoms in the Soviet Union, and therefore allowed the newspaper to write about what was impossible for any other outlet. For example, in May 1978, it published an essay, *Banya* ("Bathhouse"), by Arkady Vaksberg, where he described a closed high-ranking sauna as a place for rarefied corruption (Vaksberg, 1978). *Literaturnaya Gazeta* at that time frequently published risqué materials. Those topics were interesting and exciting, and could be considered examples of good journalism.

The skillfulness of the authors led to the newspaper's unprecedented popularity, and its circulation increased from 300,000 copies in the early 1960s to 6.5 million copies in the late 1980s (Izyumov, 2014). There is no sense in minimizing the merits of all employees other than those mentioned above, without whom this outlet would have been different. Meanwhile, "the first violin part" there was played by Jews. Their articles and essays became a truly creative phenomenon of the Soviet era, which made the publication a much more complex socio-political and cultural phenomenon than we see today.

In modern Russia there are no longer such publications. Today most of them are imbued with political partisanship that bring rigidity and intolerance. Times have changed, as has the array of journalistic activity. In addition, much seems to go wrong because editorial offices as such have been left without Jews. Some of them emigrated, others went to the other world. The professional culture of editorial offices have clearly declined, not only because of pressure from the authorities but also due to the misunderstanding by journalists that the content should be aimed at ordinary people. All this was respected by *Litaraturnaya Gazeta* and its readers. As is well known, Jews have never been indifferent to

the world around them, while trying to change it as much as possible. The Jews employed by the best Soviet newspaper ever were such people exactly.

Repatriation to Israel and its Coverage in the Soviet Press

The repatriation of Jews from the USSR to Israel, which began in the late 1960s (after Israel's victory in the Six Days War), predetermined a new level of propaganda in the USSR. On the one hand, the Soviet Union introduced a "permissive" policy, allowing Jews, albeit with great difficulty, to leave the country. On the other hand, the development of this policy was profoundly criticized by the Soviet media. They sought to discredit the idea of Jewish repatriation and did not want to recognize the right of Jews to live in their historical homeland. What exactly did the propaganda efforts of the Soviet media look like on this issue? It is worth referring to journalistic examples from one of the most popular newspapers at that time: *Izvestiya*. Its coverage clearly illustrates a common practice that occurred in the Soviet media then.

The repatriation of Jews since the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s was explained in the press by the philistine nature, low moral character, and inherent greed of these people. By then, the media ignored real reasons that forced Soviet Jews to leave the country, especially the dissemination of anti-Semitism. In order to strengthen arguments, Soviet propaganda used numerous forms of influence. One of them was "letters to the editor", telling of the "hopelessness" of life outside the USSR. One of these letters published by *Izvestia* was written by a group of Soviet Jews to the UN Secretary General Kurt Waldheim. Discussing their sad fate, the authors of the letter noted that they "were mostly driven by philistine psychology" (Nashi stradaniya, 1977, p. 3).

By publishing these letters, the press sought to show repatriates as weak-willed people who were unable to take even a minimum of responsibility. At the same time, readers were not given the opportunity to understand if these people, indeed, wrote those repentant letters. If the names of the signatories had

been mentioned, the falsifications would have been revealed at once, and all the work of the Soviet propaganda machine would have failed. For this reason, the anonymity of such letters was commonplace in the press.

Exposing the activities of Zionist organizations became in those years one of the most important areas of the struggle of the Soviet ideological apparatus and the media against mass repatriation from the USSR. In this regard, the statements of Soviet Jews being allegedly sent to the UN were typical. The leaders of Zionism were called as representatives of the “extreme nationalism of the large Jewish bourgeoisie”, who have put themselves “in the service of world imperialism”. Primitive formulations were also developed in the works of outstanding Soviet journalists. One of them, V. Kudryavtsev, claimed that the leaders of Zionism sought to “distract the Jewish people from the class struggle”, and that Zionism itself was a “form of racism” (Kudryavtsev, 1975, p. 3).

The idea of Zionism being a bearer of racist ideology was expressed, for example, during a press conference hosted by the Moscow Central House of Journalists in 1976. The speakers were those who left the USSR for Israel, but returned. They called Israel a “racist society”, and claimed that immigrants from the USSR were treated there as “second class”. In order to confirm this, the speakers said that many Soviet immigrants had been “blacklisted by the rabbinate and the Interior Ministry as un-thoroughbred” (Borisov & Kukushkin, 1976, p. 5). Using these arguments, another participant in the press conference, Kyiv engineer B. I. Brovshtein, even compared Zionism to fascism, by declaring the “ideological kinship” of these two phenomena: “Both are racists” (Ibid).

Soviet journalists tried to expose the agitation of Zionist organizations for the departure of Jews from the USSR for Israel. A well-known *Izvestia* columnist, Sergei Kondrashev, referring to the letters by people who went to Israel, pointed out that their authors were victims of propaganda (Kondrashev, 1975, p. 4). In turn, V. Cassis and M. Mikhailov, who had published many revelatory articles about “anti-Soviet emigration”, sought to prove that while calling for Jewish repatriation, Zionist organizations in Israel were primarily pursuing financial goals and attempting to “fill up their own pockets” (Cassis & Mikhailov, 1976, p. 4).

Simultaneously, according to Soviet propagandists, the leaders of Zionist organizations did not disdain any method of achieving their goals. It was emphasized that the activities of these structures were not limited to the Soviet Union, but were truly global. Academician M. Mitin stated that the Zionists of Tel Aviv strongly fueled and provoked anti-Semitic actions in a number of countries, and helped in such a deceptive way to spur the departure of people of Jewish origin for Israel (Mitin, 1979, p. 5).

In turn, Soviet officials persistently denied the thesis of artificial containment of Jewish repatriation and emigration by Soviet authorities, as well as of the presence of a large number of “refuseniks” (i.e., those who were denied an Israeli visa). However, in an interview with *Izvestia* in 1977, the head of the All-Soviet Department of departures and registrations (OVIR), V. Obidin, stated that everyone who wished to go to Israel had received permission (Itkin, 1977, p. 4). That was a big lie regularly propagated by all the other Soviet outlets as well. However, due to the deliberate prevention for ideological reasons of information emerging, this deception during those years could not even get a minimum of publicity, which only increased the propaganda pressure.

The Soviet media believed that one more problem for Soviet repatriates was the involvement of Israel in the 1970s in a deep socio-economic crisis. It was manifested, according to Soviet propaganda, in a decline in the living standards of the population. “The economic situation in Israel is bleak”, stated V. Cassis and M. Mikhailov (1976, p. 4). *Izvestya* publicist Vikentiy Matveev declared that the lack of social justice in Israeli society inevitably led to the growth of the strike movement in the country (Matveev, 1977, p. 4). However, none of the articles answered the question of how the country “with an unenviable socio-economic situation” still managed to develop, especially in light of ongoing wars.

An important factor that contributed to the growth of pessimistic sentiments in Israel, according to the Soviet media, was the population’s disagreement with Israel’s national foreign policy. “The expansionist policy of Tel Aviv, the injection of military psychosis and provocative actions that complicate the situation in the Middle East – all this causes in people a sense of resentment”, noted *Izvestya* (Nilov,

1976, p. 4). Obviously, again, this kind of statement by Soviet propagandists had little to do with reality.

At the above-mentioned press conference at the Central House of Journalists in 1976, it was noted that “many indigenous Israelis want others to fight for them”. Reluctance to participate in hostilities could indeed have forced some young people to leave the country in the 1970s. However, this conclusion should have been based on the observations of at least a few people, in order for the media to have a complete and valid picture of the supposed problem. *Izvestia*, which referred to the above quotation, rejected such a complex approach, as all the Soviet media did at that time, and thus consciously simplified the perception of the situation.

The sense and style of these publications were typical of the Soviet press in those years. Remarkably, the people criticized in those articles could not get an opportunity to speak in their own defense, and the principle of the presumption of innocence was strictly violated. However, in the 1970s, as before, legislative and ethical restrictions only formally operated in Soviet society and did not influence the press. The implementation of propaganda swept them away, in favor of state interests, and the media coverage of Jewish repatriation clearly confirmed this.

The Dissident *Khronika*, and the Fate of *Metropol*

The 1960s–1970s formed the attitude toward the Jewish topic not only on the basis of state requests, determined by ideological and political restrictions. This was the time of the formation of more independent thinking in the country, and the initiators of this process were representatives of Jewry, actively promoting themselves through the printed word. During the Khrushchev thaw, it was also Jews who actively neglected the official political system.

The main idea for these people was to promote justice. Jewish intellectuals could ignore the Torah, but at the genetic level they inherited much – for example, the exhortation for Jews to bear responsibility not only for yourself, but also for other people living on the earth, because “you are a holy nation with the Lord thy

God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a special nation among all the nations that are on earth” (see Exodus 19:5–6). Since ancient times, Jews have dreamed of restoring equal relations with each other and of bringing life into accordance with the highest principles of justice. Sholem Aleichem wrote about the same idea, essentially, in his novel about Tevye, the milkman. A similar idea was promoted by Zionist Vladimir (Zeev) Zhabotinsky in his memoirs “The story of my days”, written in the 1930s.

As has already been noted, the Jews went to the Russian revolution because they did not recognize in tsarism a humane attitude toward people. Jewish trends in the 1960s were also a reaction towards the injustice, demonstrated by the Soviet system in relation to proclaimed principles. Soviet philosopher, Grigory Pomerants, reflected on that in his handwritten essays about the moral responsibility of Soviet politics (Pomerants, 1972). Pomerants believed that the ideas of socialism still had not lost their usefulness. Most Soviet Jews also intuitively felt the need to act in accordance with their spiritual ideals, which explains the openness of their statements. It is also worth remembering literary critic Mikhail Lifshits, who for many years contributed to the magazine *Noviy Mir* on the topic of finding the ideal hero (Lifshitz, 1995).

Some Jews went even further, defending dissident ideas and using samizdat as a very specific phenomenon of Soviet life at the time. Samizdat, by the way, was not homogeneous. There were leaflets that contained mostly facts given without comments. Also, there were small and irregular journals such as *Phoenix-61*, *Phoenix-66*, and *Syntaksis*, edited by Alexander Ginzburg and Yuri Galanskov. In addition, it was possible to see political newspapers or journals published with certain regularity. Against this background a journal, *Khronika tekushchikh sobyiy* (“The chronicle of current events”), which came out in Moscow in April 1968 and was edited by Natalia Gorbanevskaya, turned out to be a bit different. Gorbanevskaya headed *Khronika* until August 1968, when she was arrested with other human rights activist Jews, Larisa Bogoraz, Victor Feinberg, Pavel Litvinov, and their associates who went to Red Square to protest against the entry of Soviet troops into Czechoslovakia.

The typewritten *Khronika* reported on human rights violations and extrajudicial persecutions of dissidents. In the late 1960s, *Khronika* was essentially the only source of information on those occurrences. It suffered from imperfection in content and the lack of a strictly specified layout. Nonetheless, *Khronika* undoubtedly became a symbol of the time, with participation by Jews who were extremely active in its creation and development.

If the Soviet powers had not so neglected to deal with dissent, then the development of the underground press would have been less effective. These publications appeared because no text in the official media could come out without prior censorship. The fate of the literary almanac *Metropol*, published in 1979, was one more confirmation of how the Soviet authorities treated non-standard forms of creative publishing. The name of the almanac had several meanings:

First of all, it is the capital, the mother of cities [...] as our eternal spiritual center. Secondly, *Metropol* is the name of the hotel, a roof over the head of homeless literature. Thirdly, it is the ironic meaning associated with subway [...] Writers are trying to defend the autonomy of literature [...] to separate literature from the state. *Metropol* was an expression of this struggle (L. S., 1981, p. 440).

From the very beginning, censors judged the content of *Metropol* as not trustworthy. The same applied to the authors, Jews by nationality, who contributed to the almanac. Among them were poets Semyon Lipkin, Inna Lisnyanskaya, Yuz Aleshkovsky, Yevgeny Rein, and Vladimir Vysotsky; satirist A. Arkanov; and writers Genrikh Sapgir and Friedrich Gorenshtein. The layout of the almanac was designed by the theater artist David Borovsky and Anatoly Brusilovsky; the frontispiece was decorated by Boris Messerer. Among the authors of *Metropol* were not only Jewish people. The editorial board selected contributors based primarily on their abilities, but not nationality. Yet, the names in the almanac made it noticeable that Soviet literature in the late 1970s was largely promoted by Jews.

Metropol was “a breakthrough in the uncensored press”, an attempt to assert the right of each author “to write freely” (Rybakov, 1997, p. 261). Today, forty years later, the content of this almanac does not seem especially striking. However, there was the desire of each author to write independently, without regard to would-be rules and authorities. These informal initiatives caused pronounced unfriendliness from the officials, who immediately informed the Central Party Committee. One of bosses of the Soviet Union of Writers, Felix Kuznetsov, called *Metropol* “aestheticization of criminality”. Poet Rimma Kazakova said, even more harshly: “This is garbage, not literature, something close to graphomania” (Yerofeyev, 1990, p. 17).

Jewish writers, who published their prose and poetry in *Metropol*, did not set for themselves any political objectives and could not protect themselves. At the meeting of the Board of the Union of Writers *Metropol* was severely defeated (Zalambani, 2006). What is most sad about this defeat is seeing among critics of the almanac such prominent figures as Alexander Borschagovsky, who in the late 1940s was one of the many victims of the anti-Semitic campaign against “rootless cosmopolitanism”, and the famous children’s writer Anatoly Aleksin (who in the 1990s settled in Israel). All of them got up from their seats at that memorable meeting of the Union of Writers, and smeared their colleagues on the wall.

Borshchagovsky and Aleksin were people of their time, criticizing much of what did not fit into the official framework. *Metropol* as an almanac, contributed to by Jews, was in this regard an easy target.

When the Country Became Indifferent to Jews

The Soviet government formally ended its existence in 1991. Movement toward its breakdown began six years earlier, in April 1985, when the then CPSU General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev declared *perestroika* and *glasnost*. According to Gorbachev (1988, p. 2) himself, he wanted to transform the national economy, so that the society could “multiply the good and fight with the bad”. Gorbachev saw

this as a necessary condition for making life better in the USSR, which in those years was already in a deep slump. Neither he nor society understood how difficult and even unpredictable that was, but euphoria penetrated the souls of the Soviet people, who received an opportunity to speak out about what had never before received proper publicity! The “Jewish theme” was among those topics.

The TV conferences conducted in the second half of the 1980s by Soviet TV journalist Jew Vladimir Pozner and his American colleague Phil Donahue were very popular with millions of viewers. Their shows were impressive: Everyone who was present in the studios on both sides of the ocean could ask questions and sincerely speak out. In one of those programs, Moscow Studio hosted a group of very elderly Jews, who openly related that they had long ago dreamed of leaving for Israel, but the Soviet authorities put obstacles in their way. The fact that all this was spoken out loud was very unusual for the viewers. People were glued with fascination to the TV screens, and could not believe that such stories suddenly became reality.

Another very unusual TV show, “Before and after midnight”, was presented by journalist Vladimir Molchanov. In an intelligent, even aristocratic manner that was unusual for most of the then Soviet TV presenters, he talked on Fridays about the “white spots” of national history and culture. One of the programs was devoted to Jewish repatriation. Those who had gone to Israel a few years before were invited to the studio, and they talked about what they experienced. Molchanov also regularly interviewed prominent figures of foreign and Soviet culture, Jews by origin. He spoke with the American pianist Vladimir Horowitz, the world-famous violinist Yehudi Menuhin, the poet-emigrant Naum Korzhavin, sculptor Ernst Neizvestny, and many others.

Initially, the audience reacted to all this with enthusiasm, but interest in these new topics was soon gone. As it turned out, their appearance did not make life easier. By the late 1980s, the “iron curtain” was removed, and hundreds of thousands of Jews moved to Israel and beyond. Over two years, before the collapse of the USSR, more than 340,000 of them left the country, and about 100,000 Jews went to the United States and Germany (Tolts, 2012). Besides, the “Jewish topic” rapidly ceased to be a focus, due to the expansion of Soviet-American relations,

which changed the entire political agenda. After the development of the above topic over many decades, its final chord sounded quite inconspicuously.

Conclusion

The Soviet-era media sought to discuss all the major political issues of the day. At the same time, for the sake of the then political principles, they were characterized by an extremely one-sided reflection of reality. This directly related to the perception of the “Jewish topic”. Coverage of this topic was built into ideology in the country and therefore highly biased. This was clearly seen in the course of media participation in political campaigns, such as the fight against “rootless cosmopolitanism”, the “Doctors’ plot”, the repatriation of Soviet Jews in Israel, and others. All of them were distinguished by an irreconcilable attitude towards Jews, who were considered by Soviet propaganda to be traitors to the Motherland.

For more effective influence, the mass media published emotionally colored texts prepared by the best publicists. They were characterized by ideological and political intransigence, biased perceptions of the surrounding world, conscious distortion of facts, lack of consistency, and other methods of manipulative influence. This made media texts propaganda-oriented.

Political conditions in modern Russia are significantly different from those that existed in the Soviet Union, and formal investigation of methods of influencing audiences during the Soviet era has lost its relevance. Simultaneously, the study of manipulative approaches used to create a certain picture of the world for the sake of certain political actors has not lost its meaning. It seems useful to consider the “Jewish topic” in the Soviet media, due to the importance of understanding the overall strategy of media manipulation, implemented on the basis of state interests. The activity of journalists as serving these interests remains no less important. The attempt made in the article to envisage the role of Jewish journalists in terms of constant propaganda confirms what happens to the media when it becomes undermined by political priorities of the government.

References

- Aksyutin, Y. V. (2010). *Khrushchevskaya "ottepel" i obshchestvenniye nastroyeniya v SSSR v 1953-1964 gg.* [Khrushchev's "thaw" and public spirits in the USSR in 1953–1964]. Retrieved from <https://history.wikireading.ru/309285>
- Anti-Semitism v SSSR* [Anti-Semitism in the USSR] (n.d.). Retrieved from http://wreferat.baza-referat.ru/АНТИСЕМИТИЗМ_В_СССР
- Ardamatsky, V. (1953). Pinya iz Zhmerinki [Pinya from Zhmerinka]. *Krokodil* (March 20, 1953).
- Belaga, L. (2012). *Khronika gosudarstvennogo antisemitizma v SSSR posle Stalina* [Chronicle of state anti-Semitism after Stalin] (February 3, 2012). Retrieved from <https://la-belaga.livejournal.com/214096.html>
- Borisov, V., & Kukushkin, V. (1976). Tragediya obmanutikh [Tragedy of the deceived]. *Izvestiya* (February 6, 1976).
- Borshchagovsky, A. (1994) *Obvinyaetsya krov'* [Blood is being blamed]. Moskva, Rossiya: Progress.
- Brown, J. A. C. (1964). *Techniques of persuasion: From propaganda to brainwashing*. London, England: Penguin Books.
- Cassis, V., & Mikhailov, M. (1976). Nad propas'tyu vo lzhi [Over the abyss of lies]. *Izvestiya* (May 16, 1976).
- Chechetkina, O. (1953). Pochta Lidii Timashuk [The mail of Lidya Timashuk]. *Pravda* (February 20, 1953).
- Erenburg, I. (1959). Otvet na odno pis'mo [Reply to a letter]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (September 2, 1959).
- Gorbachev, M. S. (1988). *Perestroyka i novoye myshleniye dlya nashey strany i vsego mira* [Perestroika and a new thinking for our country and the entire world]. Moskva, Rossiya: Politizdat.

- Gorky, A. M. (1919). *Obrashcheniye k russkomu narodu* [The appeal to the Russian people]. Retrieved from <https://polonsil.ru/blog/43521223976/Maksim-Gorkiy-o-evreyah.-Obraschenie-k-russkomu-narodu>
- Ingulov, S. B. (1930). *Rekonstruktivniy period i zadachi pechati* [The reconstruction period and the tasks of the press]. Moskva, Rossiya.
- Itkin, V. (1977). Myl'niye puziri i real'niye fakti [Soap bubbles and real facts]. *Izvestiya* (January 22, 1977).
- Izyumov, Y. (2014). *Pamyati glavnogo redaktora "Literaturnoi gazeti"* [To memory of the editor-in-staff of *Literaturnaya Gazeta*]. Retrieved from <https://ok.ru/zrelost2.0/topic/68483498093337>
- Kiyanskaya O. (2015). *Yakov Belsky: chekist, khudozhnik, zhurnalist* [Yakov Belsky as a chekist, painter, journalist]. Retrieved from www.poslednyadres.ru/articles/belsky.htm
- Kondrashev, S. (1975). "Usloviya zhizni nepriemlemy..." ["Living conditions are unacceptable"]. *Izvestiya* (March 6, 1975).
- Kostyrchenko, G. V. (1994). Kampaniya po bor'be s kosmopolitizmom [Campaign on fighting with Cosmopolitanism]. *Voprosi istorii*, 8, 47–60.
- Kostyrchenko G. V. (2003) *Tainaya politika Stalina*. Ch. V. Antisemitskaya agoniya diktatora [Stalin's Secret policy, ch. V: Anti-Semitic agony of the dictator]. Retrieved from http://krotov.info/libr_min/11_k/os/tyrchenko_7.html
- Kraminov, D. (1957). *V Anglii (Zapiski jurnalista)* [In England: (Notes of a journalist)]. Moskva, Rossiya: Pravda.
- Krushchev, N. S. (1959). "Soviet pechat' dolzna byt' samoi sil'noi i samoi boevoi": *Vystupleniye N.S. Krushcheva na pri'ome sovetских zhurnalistov v Kremle 14 noyabrya 1959 g.* ["The Soviet press has to be the strongest and most combative": N. S. Krushchev's speech at the reception of soviet journalists in the Kremlin on November 14, 1959]. *Pravda* (November 18, 1959).

- Kucherovsky N. & Karpov, N. (1959). Vo imya chego i dlya kogo [For what and for whom]. *Znanya* [Kaluga] (December 23, 1959).
- Kudryavtsev, V. (1975). *Prestupniy pocherk sionizma* [Criminal handwriting of Zionism]. *Izvestiya* (December 1, 1975).
- Levidov, M. (1927). *Prostiy istini* [Simple truth]. Moskva-Leningrad: 3 Typolitographiya Transpechati.
- Lifshits, M. (1995). *Ocherki russkoy kul'tury* [Essays on Russian culture]. Moskva, Rossiya: Naslediye.
- Lippmann W. (1965). *Public opinion*. London, England: The Free Press.
- L. S. (1981). Beseda s pisatelem Vasiliyem Aksenovym [A talk with writer Vasily Aksyonov]. *Kontinent*, 27, 118–194.
- Lozinsky S. G. (1929). *Sotsialniye korni antisemitizma v Sredniye veka i novoye vremya* [The social roots of anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages and modern times]. Moskva, Rossiya: Ateist.
- Matveev, V. (1977). Izrail': ot krizisa k krizisu [Israel: From crisis to crisis]. *Izvestiya* (November 25, 1977).
- Mitin, M. (1979). Sionizm – orudie agressiyi [Zionism is an instrument of aggression]. *Izvestiya* (January 25, 1979).
- Nashi stradaniya – obvinitel'niy akt protiv sionistov [Our suffering is an indictment against the Zionists] (1977). *Izvestiya* (February 18, 1977).
- Nilov, V. (1976). Oplata galetami [Payment by biscuits]. *Izvestiya* (September 4, 1976).
- Ob odnoi antipatrioticheskoi gruppe teatral'nikh kritikov [About one anti-Patriotic group of theater critics] (1949). *Pravda* (January 28, 1949).
- Osetrov, Y. (1962). Poeziya i proza “Tarusskikh stranitz” [Poetry and prose of Taruskiye stranitsy]. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (January 9, 1962).

- Pomerants, G. S. (1972). *Neopublikovannoye* [The unpublished]. Munich, Germany: Posev.
- Pomerantsev, V. (1953). Ob iskrennosti v literature [On sincerity in literature]. *Noviy Mir*, 12, 218–245.
- Rabinovich Y. I. (2014). *Pochemu evrei ne ljubayt Stalina* [Why do Jews not love Stalin]. Retrieved from <https://history.wikireading.ru/253509>
- Romm, M. (1989). Chetyre vstrechi s Khrushchevym [Four meetings with Khrushchev]. In Y. V. Aksyutin (Ed.), *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: Materials to the biography*. Moskva, Rossiya: Politizdat.
- Rubashkin, A. (1990). *Ilya Erenbyrg: put' pisatelya* [Ilya Erenbyrg: The way of the writer]. Leningrad, Rossiya: Sovetskiy pisatel'.
- Rybakov, A. (1997). *Roman-vospominaniye* [A remembrance novel]. Moskva, Rossiya: Vagrius.
- Shafir, Y. (1923). *Gazeta i derevnya* [Newspaper and village]. Moskva, Rossiya: Author.
- Shafir, Y. (1927a). *Ocherki psikhologii chitatelya* [Essays of the reader's psychology]. Moskva, Rossiya: Author.
- Shafir, Y. (1927b). *Voprosy gazetnoi kul'turi* [Issues of the newspaper culture]. Moskva, Rossiya: Author.
- Sholokhov, M. A. (1954). *Rech' na Vtorom Vsesoyuznom syezde sovetskikh pisatelei* [Speech in the Second All-Soviet Congress of Soviet writers]. Retrieved from http://thelib.ru/books/sholohov_mihail_aleksandrovich/ocherki_feletony_stati_vystupleniya-read-14.html
- Simonov, K. (1954). Novaya povest' Ilyi Erenburga [The new novel by Ilya Erenburg]. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (July 17, 20, 1954).
- Soobshcheniye ob Ukaze Presidiuma Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR N 125/32 [The message about the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of

- the USSR from N 125/32] (1953). *Pravda* (April 4, 1953).
- Sovetskiy Soyuz. Evreii v Sovetskom Soyuze v 1922-41 gg. [The Soviet Union: Jews in the Soviet Union in 1922–1941]. *Elektronnaya evreiskaya entsiklopediya*. Retrieved from <https://eleven.co.il/jews-of-russia/history-in-ussr/15416/>
- Stalin I. V. (1931). *Otvet na zapros Evreiskogo telegrafnogo agentstva iz Ameriki*, 1.12.1931 [Response to a request from a Jewish Telegraph Agency in America, 1.12.1931]. Retrieved from www.kprf.org/showthread.php?t=929
- Tolts, M. (2012). Postsovetskaya yevreyskaya diaspora: noveyskiye otsenki [Post-Soviet Jewish diaspora: The newest evaluations]. *Demoskop Weekly*, 497–498 (February 6–9, 2012). Retrieved from www.demoscope.ru/weekly/2012/0497/tema01.php
- Vaksberg, A. (1978). Banya [Bathhouse]. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (May 12, 1978).
- Yermakov, Y. (1995). *Manipulyatsiya nad lichnos'yu: smisl, priyomi, posledstviya* [Manipulation of personality: Meaning, techniques, consequences]. Ekaterinburg, Russia: Ural State University.
- Yerofeyev, V. (1990). Desyat' let spustya [Ten years later]. *Ogonyok*, 37, 16–18.
- Yevtushenko Y. (1961). Babi Yar. *Literaturnaya Gazeta* (September 19, 1961).
- Zalambani, M. (Ed.). (2006). Delo “Metropolya”: Stenogramma rasshirennogo zasedaniya sekretariata MO SP SSSR ot 22 yanvarya 1979 goda [The case of Metropol: A transcript of the expanded meeting of the Secretariat of the Moscow organization of the USSR’s Union of Writers from January 22, 1979]. *Novoye literaturnoye obozreniye*, 82, 243–281.
- Zapiska glavnogo redaktora gazeti “Sovetskoye iskusstvo” V.G. Vdovichenko G.M. Malenkovu o polozheniyi v oblasti muzikal'nogo iskusstva [Note by the editor-in-chief of the newspaper “Soviet art”, V. G. Vdovichenko, to G. M. Malenkov about the situation in the field of music] (March 17, 1949). Retrieved from <https://alexanderyakovlev.org/fond/issues-doc/69573>

Zaslavsky, D. (1930). *Pedagogi vrediteli* [Teachers-Saboteurs]. Moskva, Rossiya: Rabotnik prosveshcheniya.

Zhirkov, G. V. (2003). Ya. Shafir – issledovatel' i teoretik zhurnalistiki [Y. Shafir as a researcher and theorist of journalist]. *Aktsenti: Novoye v massovoi komunikatsiii* (77–88). Voronezh: Voronezh State University.

About the Author

Dr. Dmitry Strovsky has a Ph.D. in political science and for over 25 years worked as a teacher and then professor on the Journalism Faculty of the Ural Federal University in Ekaterinburg, Russia. He has written extensively in Russian and English on the issues concerning the historical and contemporary evolution of the Russian mass media and the relationship between politics and media in this country. Strovsky has authored and edited several books and more than 100 articles on these issues in Russian and English. He has been invited numerous times as a visiting professor to universities in the U. S., Finland, Sweden, China, Mongolia, and other countries to pursue scientific and lecturing work, and contributed his articles to various international journals in the U. S., Britain, Brazil, etc. Currently he is a media researcher at Ariel University in Israel.