

Document publication

УДК 94(470)+82-6+930.23

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-2-581-592

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N. I. Levitsky's Letter to A. I. Lysakovsky about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representatives
in the Petrograd Military Censorship Commission (1916)

Abstract

The article publishes a letter from the chairman of the Petrograd Military Censorship
Commission, Nikolai Ivanovich Levitsky, to the manager of the Press and Information

Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Alexander Iosifovich Lysakovsky (dated December 22, 1916). In the letter, Levitsky insists on the need to include representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the military censorship commission on a permanent basis. At the time, a different scheme was in effect: Levitsky sent diplomatic materials (newspaper and magazine articles, books, pamphlets, and cartoons) for verification to the Press and Information Department, which made its decision on their further fate. Levitsky pointed out the complexity and slowness of this scheme, which led to delays in printing, dissatisfaction of authors and editors. The main problem, Levitsky acknowledged, was insufficient competence of censors in foreign policy matters. Meanwhile, by the end of 1916, the topic of diplomatic censorship had become quite relevant. As the war drew to a close, more and more material appeared in press about the post-war world order and Russia's future relations with its allies and adversaries. Against this background, Levitsky advocated the inclusion of representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as censors. The idea itself was not new: in the autumn of 1916, the headquarters of the Northern Front had submitted a project to reform the Petrograd military censorship in order to improve its efficiency. The main focus of the project was on expanding its staff and creating new departments in the Petrograd Military Censorship Commission. The representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was also to be included in the commission. Levitsky's proposals followed the emerging trend: enhanced staffing and centralization of the military censorship, closer interaction of departments in order to increase its effectiveness. Lysakovsky approved the suggestion. Since January 1917, five officials of the ministry had been sent to the Petrograd Military Censorship Commission for daily and round-the-clock viewing of the press. However, this cooperation did not last: after the February Revolution, Foreign Ministry officials were released from the censorship work following the actual cessation of the preliminary censorship of press in Petrograd. Nevertheless, the unrealized project became a harbinger of future organization of press censorship after the Bolshevik's assumption of power. The published document shows that the February Revolution was only a break in the process of censorship centralization and strengthening control over the press by the Russian state.

Keywords

Historical sources, World War I of 1914–18, military censorship, Petrograd Military Censorship Commission, Nikolay Levitsky, Alexander Lysakovsky, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Submitted 12.01.2021, published (for citation):

BOGOMOLOV, I. K. Pis'mo N. I. Levitskogo A. I. Lysakovskomu o predstavitelyakh MID v Petrogradskoi voenno-tsenzurnoi komissii. 1916 g. [N. I. Levitsky's Letter to A. I. Lysakovsky about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Representatives in the Petrograd Military Censorship Commission (1916). In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2021, no. 2, pp. 581-592. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-2-581-592

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