

Russia Abroad: The Ideological and Political Views of Russian Émigrés in European Russian Newspapers between 1918 and 1940

The final century of the second millennium will go down in history as one characterized by major refugee movements. The greatest refugee movement of the twentieth century with respect to both numbers and cultural significance is the consequence of the flight from Russia of as many as two million people after the Bolshevik assumption of power in 1917. The flight and subsequent fate of these Russian émigrés eventually left its own stamp on the entire period between the two world wars. As a consequence of Russian emigration, Russian communities formed all over the world. These are regarded as having formed a special, second so-called “Russia Abroad” (= *Zarubezhnaya Rossiya, Rußland jenseits der Grenzen*) as a counterweight to the Soviet state. The subject matter examined in this study is the thoughts and opinions of Russians who had fled to Europe as they appear in the Russian émigré press, specifically on the basis of the perspective gained from newspapers during the inter-war period between 1918 and 1940. The press constitutes an important source providing information on the history of émigré Russians, particularly since other primary written material has only been preserved sporadically, and oral data sources are no longer accessible.

This study maps the ideological world of the most important political émigré groupings: cadets, social revolutionaries, Menshevik socialists, and monarchists, their mutual exchanges of views, as well as changes in opinion on the basis of information available from newspapers. The study compares this data for the selected period to the history of Russia and the Soviet Union. The significance of this comparative data as material is to be found in the new and, as of yet, little analyzed material which has been available to scholars only since the USSR “opened” in 1991, after which it became Russia again.

The study is territorially limited to the émigré centers in Helsinki, Prague, Berlin, and Paris. The analysis focuses geographically on these four different émigré centers according to which how emigration shifted during the inter-war period from close to Russia’s borders, first to Central Europe and from there further to France. Considerations of work economy have justified excluding the European émigré press that existed south of the Alps. The European Russian émigré press originated in Finland when the newspaper *Severnaya Zhizn* began to be published during the fall of 1918 in Helsinki. Two features of *Severnaya*

Zhizn made it an emigrant paper. Firstly, its editorial staff included émigrés who had fled the unrest in Russia, settling in Finland in 1918; secondly, the paper's editorial policy in issues concerning émigré, particularly that of rising to armed resistance in the battle against Bolshevism, was central right from the day it started publication. That the first émigré newspaper originated specifically in Finland is also largely due to the facts that, firstly, the conditions in Finland were peaceful, and, secondly, that a Russian printing press as well as Russian professionals in the printing trades were already available in Helsinki. Émigré newspapers flourished in Helsinki between 1918 and 1921. These years of lively writing and polemics were the consequence of Helsinki having functioned as an important center of political activity for émigrés in the Baltic region. From the beginning of 1919 the émigré press in Finland was made to serve the objectives of the military policy of Nikolai Yudenich of the Russian White Army. Yudenich and those nearest to him ousted the journalists who had represented democratic values. When Yudenich's campaign against the Bolsheviks ended in defeat in the fall of the same year, the Baltic area lost its significance from the standpoint of the activities of the white Russians. Consequently, Central Europe became the operational area for the émigrés, this meaning that the focal point of the émigré press shifted from Finland to Central Europe.

The first Central European Russian newspapers began to appear in the most important émigré centers, Prague, Berlin, and Paris, in 1920. The émigré newspapers appearing in Finland had avoided strict party affiliations, trying instead to unite all émigrés into a common struggle against the Bolsheviks. Instead, these new newspapers demonstrated themselves to be clearly the heirs to the political parties which had preceded the revolution. These emigrant newspapers became the ideologically colored publications of politicians who had fled the revolution. They did, however, fulfill the normal criteria expected of newspapers: they appeared daily, they published news, cultural overviews, announcements, advertisements, etc. The newspaper was, in addition to speaking trips and mass meetings, an unsurpassed means for politicians when they desired to reach émigrés spread all over Europe. The newspapers published by the European Russian émigré press represented a diversified range of political viewpoints, ranging from the non-Bolshevik left to those of moderate right-wing cadets. The monarchists did not get a newspaper supporting their line until the mid 1920s. The popularity of this newspaper, *Vozrozhdenie*, was never comparable to the readerships of *Rul* or *Posledniya novosti*. The fact that the émigré press represented opinions that were increasing moderate, even to the point of showing a considerable degree of understanding for the Soviet Union, is new information. It is in contradiction to the earlier presented view according to which support for the extreme right and monarchism were strengthening during the last years of the 1920s.

The ideological spectrum of the Russian émigré press follows a path which begins with a first phase characterized by enthusiasm and confidence in victory, to one intermittently marked by desperation, but still capable of producing active polemics during the mid 1920s, this leading eventually to a new phase of

enthusiasm during the 1930s. At that time nationalistic views emphasizing the importance and greatness of Russia as a state began to strengthen in the émigré press. Each of these three political and ideological phases of the émigré press can be seen to be consolidating into specific theoretically based models in the newspapers that were studied. Confidence that the revolution would evolve, as had happened in France, followed the battle fatigue, which had replaced the initial readiness for armed struggle and planning for intervention. During the period of searching and uncertainty, when the émigré newspapers even sought inspiration from sources such as pan-Europeanism, they found a decision in their own so-called Bonapartism. Appropriately inspired by the power struggle between Trotsky and Stalin, this resulted in the “émigrés own revolutionary ideology,” which is to be seen as an attempt to have the opportunity to participate in the power-play going on at the top of the Soviet leadership. It even appears to be that the émigrés and Stalin had, in essence, been feeding one another with information concerning the size of Trotsky’s support. The émigré newspapers interpreted the speeches made by Stalin and his supporters about the dangers of Trotsky and of Trotskism to mean that the opposition in the Soviet Union truly enjoyed widespread support. Of the émigré newspapers at least *Posledniya novosti*, *Dni*, and *Sotsialisticheski vestnik* appear to have been ready to believe at a certain point that the émigrés could join the internal Soviet opposition. Correspondingly, the one-sided expressions of support for Trotsky published in the émigré press could be interpreted in the Soviet Union as expressions of collaboration between Trotsky and the émigré press. When Trotsky was eventually deposed, the expressions of Bonapartism in the émigré press became demonstrations of support for Stalin.

Nationalism could also be seen in the émigré press of the 1930s as an ideological discussion concerning the issue of the defense of their homeland (*oboronchestvo*). Ever since 1934 the émigré newspapers had been awaiting the outbreak of a major war after France and the Soviet Union concluded a non-aggression pact at the beginning of the same year. Various articles published in them speculated about the war and the role that the émigrés would play in it. The view began to strengthen in the émigré press that émigrés should be ready to defend the Soviet Union as the successor to Russia. Pavel Milyukov’s *Posledniya novosti* and Aleksander Karensky’s *Novaya Rossiya* had both, in particular, prepared their readers for this by fostering a positive image of Stalin. On the one hand, the émigré press had tried to function at the opposition to the Soviet press, on the other hand it assumed the function of disseminating anti-Bolshevik information and opinions in Europe.

Despite the fact that the Bolshevik leaders evidently followed the articles published in the émigré press, the Soviet press hardly submitted to an exchange of opinions. In the same manner, the influence of the émigré press on decision making in European states or even on their public opinion appears to have been of no more than minor importance. The emigrant press was forced to become more introspective, to concentrate on self-examination. The European attitude towards the articles printed in the émigré press are well depicted by the words in an issue of the *Rul* newspaper which was published in Berlin: “they hear, but

they don't listen". This was, of course, partially the fault of the émigrés themselves. Their press was hardly unanimous anywhere. Outsiders found determining which émigré newspaper to believe and listen to at any particular time difficult.

The émigré press defined the status of the émigré by reflecting it onto events in the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, Europe. At the same time it continually sought to find ways, ideological, political, and, to a decreasing degree, military solutions, for creating a new Russia. Even if the émigré press occasionally seems to dive to unrealistic utopias, it had a more important function than merely consoling Russians who had lost their homelands and whipping up nostalgia. The émigré newspapers desired to participate in the power struggle, which was going on in the Soviet Union. The politicians who published and edited the papers also maintained and developed Russian nationalism, which, they believed, would help them once again to have the opportunity to develop a new, post-Bolshevik Russia.

The twentieth century has been considered to be the century of communism, which lasted from the Russian revolution of 1917 up until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990. Correspondingly, the history of émigrés has been considered the 'history of losers,' which has not been of much interest to historians. The past century can, however, also be observed, as Georg Lukacs does, as a century of nationalism, which began with the nationalistic fanaticism of the First World War and ended with the fragmentation of the Soviet Union into nationalistic mini-states. Thus, the history of émigrés can be seen as "winners' history". The émigrés living outside of the Soviet Union preserved and have continued to develop Russian nationalism in its different forms. This "winners' history" thus provides the elements which relate the history of the émigré press.

This study has only succeeded in touching upon Soviet concerning the émigrés and their press. Nevertheless, even they give some indications than even after the émigrés, in 1948, Stalin also "remembered" the émigrés once again. Here it might be justified to quote from the biography of Stalin written by Dimitry Volkogonov: "Even though Stalin should have been certain of the reliability of the entire nation, he was unable to find relief. In January 1948 Stalin invited the minister of internal affairs, Sergey Kruglov, to visit him, and he gave him the following assignment: Kruglov was to initiate the "practical measures" necessary for the establishment of new prison camps and incarceration facilities. "Dissatisfaction was increasing, people were defecting across borders, some authors were maintaining silence as if they wanted to protest against tyranny. It was necessary to resort to measures against Trotskyites, Mensheviks, socialist revolutionaries, anarchists, and white Russian immigrants." Volkogonov continues: "The reader should not think that I have confused the dates. No, in 1948 Stalin speaks once again about Trotskyites, Mensheviks, socialist-revolutionaries, and anarchists. I think he is searching for 'new enemies'..."

Translated by Eugene Holman