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Karel C. Berkhoff. *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012. 407 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-674-04924-6.

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K. Berkhoff: Motherland in Danger

In his latest book, Karel C. Berkhoff scrutinizes Soviet wartime propaganda, a still neglected aspect of World War II. The book seeks to assess the mobilizing role of newspapers and radio broadcasting directed at civilians on the Soviet home front. It is based on extensive archival research, as well as on detailed analysis of four central newspapers ("Izvestija", "Pravda", "Trud" and the army's "Krasnaja Zvezda" - although the latter was obviously not destined to the home front) and the Sovinformburo broadcasts, supplemented by occasional references to other news sources, and memoirs. Berkhoff offers a sweeping survey of Soviet media coverage during the war and a compelling analysis of the complex, at times contradictory processes that shaped it.

The first of ten thematic chapters deals with the Soviet propaganda apparatus during the war. That "huge propaganda machine" was supposed to function with one exclusive aim - to "educate" and "mobilize" all Soviet citizens for war. However, due to acute material problems, newspapers and radio broadcasts often failed to reach their intended audience. The efficiency of the propaganda apparatus was seriously affected by the state's obsession with establishing total control on all information, carefully channelled by the newly created Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo). The combination of extreme centralization, severe censorship and poor communication heavily constrained the working of the propaganda machine.

Chapter 2 is devoted to the way military events were mirrored in the media. The initial cover-up of the 1941 military disasters was followed with generally vague and misleading reporting on the course of the war, up to Stalingrad, when the coverage became more accurate. Extensive censorship purported to protect military secrets and to avoid "demoralizing" the population. Rather than to inform their audience, the mass media mostly sought to galvanize them through "reports" of individual heroism; nevertheless Berkhoff doubts the efficiency of this myth-building.

The following two chapters on the home front focus on the main issues faced by civilians - labour mobilization and hunger. The pervasive, extremely fussy, sometimes bizarre censorship barred the media from echoing those hardships or even providing basic factual reporting on civilian life in the Soviet rear. Instead, the media mostly focused on stressing the people's indebtedness to motherland and army, their selflessness and their total loyalty to Stalin. In Berkhoff's view, the results were disastrous, as the obsessive will to suppress information ultimately proved self-defeating.

The next two chapters deal with the coverage of Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust. Reprint from Karel C. Berkhoff, "Total Annihilation of the Jewish Population": The Holocaust in the Soviet Media, 1941-45, in: Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History 10, no. 1 (2009), pp. 61-105. Berkhoff stresses the pervasiveness of atrocity propaganda. The mass mortality of Soviet POW's, the famine in occupied cities, concentration camps, labour deportations, among others, were all prominently reported. Enemy atrocities were presented as part of a Nazi plan to exterminate the Soviet people or all Slavs. Within this context, the mass murder of the Jews was mentioned as early as summer 1941. Later, reference to the Jewish identity of victims was increasingly, but not systematically, omitted. Still, from December 1942 onward, broader publicity was given to the extermination of non-Soviet Jews. In 1944, reports on the Nazi death camps explicitly mentioned the extermination of Jews, although always among other victims. Berkhoff stresses that the genocide was mentioned, but "buried" in Soviet propaganda, and that there was no consistent policy on the question, as Stalin wavered between the usefulness of such reporting for his dealings with the Western Allies and his wariness of stoking his own people's suspected anti-Semitism.

The next three chapters explore the representation of

the enemies, both internal and external, and of the motherland, offering detailed descriptions and cautious conclusions. One can regret that the author does neither attempt to offer a coherent frame of analysis for this friend / foe discourse nor to put it in a broader perspective.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the Soviet hate speech targeting foreign enemies. In the Soviet propaganda narrative, love for the motherland was supposed to produce hatred towards the enemy, thus generating to self-sacrificing, death-embracing heroism. Berkhoff contends that racist hate speech, including systematic dehumanization of the Germans and repeated calls for their extermination in front-line newspapers, dominated the Soviet media from the spring of 1942 to the end of 1944. It was carried out by the most prominent and influential wartime writers, including Ehrenburg, whose case is discussed in detail - and who, like Grossmann and Tolstoi, operated beyond the censors' grasp.

Love of the motherland - the "rodina" - was the other side of the coin (chapter 8). This Soviet "motherland" was one that supposedly unified all Soviet citizens. Ethnic minorities were rarely mentioned in the central press, although Ukrainians did receive much praise. Nonetheless, according to Berkhoff, although the media during the war was Russocentric, this was a tendency, not a policy: in view of the country's ethnic realities, Stalin exercised caution, emphasizing the *Soviet* motherland. Only with victory in May 1945 did the discourse shift to the explicit exaltation of the Russian people.

Chapter 9 is devoted to the population on occupied territory. Soviet propaganda insisted on the duty to resist, the selfless heroism and loyalty of all Soviet citizens on German-occupied territory. Traitors, being rare exceptions, were to be severely punished; nevertheless there was very little reporting on the actual fate of former collaborators after the liberation.

The last chapter deals with the representation of Western Allies in the Soviet media. Although pre-war hostility was toned down, coverage was centred entirely on the Soviet-German war, ignoring the Pacific war, downplaying the importance of Allied aid, and reporting very little on Allied combat. The war - and the victory - were Soviet.

In his conclusion, Berkhoff draws welcome, if late, comparisons between the Soviet war propaganda and that of the Western Allies. He also attempts to weigh the propaganda's impact on the Soviet audience. He seems to doubt its efficiency, although he remains inconclusive, bemoaning the lack of available evidence and trying, more or less successfully, to avoid inferring the audience's reactions from his own. In spite of a cursory reference to Stephen Kotkin, and extensive use of Amir Weiner's book Stephen Kotkin, Magnetic Mountain. Stalinism as a Civilization, Berkeley 1997; Amir Weiner, Making Sense of War. The Second World War and the Fate of the Bolshevik Revolution, Princeton 2001. The latter is mostly used as a source of data; Berkhoff does not discuss Weiner's core theses. For a very different take on the efficiency of the Soviet war discourse, see Jochen Hellbeck, Die Stalingrad-Protokolle. Sowjetische Augenzeugen berichten aus der Schlacht, Frankfurt am Main 2012, published a few months after Berkhoff's book. , Berkhoff does not try to engage in the broader discussion on "Bolshevik speak", discourse, ideology, and the Stalinist project.

The book is most interesting in its dealing with the complex logics of Stalin's decision-making and the intricate workings of the central propaganda apparatus during the war. In spite of its title, the book is not meant to be a comprehensive analysis of Soviet propaganda. Posters, movies, music, are hardly mentioned. Oral propaganda - meetings, rumours, propaganda carried out by Party and Komsomol members and political officers - is almost completely absent. This well documented book nonetheless offers an interesting analysis of the discourse that the Soviet leadership wanted the Soviet population to hear during the war.

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