
THE PROBLEM OF CENSORSHIP IN THE AZERBAIJANI NATIONAL PRESS (1914-1917)

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of censorship issues in Azerbaijan in a historical context. Here, the period from the beginning of the First World War - from 1914 to the fall of tsarism - to 1917 is included in the study. The problems faced by the Azerbaijani national press in this regard are analyzed on the basis of factual materials. The author notes that the tsarist ruling circles were distinguished by their harshness in relation to the press of the exploited peoples. In particular, the national press, journalists and publishers of the Turkic-speaking and Muslim peoples were constantly subjected to discrimination, and their free activities were restricted. Tsarism tried to prevent free speech through various censorship departments and tried to distract writers from the struggle with punitive measures. The author notes that despite all these negative circumstances, the Azerbaijani national press was able to adequately fulfill its assigned task and rendered exceptional services in the formation of national consciousness and self-awareness.

Keywords: censorship, press, newspaper, journalist, publisher, war, issue, page.

Research methods. Empirical research methods (collection and selection of facts, establishing relationships between them, description, comparison, etc.) were used in the preparation of the article.

Scientific innovation. Certain studies have been conducted and scientific works have been written on censorship issues in the Azerbaijani classical press. In this regard, Professor Agharafi Zeynalzadeh's book "Azerbaijani Press and Tsarist Censorship" can be cited as an example. However, this study covers the years 1850-1905. This research work reflects the processes related to censorship during the years 1914-1918. Since no separate research work has been conducted on the mentioned period, the presented article is important as one of the first studies in this field.

Introduction

Translated from Latin, censorship, which means "harsh judgment, harsh analysis, harsh criticism", is a system of state control over the press and information media as a whole. In other words, censorship is a form of restriction of freedom of expression and the press in accordance with the interests of state and public institutions. Since Azerbaijan was a colony of Tsarist Russia for a long time, the processes taking place in this area developed directly in connection with Russia. In turn, censorship in Russia was formed simultaneously with the emergence of the press and manifested itself as a system of control over the activities of the press. After the first censorship rules in Russia were published in 1804, a "Preliminary Censorship Committee" was created under the Ministry of Public Education. "In 1826, Tsar Nicholas I further strengthened censorship. In 1865, "Temporary Rules on the Press and Censorship" came into force" [Mammadli, 2012:36].

In Tsarist Russia, censorship processes took place under different names in different years: censorship regulations (1804, 1826, 1828), temporary regulations on censorship (1862, 1865, 1882), temporary censorship regulations on periodicals (1905), temporary regulations on military censorship (1914), etc. All of these have always been based on the struggle against freedom

of speech and thought. "Banning the press, burning of circulation, confiscation, prohibitions on importing literature from abroad are among the methods developed by censorship. In Russia, the press has always applied censorship in advance, with the exception of the period of Alexander I" [Mammadli, 2012:35].

Censorship during the war years and its forms of manifestation. (1914-1918)

Like all national outposts of the Russian Empire, the national press in the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, has always had to operate under conditions of severe censorship. From the publication of the newspaper "Akinchi" (*The farmer*) until the fall of the empire, our journalists and publicists, and our journalism in general, have always felt censorship as the "sword of Damocles" hanging over their heads.

One of the periods when censorship rules were strictly enforced in Azerbaijan was the years of the First World War. As soon as the war began, the Caucasian viceroy issued a number of orders in addition to the existing censorship laws, and independent censorship committees were created from the very first days. In addition to special circular instructions issued for the periodical press, the publication of information of a military nature in the local press, especially in newspapers and magazines published in non-Russian languages, was significantly limited by the viceroy's order. Local newspapers periodically published news of various contents about this. In the materials "To the Newspaper Publishers" published in issue 712 of the "Igbal" (*Prosperity*) newspaper (1912-1915) dated August 15, 1914, and "Information that will not be published in the newspapers" published in issue 792 of 1914, the rules regarding the conditions under which the press should operate were brought to the attention. Only news and information permitted by military censorship could be published by local newspapers. That is why "on the last page of many printed examples that are the chronicle of that period, such a note attracts attention: "In agreement with military censorship." [Ashirli, 2023:263]. The state first of all prevented the propagation and dissemi-

nation of ideas of national freedom by all means. Intellectuals who were careless in expressing their ideas and indulged in freethinking to a certain extent were immediately punished. "A certain limit was mandatory in the press, and anyone who crossed that limit immediately felt the whip of the authorities on their back." [Jafarov, 1993:13].

Censorship rules were distinguished by their severity in the years before World War I, including the period after the First Russian Revolution and during the Balkan Wars. However, the situation in 1914-1917 was more acute and intolerable than before. When examining the situation with censorship during the First World War, we witness its manifestation in the following forms:

- Partial or complete removal of materials from the pages of newspapers and magazines, leaving their places blank;
- Fines or arrests of editors and publishers;
- Not allowing fined or arrested persons to publish new printed media;
- Closing of periodicals.

The most common form of censorship was the first. It could also be considered the mildest in terms of punishment compared to the others. Because there was no question of any fines or punitive measures. Basically, materials were removed from the page and other articles were recommended to be placed in their place. However, the editors, in protest against this policy of tsarism, kept those places empty, giving a kind of signal to their readers. When browsing through the native-language newspapers and magazines published during the First World War, we come across quite a few such facts. In particular, we can witness sections that were left empty to one degree or another on the pages of the newspapers "Igbal" (1912-1915), "Sedayi-hagg" (1912-1915), "Basirat" (1914-1920), "Yeni igbal" (1915-1917), "Achig soz" (1915-1918), "Sedayi-Caucasus" (1915-1916), "Dogru soz" (1916-1917), and the magazines "Dirilik" (1914-1916), "Tuti" (1914-1917).

This form of punishment manifested itself in several ways. In addition to words, the censors banned sentences, paragraphs, entire articles, and even entire pages. For example, in the 2nd issue of the newspaper "Dogru soz" three columns of the article "State Duma. Speech of the Caucasian Lawyers" were shortened, and in addition, some places on pages 2 and 3 were "clipped". The magazine "Qurtulush" (*Salvation*), which was published in total 4 issues, was also subjected to serious censorship in this regard. More than half of the 1st pages of the 2nd and 3rd issues of the magazine, and a large part of the 7th page, were left completely blank.

The first page of the 313th issue (October 28, 1916) of the newspaper "Achig soz" (*Plain word*) was completely erased. In the newspaper's issue 399 dated February 9, 1917, half of Taghi Shahbazi's two-column article "In Defense Service" was destroyed, in issue 225 the beginning of the article "On the Turkish-Russian Front", and the entire article under the "Our Press" rubric (2 and a half columns) was destroyed. In the "Basirat" (*Vigilance*) newspaper (June 13, 1915, No.

49), about half of Haji Ibrahim Gasimov's article "A Little Bit of Ourselves" was removed from print. In the same issue, another article by the same author under the "Haftabejar" rubric was also "touched". In issue 72 of "Basirat" two columns of the article under the "Political Disputes" rubric were deleted, and blank spaces were left in "Haftabejar" a large part of H.I. Gasimov's article "The Birth of the Messiah" also fell under the wrath of the censor.

The first page of the 12th issue of the newspaper "Yeni igdam" (*Initiative*) (1915) (April 7, 1915) was completely blank, and in issues 8, 11, 19, 23, 28, 40, and 41 of the satirical magazine "Tuti" (*Parrot*) some pages were either left blank, half-written, or completely destroyed.

Fines for press organizations were commonplace during the period in question. These fines covered the entire territory of the empire, and press organizations operating in various cities of Tsarist Russia were punished in this way. But of course, the Caucasian press and Azerbaijani journalism, which was a part of it, felt this more. Every article published in newspapers and magazines was seriously scrutinized, whether it contradicted the censorship rules, and if a flaw was discovered, fines were inevitable.

One of such fines was imposed on the magazine "Dirilik" (*Aliveness*) published in Baku in 1914-1916. The reason for this was the article "The Testament of the Russian Emperor Peter the Great" published in the 16th issue of the magazine dated June 1, 1915. The chief of the Caucasian Military District, on the grounds that this article violated censorship rules, fined the magazine's director Aliabbas Muznib 200 manats. If the director failed to pay this fine, he would be arrested for 6 days. This was reported in the 7th issue of the newspaper "Achig soz" (1915-1918) dated October 11, 1915, and in the 138th issue of the newspaper "Yeni igbal" (1915-1917) dated October 11, 1915. Another press organ that was subjected to a similar punishment was the newspaper "Sedayi-Caucasus" (*The voice of Caucasus*) (1915-1916) and its publisher Haji Ibrahim Gasimov. We find the following information about this in the 55th issue of the newspaper "Basirat" (1914-1920) published under his leadership, dated August 1, 1915: "The newspaper "Sedayi-Caucasus", published under the management of our director, was fined 500 manats by the military chief of the Caucasus district, General Volsky, for the article titled "Dushende" (*When it falls*) in the 29th issue of that newspaper. If Gasimov fails to pay the fine, he will be imprisoned for 10 days" [Mirzayev, 2018:19].

One of the writers who faced a similar punishment was Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh. His voluminous article criticizing the director of the Baku Gubernia Public Schools, which he wrote for publication in the 13th issue of the "Yeni igbal" newspaper dated May 12, 1915, was removed from the page. In order to clarify the reasons for the incident, the author of the article met with the censor Imamverdiyev, but could not get a satisfactory answer from him. On this basis, although the author of the article did not argue with the censor, he could not achieve the necessary result. In order to find out the reason for the censorship ban on the article,

the author also visited the apartment of the chief military censor, Count Ledokhovskiy, that evening. The military censor stated that the article had been removed from the page and the folder had been destroyed on his orders, but refused to provide information about the reason. M.A. Rasulzadeh also argued with Ledokhovskiy and had to speak to him in a harsh manner. The military censor, who took this action as an insult to himself, informed the mayor Martynov about all this. As a result of all this, on May 19, 1915, M.A. Rasulzadeh was arrested for “activities harmful to public order and peace.” The following news was published about this in the 23rd issue of “Yeni igbal” dated May 24, 1915: “Our chief writer, Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh, was arrested in the mayor’s office on May 19 by order of the mayor of Baku and sent to prison.” [Mirzayev, 2018:16]

Thus, M.A. Rasulzadeh, who was removed from the editorship of the “Yeni igbal” newspaper, was imprisoned for a month and a half, but was released because no solid charges could be brought against him. We find the following information about this in the 53rd issue of the “Basirat” newspaper dated July 11, 1915: “About a month and a half ago, the editor-in-chief of the “Yeni igbal” newspaper, Mr. Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh, was arrested. How many days ago, he was released from prison. It is not known whether he will work in the Baku press again.” [Mirzayev, 2018:17].

As can be seen, the censorship circles used this method to suppress the press organizations, their editors and publishers, which were already in a difficult economic situation, and to create artificial obstacles to their journalistic activities. The main goal here was to exclude them from press activities, disrupt the information supply of the local public, and ultimately prevent the awakening of the masses of the people, the development of national feelings, and prevent any incident that might occur against the tsarist government.

During the war years, journalists who were fined or arrested for various reasons faced another artificial obstacle. They were not given the right to publish newspapers and magazines again. In such cases, the intellectuals in question were forced to use various methods. One of the main methods used by Azerbaijani journalists and publishers to open a press during this period was to register it in someone else's name. Journalists who were sure that they would not be able to obtain the right to be an editor-publisher again saw the way out in this way, or rather, in obtaining permission in someone else's name and starting work themselves. Hashim bey Vezirov used this method the most. He took advantage of this method to achieve the publication of the newspaper “Sedayi-hagg” (*The voice of truth*). Salman Tahirov received permission to publish the newspaper and his name was usually mentioned in correspondence related to the publication. However, Hashim bey Vezirov himself was the real editor and publisher of the newspaper. H. Vezirov was not the only one who used this method. The famous journalist-poet Aliabbas Muznib, who could not escape persecution and punishment, was also able to publish the magazines “Dirilik” and “Babayi-Amir” on the basis of the rights granted to

his brother Abulfaz Mutallibzadeh. The great revolutionary-democrat Mahammad Amin Rasulzadeh also used such moves on many occasions. While he was the editor of the “Igbal” newspaper, he attracted the attention of the tsarist ruling circles due to his revolutionary activities. The newspaper published under his editorship was closed by the order of the censorship office dated April 27, 1915. The next day, M.A. Rasulzadeh managed to publish “Yeni igbal” as a continuation of “Igbal”. At that time, permission was obtained in the name of Abdurrahman Mashadi Dadash oglu. M.A. Rasulzadeh registered the newspaper “Achig soz” in the name of his cousin Mahammad Ali Abdulaziz oglu. The difficulty of publishing new newspapers and magazines, both during the war years and in all periods, was also that “censors like Kishmishov and Garakhanov slandered the Azerbaijani press and literature, even calling almost all Azerbaijani writers “Panislamist”. They also managed to reject the applications of Azerbaijani intellectuals to publish new newspapers and magazines with the satanic letters they sent to the government in this context” [Anthology of the history of the Azerbaijani press, 2010:97].

The factors listed above ultimately led to the closure of press organizations. This process was initially temporary in nature. “However, this was only the outward appearance of the matter. In fact, the tsarist censorship, acting independently, could suspend the publication of any newspaper or magazine for an indefinite period of time, without discrimination” [Zeynalzadeh, 2006:25]. Such cases were common during the period in question. At that time, the tsarist censorship’s “favorite” expression was “due to its harmful direction.” Many issues were covered up with this expression, and press organizations were stigmatized with it and their publications were stopped. Since the day the national press was formed in Azerbaijan, this term was also put into circulation in parallel. This term stood out as the main reason for the closure of our newspapers and magazines, whose activities were stopped. Another reason was noted in his memoirs by Mirza Sharif Mirzayev, who worked as the chief censor of the Press Affairs Committee in Tbilisi for Eastern languages, including Turkish: “The “Panislamism” movement, which was insidiously fabricated about the Caucasian Turks before the 1917 revolution, served as a solid basis for the operation of the Caucasian Censorship Committee against the Turkish press” [Mirzayev, 2009:7].

General Volsky, who was the chief of the Caucasian military administration, was distinguished by his special “zeal” in the closure of native-language press outlets for the aforementioned reasons. On his orders, on March 20, 1915, the newspaper “Igdam”, published by Ali Mukhtar Alakbarov and edited by Haji Ibrahim Gasimov, was closed (after issue 72), and on April 27 of the same year, the newspaper “Igbal”, edited by M.A. Rasulzadeh and published by Abdurrahman Mashadi Dadash oglu (after issue 923). Information about the closure of “Igdam” was provided in issue 892 of “Igbal” dated March 22, 1915, and information about the closure of “Igbal” was provided in issue 1 of “Yeni igbal” dated April 28, 1915.

The reason for the closure of the “Sedayi-hagg” newspaper is also distinguished by its “uniqueness”. A statement in a feuilleton published in the 291st issue of the newspaper on December 18, 1914, caused a huge scandal, and the long-running process eventually resulted in the closure of the newspaper and the bringing of its editor-publisher to court. The tsarist ruling circles did not forgive the editor of the newspaper Hashim bey Vezirov and publisher Salman bey Tahirov for the “sari gamish” (*yellow reed*) statement made in that article with the general title “When I feel like it”, accused him of anti-state activities, confiscated copies of the newspaper, and soon the newspaper was closed. Professor Agharafi Zeynalov writes about this: “It is true that there were not a few objects criticized and exposed in the feuilleton. Ultimately, their criticism directly concerned the city дума and other government departments dealing with these issues. However, none of these were the main reasons for the conflict that arose. The reason was the military situation in the Caucasus and the complicated conditions it created. Because at the end of October 1914, the German-Turkish fleet bombarded the Black Sea ports, and on October 31, Turkish troops launched an attack from the direction of Kars and Batum. According to the attack plans of the Turkish troops, the main blow was to be delivered to the Sarıgamış region. The Sarıgamış operation began on December 9, 1914, and lasted until January 5, 1915. At such a time, the feuilleton about “Sedayi-hagg” was published. This was the reason that made the issue extremely serious and raised it to the level of conflict.” [Hashim bey Vezirov’s journalistic activities, 2001:50].

Thus, the ruling circles were not satisfied with closing the “Sedayi-hagg” newspaper for one statement, but also brought its editor-publisher to court. Not content with this, the censorship office suspended the activities of another newspaper, “Sedayi-Caucasus”, published under the editorship of H. Vezirov. The reason for the closure of this newspaper was an article titled “The Complaint of the Greek King” in its issue dated February 3, 1915.

Conclusion

Thus, the following conclusions can be drawn from our research on censorship issues in the Azerbaijani press during the First World War:

- Tsarism used the Press Committee, Military and Civil censorship and other administrative organizations - the gendarmerie department, the police department, etc. to suppress the national press.

- These administrative factors were one of the main means by which the tsarist ruling circles stifled the national liberation struggle, slowed down the process of national awakening and self-awareness of the enslaved peoples, and held them back from normal development.

- Despite these closely related forms of punishment and other obstacles, the leading intellectuals of Azerbaijan did not lose heart, and using the first opportunity that arose, they managed to illuminate the fateful problems of the people and shape public opinion.

- The issues covered by leading writers and public and political figures in the pages of the national press, and the national and public consciousness they formed, ultimately led to the restoration of our lost statehood - the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic.

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