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White Propaganda Efforts in the South during the Russian Civil War, 1918–19 (the Alekseev–Denikin Period)

CHRISTOPHER LAZARSKI

As early as in the course of the Russian Civil War, the Whites regarded their propaganda as a total failure. Later, in exile, their criticism of it only grew stronger. The historiography of the Civil War has fully supported this negative assessment. As the argument goes, the White leadership and the rank and file had an essentially ‘conservative’ attitude towards propaganda, i.e., they looked upon it with suspicion and contempt and did not understand the real need for its existence. For this reason, White propaganda was a half-hearted, badly organized effort, which lacked elementary human and technical resources. It was further weakened by inner contradictions within the anti-Bolshevik movement, by the absence of appealing ideology, and by a gap between words and deeds. Altogether, White propaganda could not effectively counterbalance the nearly perfect propaganda of the Bolsheviks and, in fact, as some White leaders asserted, it brought more harm than good.¹

For the purpose of this article, propaganda is defined as the deliberate effort to influence the views of the population, in this case, in the southern regions of the former Russian Empire. Hence, it is not limited to active agitation aimed at gaining the support of a specific group or class. The selective promulgation of news in any society with a restricted access to information becomes an important part of propaganda work. The information policies of the White government must thus be included in any serious study of White propaganda.

This paper will address the issues of White propaganda in a larger perspective of anti-Bolshevik propaganda in the South coming from a variety of sources. It will also question the credibility of one-sided views on White propaganda and analyse the strengths, the weaknesses, and

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¹ A. I. Denikin, *Ocherki russkoi smuty*, 5 vols, Paris, Berlin, 1921–25 (hereafter *Ocherki*), vol. IV, p. 233; A. S. Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, 2 vols, Berlin, 1922 (hereafter Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*), vol. II, p. 185.

the nature of the White propaganda organization Osvag. Finally, it will discuss briefly the role of the Volunteer Army in propaganda work.

* * *

After the October *coup d'état*, Bolshevik authority rapidly spread throughout the country. The new regime, however, was able to hold the peripheries of the Russian Empire only temporarily and had to fight against a variety of local governments. In the South, in 1917-18, at least a dozen such governments resisted Soviet power, each representing different, often contradictory, social interests and regional or national aspirations. 'The Volunteer Army of General Alekseev' was by no means the most important or legitimate alternative to the Soviets in the South, nor was it regarded as such. At the same time, this Army, as the only anti-Bolshevik centre in the South, had clear all-national goals and claimed to be the only heir to legitimate all-Russian authority. With this perspective, it insisted on the continuation of the war with Germany as a task equally important to the fight against the Bolsheviks. It also opposed not only separatism, but even regional particularism in the South. With the passing of time, the movement became more rigid in this respect, increasingly alienating the Cossacks, who composed the majority of the Army. Furthermore, the Volunteer Army rejected any definite 'pre-determination' of the social, economic and political order of a future Russia. This meant that the movement could neither deliver the peace and land that the people (*narod*) wanted, nor unequivocally guarantee the democracy and freedom that the educated society (*obshchestvo*) desired. An equally important negative element was the Army's behaviour on the White-controlled territory. Although the re-establishment of law and order was high in Denikin's priorities, the Army frequently brought even more lawlessness and disorder to an already fragmented society.

It was often argued by the Whites themselves, and still is by some historians, that these factors severely handicapped anti-Bolshevik propaganda work and offered excellent material for Red agitation.² This opinion seems to overlook the analogous difficulties which confronted Bolshevik propaganda. War Communism, as an ideology, did not possess popular appeal; since it included mass terror and requisitions, it quickly antagonized the population within its reach. As to the

² Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Wrangel Military Archives (hereafter cited as WMA), file 130, Otdel propagandy, N. E. Paramonov, 'Doklad', Azbuka report, 4 January 1919; file 166, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report to A. D. Bilimovich, Kiev, November 1919; file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report, Kharkov, 10 August 1919; and file 164, two special intelligence reports, no. 39, 20 March 1919, and no. 53, 16 May 1919. See also Peter Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919-1920*, Berkeley, 1977 (hereafter *Civil War in South Russia*), pp. 27, 72; *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, Cambridge, 1985 (hereafter *The Birth of the Propaganda State*), pp. 63-64.

Red Army, it did not conduct itself any better than the Volunteers. And White propaganda took full advantage of these factors by using the threat of communal property and abuses of power by 'Red commissars' as one of its main themes.

The Volunteer Army never controlled information and propaganda on its territories to the degree achieved gradually by the Bolsheviks. Prior to the foundation of Osvag in September 1918, the Whites were not even in a position to do it. Furthermore, the White movement became the dominant anti-Bolshevik force only in the winter of 1918–19. Their propaganda efforts therefore, especially in the early period, have to be seen as part of a larger anti-Bolshevik campaign coming from various sources.

After the initial chaos, in the spring and summer of 1918 the pro-German governments of Ukraine and the Don established themselves as anti-Bolshevik centres, stronger than the Volunteer Army itself. Many Russian patriots were ready to accept these separatist governments as their own authority because they considered Bolshevism to be a disastrous alternative.³ The propaganda of these anti-Bolshevik centres was pro-German, often separatist, and increasingly conservative and monarchist.⁴ Its positive goals, such as an independent Ukraine or decentralized Russia, contradicted White propaganda, but its negative side, namely the hatred of Bolshevism, was common to both. A similar disagreement on which programmes to adopt, combined with strong hostility towards the Bolsheviks, appeared later, in the autumn and winter of 1918, between the Whites and the more liberal governments of Crimea and of Kuban.

The Russian-language press and party organizations were also powerful sources of anti-Bolshevik propaganda and information about the Volunteer Army. In late 1917, even in Bolshevik-controlled territory the press 'inserted accurate information' about the Volunteer Army.⁵ From 1918 onwards, the South experienced a proliferation of press publications in spite of paper shortages. There are no sufficient

³ For example, some Kadet politicians participated in the government of Hetman Skoropadskii. A conservative leader A. V. Krivoshein said in early November of 1918 that he was even ready to become a 'Ukrainian patriot' if 'the Ukrainian Government creates an army and leads the struggle against Bolshevism' (see WMA, file 141, 'Otdel'noe soobshchenie dlia VEDI', Azbuka report, Kiev, pp. 1–2).

⁴ WMA, file 167, V. A. Stepanov to Natsional'nyi Tsent, correspondence, Azbuka report, 10 September 1918, pp. 2–3. See also several Azbuka reports in WMA, file 141: agent Az, Kiev, pp. 2–4; agent Az, 11 October 1918, and 'Ekstrennoe soobshchenie Aza', 24 (11) November 1918. For general information on the Skoropadskii regime, see Joan L. Stachiw (ed.), *Ukraine and the European Turmoil, 1917–1919*, 2 vols, New York, 1973, vol. 1, pp. 76–110.

⁵ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. 1, part 2, p. 97. A leader of the Union for the Regeneration of Russia, V. A. Miakotin, states that until mid-1918 various socialist parties could organize public meetings and conduct press propaganda directed against the Bolsheviks, see his article, 'Iz nedalekago proshlago', in *Na chuzhoi storone* (hereafter NCS), 2, 1923, pp. 185–87, 194–97.

data for the entire region, but a sample from Kiev and its immediate vicinity illustrates the point. In the winter of 1918–19, under the inhospitable authority of the Ukrainian Directory, which closed down some Russian-language newspapers, the remaining twelve press organizations were still able to print 284,000 copies per day.⁶ Various southern party organizations carried out their own anti-Bolshevik propaganda by organizing meetings and public lectures, by issuing resolutions, protests and appeals, and by publishing newspapers and leaflets. Some of them, such as the White intelligence service Azbuka and the National Centre, supported the White cause unequivocally and propagated its aims.⁷ Some, such as the Union for the Regeneration of Russia and the State Unity Council of Russia, did it with certain reservations.⁸ Others, such as monarchist, industrial and agricultural organizations, were perceived by the Whites as unfriendly, though they often shared the same final goal: the restoration of the all-Russian state.⁹ Thus, White anti-Bolshevik propaganda, however modest in the early period, had to be amplified by the endeavours of various forces hostile to Bolshevik authority. Together, these efforts seemed strong enough to neutralize the influence of Bolshevik propaganda. Indeed the

⁶ The figure is trustworthy because White intelligence service was able to obtain exact data from the Press Department of the Ukrainian Directory: WMA, file 149, 'Soobshchenie Aza', Azbuka report, Kiev, 7 January 1919 (NS). By comparison, the Ukrainian language press reached 45,000 copies per day for the whole Ukraine (*ibid.*). Earlier, in the fall of 1918, Ukrainians had only five press titles: WMA, file 141, 'Soobshchenie Aza', Azbuka report, Kiev, 15 October 1918. When the Directory took power in Kiev, it closed some Russian newspapers: WMA, file 131, 'Soobshchenie Aza', Azbuka report, Kiev, 21 (8) December 1918.

⁷ Azbuka was more than a simple intelligence organization. Headed by V. V. Shulgin, it gathered many talented journalists from *Kievlitainin* who were also active in the Kievan section of the National Centre. Among its goals Azbuka had agitation for the White cause, and to fulfil that task it maintained the publishing house Rossiia which printed leaflets, pamphlets and the newspaper *Rossiia*. The National Centre also conducted propaganda on behalf of the White movement. See WMA, file 136, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, Azbuka, 'Istoricheskaia spravka', memorandum, and V. A. Stepanov to V. V. Shulgin, telephone conversation, 9 January 1919; file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, 'Informatsiia Odesskago otdela Natsional'nogo Tsentra', intelligence report, 25 (12) January 1919. See also WMA, file 148, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, I. P. Demidov, 'Doklad o Kieve', 19 September 1919, pp. 2–3.

⁸ In the fall of 1918, the Kievan headquarters of the Union for Regeneration focused its activity mainly on propaganda for its programme: Miakotin, 'Iz nedalekago proshlago', *NCS*, 5, pp. 259–61. Although the Union preferred dictatorship over dictatorship, the party's programme was quite similar to that of the White Army. For its summary, see *ibid.*, pp. 259–61.

⁹ For details on the monarchists, see: WMA, file 141, 'Ekstrennoe soobshchenie Aza', Azbuka report, Kiev, 24 (11) November; 'Soobshchenie Vserossiiskogo Natsional'nogo Tsentra', 17 (4) December, 1918, and intelligence report, 7 September 1918. For the industrialists organized in *Protogis*, see: two Azbuka reports in WMA, file 141: 'Soobshchenie Aza', Kiev, 1 November 1918, p. 15, and 'Soobshchenie Dobro', 8 November 1918. For the Union of Agriculturalists (*Soiuz khleborobov*), see: Azbuka reports in WMA, file 136, 'Soobshchenie Vedi ot Aza', Kiev, 18 October 1918, p. 4, and file 141, 'Soobshchenie Aza', Kiev, 8 November 1918 (NS), pp. 2–3, and 'Soobshchenie Oko', 8 November 1918, p. 2.

South did not experience spontaneous Bolshevik uprisings after the initial stage of chaos.

The swift spread of Bolshevik power after the October Revolution, and the propaganda which accompanied it, made a profound impression on the Whites. The Bolshevik success appeared to them mainly the work of a Red propaganda machine making empty promises, disseminating lies and exhorting the people to revolt against the natural order.¹⁰ White sources are full of complaints about the seemingly ubiquitous hostile propaganda and the absence of White counter-efforts.¹¹ On the one hand, they claimed that the Bolsheviks, and even separatists, devoted huge resources to conduct skilful, imaginative and powerful propaganda; on the other, that the Whites were incompetent, passive and hopelessly outmanœuvred.¹² Historians have taken these complaints at face value, and used them as proof of White negligence and ineptitude in propaganda matters.¹³ A different perspective on such complaints can show, however, that another interpretation is equally plausible.

The Whites appear to have held highly unrealistic opinions on the power of propaganda and they often tried to explain away all problems, even the most fundamental, as the result of hostile agitation. For example, some reports attribute peasant passivity or enmity towards the government to the inadequate response of White to Bolshevik propaganda. Pillages of the countryside by the Army and Denikin's land policy seemed to be less important.¹⁴ Other sources state that

¹⁰ For example: P. Fetisov, 'Edinstvennoe oruzhie bol'shevikov', *Zhizn'*, no. 161, 20 November 1919, p. 1; V. Shulgin, 'Revoliutsiia beznadezhno provalilas', *Kievlianin*, no. 2, 22 August 1919, p. 1; M. Ometov, 'Pomnite-li vy?', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 412, 14 November 1919, p. 2; E. D. Grimm, *Kak bol'sheviki zakhvatili vlast' na Rusi*, Rostov-on-Don, 1919, *passim*; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. III, p. 262.

¹¹ For example, WMA, file 141, agent Oko, Azbuka report, Kiev, 28 September 1918 (OS), and three intelligence reports, file 146: no. 110, Kharkov, 31 July 1919; no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, and 10 August 1919.

¹² Reports emphasizing the superiority of separatist propaganda are especially striking: WMA, file 136, Shulgin to Stepanov, correspondence, Azbuka report, Odessa, 6 February 1919, p. 5; file 141, Agent Oko, Azbuka report, Kiev, 28 September 1918; file 148, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, Dimitri Ianchevetskii, intelligence report, Kiev, 28 August 1919; intelligence report, no. 41, Ekaterinoslav, 23 September 1919, pp. 2-4; intelligence report no. 638, Kharkov, 8 September 1919, pp. 4, 7, 13, and I. P. Demidov, 'Doklad o Kieve', 19 September 1919. See also 'Petliurovskaia agitatsiia', *Kievlianin*, no. 6, 27 August 1919, p. 4. Not only Bolsheviks but 'everyone conducts propaganda against the Volunteer Army', complains one report, and lists local nationalists, egoists, doctrinaire and thoughtless people, and all those who lost their high governmental positions: WMA, file 129, Vserossiiskii Natsional'nyi Tsentri to prince G. E. L'vov, correspondence, Ekaterinodar, 14 (1) May 1919.

¹³ Examples of this tendency can be found in Peter Kenz's books: *Civil War in South Russia*, 1918, Berkeley, 1971, pp. 209-10; *Civil War in South Russia*, pp. xiv, 71-79; *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁴ WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report, Kharkov, 10 August 1919; file 166, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report to A. D. Bilimovich, Kiev, November 1919.

separatist movements in the Ukraine and in the Cossack territories arose mainly as the result of subversive actions undertaken by the Germans, Bolsheviks and regional nationalists.¹⁵ If the Whites had been energetic and had developed agitation, says one report, everything could have changed to their advantage.¹⁶

Inasmuch as hostile propaganda created severe problems, it was believed that White counter-actions on a grand scale could have averted the situation. For example, in the late autumn of 1918, after the Germans began to withdraw from Russia, the White government asked the Western powers to dispatch immediately at least a token military force to the South in a show of friendship. This, they said, would have had a profound propagandistic effect in itself on the southern population.¹⁷ Some politicians also expected the Allies to issue a proclamation condemning Bolshevism and declaring its leaders outlaws. They envisaged that this proclamation would be printed in billions of copies and disseminated by aeroplanes throughout Russia.¹⁸ Thus, to compete with its enemies, White propaganda sought to reach a dimension much higher even than that which the Bolsheviks accomplished or, as the author of another proposition put it, the propaganda programme had to be carried out according to 'American methods'.¹⁹

Critics of White propaganda work often contradicted themselves in a way which reveals their prejudice against Osveg rather than the true flaws of the agency. Some accused it of limiting its activity to the front lines while neglecting villages; others saw no propaganda at the front

¹⁵ For instance, WMA, file 129, 'Rezoliutsiia', Natsional'nyi Tsentri, Azbuka report, Kiev, 30 October 1918; file 148, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, Dimitri Ianchevetskii, intelligence report, Kiev, 28 August 1919; I. P. Demidov, 'Doklad o Kieve', Kiev, 19 September 1919; intelligence report no. 638, Kharkov, 8 September 1919; and intelligence report no. 41, Ekaterinoslav, 23 September 1919. See also file 162, 'Politicheskii obzor', 28 (15) April–14 (1) May 1919, p. 2; Hoover Institution, Krymskoe Kraevoe Pravitel'stvo (hereafter cited as KKP), 'Zapiska', box 1, file 9, p. 1, and Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. v, pp. 142–43.

¹⁶ WMA, file 141, Agent Oko, Azbuka report, Kiev, 28 September 1918. See also file 152, 'Soobshchenie Rsty', Azbuka report, 17 December 1918 (NS), and file 164, Otdel propagandy, intelligence report no. 37, 7 February 1919.

¹⁷ WMA, file 136, 'Obrashchenie Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii k Soiuznikom', Jassy Conference, 27 (14) October 1918; p. 2; file 143, 'Pervoe Obrashchenie', address to the Allies, Jassy Conference, 17 November 1918 (NS).

¹⁸ M. M. Fedorov, a member of the Special Council and a chairman of the National Centre, made this proposition in the winter of 1918–19: WMA, file 129, Azbuka report, Natsional'nyi Tsentri. Another 'grandiose plan' relating to agitation in the countryside was presented by an Azbuka agent: WMA, file 130, 'Zapiska', no. 252, Odessa, February 1919. For its summary, see Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 75. Aeroplanes used for propaganda purposes, not surprisingly, excited the Whites, cf. Hoover Institution, Wrangel Private Archives (hereafter WPA), file 1, *Zhurnal Osobago soveshchaniia* (hereafter *Zhurnal*), no. 21, pp. 130–31.

¹⁹ M. S. Margulies, an activist of the State Council Unity called for such methods: WMA, file 164, Otdel propagandy, intelligence report no. 38, 8 February 1919. On the other hand, it was Americans who were rather amused by the Russians' 'great belief in propaganda', as evidence from the Wrangel period shows. See Library of Congress, the Rare Book Division, American Red Cross, Pictorial, no. 2918.

and complained that Osvag worked only in towns.²⁰ Still others did not see any activity in towns except for 'window exhibits', which displayed some posters and Osvag's prints.²¹ Osvag's hiring standards were criticized as being either too strict or too loose, or that the agency employed either leftists or Black Hundred reactionaries, either Jews or anti-Semites.²²

The search for scapegoats by the leadership at all levels of the White administration was also a factor in White dissatisfaction with their propaganda. Denikin, doubtlessly the person most responsible for creating exceptionally unfavourable conditions for White propaganda, was the first to denounce Osvag's performance. He saw more harm than merit in its work, and so did his subordinates.²³ Corrupt and indolent Army officers and administrative officials, whose conduct greatly damaged the White cause, grew accustomed to blaming propaganda for the effects of their own wrongdoings.²⁴ In those circumstances no propaganda, however ingenious, could be deemed as satisfactory.

Lastly, it is worthwhile to compare the problems of the White propaganda effort with those of its Red counterpart. Peter Kenez, a specialist in Bolshevik and White propaganda matters, accumulated ample evidence showing that the Reds were dissatisfied with their propaganda work during the Civil War, perhaps as much as the Whites. Like the Whites, they complained that leaders paid too little attention to propaganda. Written propaganda suffered from paper shortages and low technical quality. Newspapers rarely reached local party organizations and were completely unavailable in the countryside. Editors and journalists were uneducated. Articles were dull and did not reflect local affairs. Agitators focused their work in towns and avoided villages.²⁵ At the same time, the Reds tended to overestimate the strength of White propaganda. For them, it was the Whites who

²⁰ WMA, file 166, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report to A. D. Bilimovich, Kiev, November 1919; file 133, Otdel Propagandy, intelligence report, 18 May 1919; file 146, two intelligence reports from Kharkov, no. 110, 31 July, and 10 August 1919.

²¹ Aleksandr Drozdov, 'Intelligentsiia na Donu' (hereafter 'Intelligentsiia na Donu'), *Arkhiv russkoi revoliutsii* (hereafter *ARR*), vol. II, 1922, p. 50; K. N. Sokolov, *Pravlenie generala Denikina*, Sofia, 1921 (hereafter Sokolov, *Pravlenie*), p. 108.

²² WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report, no. 153, 28 October 1919, pp. 1, 5; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34; Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. II, p. 182; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 100, 103–04. See also Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920*, p. 74.

²³ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34; Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. II, p. 185.

²⁴ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 100.

²⁵ Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, pp. 44–49, 54–56.

were imaginative, clever and dangerous propagandists who could undermine the Soviet authority.²⁶

* * *

The first White propaganda endeavours were as humble as the origins of the Army itself. Having established the Army's headquarters in November 1917 on the territory of the Don Host in Novochoerkassk, General Alekseev sent letters and appeals to Petrograd, Moscow and throughout the South, spreading news about the organization of a centre of national resistance against the Bolsheviks.²⁷ He comprehended immediately the need for propaganda warfare in a time of civil war and considered agitation, the press and political education of the population to be of equal importance to the formation of the Army itself.²⁸ Alekseev and General Kornilov, who soon joined him in Novochoerkassk, wanted to issue an order summoning all Russian officers to the South. Both generals were aware that such a mobilization order would have dubious legal force, but believed that their moral prestige would have a good propaganda effect. They were very bitter because 'Don politics' thwarted this plan. They had to limit themselves to spreading 'anonymous appeals and leaflets about the Volunteer Army' instead.²⁹ In the first period of the Army's existence, the Whites also issued several declarations and appeals which established the all-Russian priorities of the movement.³⁰

For several months, until August 1918, the Army was almost constantly on the move and its propaganda was often confined to an area no larger than a village or a county. Despite their precarious situation, the Whites solemnly issued appeals, orders and threats to the populations under their control.³¹ The nascent political apparatus of the Army — the Political Department — additionally printed a two-page periodical *Field Sheet* (*Polevoi listok*) which was distributed

²⁶ 'Agitation is conducted everywhere against Soviet authority, especially against Communism', says one Soviet report. White propaganda was appealing to the masses, it continues, because of its progressive social slogans. The report also gives information about cases in which White military units pretended to be Bolshevik detachments 'fighting against Communists and autocratic commissars'. WMA, file 162, intelligence report, 21 August 1919, p. 7.

²⁷ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. I, part 2, pp. 156–57, 197. See also Alekseev's letter to M. K. Diterikhs, the Quartermaster-General of the Army, written on 21 November 1917, six days after his arrival at Novochoerkassk, in N. N. Golovin, *Rossiiskaia kontr-revoliutsiia v 1917–1918 gg.*, Paris, 1937, vol. II, part 5, p. 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Alekseev used the term *obrabotka umov*, which in a more literal translation should be rendered as 'working on minds'.

²⁹ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. I, part 2, p. 197.

³⁰ 27 December 1917; 9 January; 23 April and early May 1918, see Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. I, part 2, p. 196; vol. II, pp. 198–99; 341–42, and vol. III, p. 131.

³¹ WMA, file 241, 'Vozvanie'; 'Operativnaia svodka k utru', 28 April 1918: 'S'ezdy predstavitelei sel i dereven' Medvezhinskogo uezda Stavropol'skoi gubernii', 29 May 1918.

among the soldiers.³² Enlistment bureaux, which the Army organized in several southern towns, also carried out propaganda work.³³ Although this activity was aimed at officers, i.e., the group the most likely to respond, it served as a source of information for the general public as well.³⁴

This transitional period ended when the Army established itself permanently on the territory of Kuban. On 23 (10) September 1918, General Alekseev founded a special propaganda organization headed by Dr Sergei Chakhotin.³⁵ This organization (Osvedomitel'no-agitatsionnoe otdelenie), known under its abbreviated name Osvag, was the first civilian institution the Whites created. It succeeded the Military–Political Department (Voenno-politicheskii otdel) as the White propaganda apparatus.³⁶ During the course of its existence, Osvag underwent several reorganizations, evidencing official dissatisfaction with the quality of White propaganda and the will to improve it.

Originally, Osvag was a section of the Department of Diplomacy.³⁷ This was changed at the first session of the Special Council held on 11 October (28 September) 1918 when it became a part of the Political Chancellery, led by the Chairman of the Special Council, General A. M. Dragomirov.³⁸ In December 1918 the Special Council concluded

³² WMA, file 241, *Polevoi listok*, no. 1, 23 April 1918, and no. 2, 4 May 1918.

³³ On 28 May 1918, General Krasnov permitted them to be opened in Novocheerkassk and Rostov: P. M. Krasnov, 'Vsevelikoe Voisko Donskoe', *ARR*, vol. v, 1922, p. 202. In the early period, enlistment bureaux were also functioning in Taganrog and Kiev, see V. E. Pavlov (ed.), *Markovtsy v boiakh i pokhodakh za Rossiiu v osvoboditel'noi voine 1917–1920 godov*, 2 vols, Paris, 1962–64, vol. 1, p. 72, and Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. III, p. 39.

³⁴ Documents for the subsequent period show how important such bureaux were as a source of positive or negative information. For example, see Azbuka report, Kiev, 30 December 1918, WMA, file 136 and KPP, box 2, file 18, N. N. Bogdanov, *Krymskoe Kraevoe Pravitel'stvo*, manuscript, p. 11.

³⁵ WMA, file 167, 'Prikaz Verkhovnogo rukovoditelia Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii', Ekaterinodar, 10 September 1918. Chakhotin, who received his PhD from the University of Heidelberg, was an assistant professor at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petrograd before the Revolution. Later, in exile, he wrote one of the first studies of mass propaganda: see Serge Chakhotin, *The Rape of the Masses: the Psychology of Totalitarian Political Propaganda*, London, 1940. The book, originally published in French in 1939, was quite famous at that time. I am indebted to Professor Richard Stites of Georgetown University for the last reference.

³⁶ WMA, file 167, 'Prikaz Verkhovnogo Rukovoditelia Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii', Ekaterinodar, 10 September 1918. The Military–Political Department, the successor of the Political Department, was created on 1 June 1918. See also Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 95.

³⁷ Kenez asserts that the attachment of Osvag to the Department of Diplomacy shows the thinking of the White leadership for whom propaganda 'was not to influence domestic public opinion but to attract foreign aid': *Civil War in South Russia*, p. 209. But this arrangement lasted only a few weeks and tells more about the precarious position of the Volunteer Army in Kuban than about the 'curious thinking' of its leaders. The Department of Diplomacy was in charge of relations with all former Russian provinces; therefore, its control over Osvag was natural. As soon as the Department was relieved from maintaining such relations, Osvag ceased to be part of it: WPA, file 1, *Zhurnal*, no. 1, 11 October (28 September) 1918, p. 1.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

that Osvag's propaganda was insufficient to match Bolshevik activity and decided to raise Osvag's status. Chakhotin was admitted to the Special Council as a member while Osvag, renamed the 'Information Bureau' (Osvedomitel'noe biuro), became a separate department of the Special Council.³⁹ Soon afterwards, on 29 (16) January 1919, N. E. Paramonov, a Don Kadet, was appointed the new chief of Osvag. The Council also allotted adequate means to develop propaganda work on a major scale.⁴⁰ Osvag's official name was changed again to the Department of Propaganda (Otdel propagandy).⁴¹ Paramonov moved the Osvag headquarters from Ekaterinodar, where the White leaders resided, to Rostov-on-Don. Although Rostov offered better printing facilities, the lack of direct communication led to constant tensions between Osvag and the government. Viewed as too leftist and independent, Paramonov was forced to resign after only six weeks in office.⁴²

On 21 (8) March 1919, Professor K. N. Sokolov, a legal scholar and prominent Kadet politician, became his successor.⁴³ He wanted to abolish the old structure and to establish an entirely new propaganda organization. The government then realized that it could not function without the much-criticized institution. Instead, Sokolov was authorized only to make necessary changes.⁴⁴ Thoroughly reorganized under his leadership, Osvag attained full growth. Prior to the evacuation of Rostov, on 4 January 1920 (22 December 1919), Sokolov had passed his duties on to Colonel B. A. Engel'gardt, who was in charge of Osvag's remnants until its natural extinction in

³⁹ *Zhurnal*, no. 21, 31 (18) December 1918, pp. 130–31. Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 95.

⁴⁰ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 95. Paramonov requested fifty million Don roubles for three months. Denikin agreed only to give twenty-five million, which, as Sokolov says, was a great deal of money at the beginning of 1919; *Zhurnal*, no. 28, 18 January 1919. Actually, Osvag spent only ten million in that period (WPA, file 2, *Zhurnal*, no. 51, 12 April 1919, p. 134). The *Zhurnal* provides general information about Osvag's finances: no. 16, 23 November 1918, p. 62; no. 19, 11 December, pp. 90–91; no. 71, 19 June 1919, p. 158; no. 75, 2 July, p. 195; no. 87, 20 August, p. 286; no. 95, 17 September, p. 338 in WPA, files 1 and 2. In August Osvag received approximately twenty-seven million. For the period September–December, Osvag requested more than sixty-eight million. However, this rapid growth of Osvag's budget was consumed mostly by inflation.

⁴¹ On 29 (16) January 1919, see Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. II, p. 183.

⁴² Kenez analyses in detail ideological differences between Paramonov and the White leaders in his *Civil War in South Russia*, pp. 72–73. See also WMA, file 130, Otdel propagandy, Paramonov, 'Doklad', Azbuka report, 4 January 1919. It seems, however, that Denikin disliked Paramonov's independent behaviour at least as much as his pro-left policy. Paramonov did not consult Denikin in choosing his closest associates and this provoked a mean and spiteful reaction on the part of Denikin. He did not acknowledge their nominations and treated them as private persons (Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 97–98).

⁴³ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 93, 96–98.

⁴⁴ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34; Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. II, pp. 184–85; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 98–99; WMA, file 163, Osvedomitel'noe biuro, information report no. 22, 4 April 1919.

March 1920.⁴⁵ General Wrangel did not revive it, but established an entirely new organization.

Chakhotin's Osvag became a large institution plagued by bureaucratic routine.⁴⁶ It initially had two divisions: the Press Bureau and the Information section.⁴⁷ It also further developed local offices which had been organized by the Military–Political Department.⁴⁸ During Chakhotin's tenure, Osvag gained a reputation as a haven for the under-educated. Jews, leftists, monarchists and reactionaries were added later.⁴⁹ The 'Chakhotin Osvag' was moved from Ekaterinodar to Rostov during the Paramonov reorganization; it was not integrated into the new organization, but existed within Osvag as a separate unit until Sokolov's tenure. The resultant structure of the institution was confusing and some sections duplicated the work of others.⁵⁰

Osvag's activity focused on several main fields: (1) Information; (2) Agitation; (3) Literature and Publications; and (4) Art, Theatre and Cinema.⁵¹ It appears that this division was replicated in Osvag's major offices (*uzly*), established in larger southern towns.⁵² Additionally, Osvag developed a network of posts (*punkty*) in small towns and villages which covered the White-controlled territory.⁵³

The concept of propaganda work which Osvag was to implement had several components. Since the Whites considered their enemy to be

⁴⁵ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 99; N. N. Alekseev, 'Iz vospominanii', *ARR*, vol. xvii, 1926, p. 238. On 30 (17) December 1919, Osvag was included into the Ministry of Internal Affairs when Denikin abolished the Special Council and created a new government, see 'Prikaz g. Denikina ob uprazhnenii Osobogo Soveshchaniia', in *Grazhdanskaia voina v Rossii (1918–1921 g.g.)*: *Khrestomatiia*, ed. S. Piontkovskii, Moscow, 1925, p. 514.

⁴⁶ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 96–97.

⁴⁷ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. iv, p. 232.

⁴⁸ WMA, file 167, 'Prikaz Verkhovnogo rukovoditel'ia Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii', Ekaterinodar, 10 September 1918; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 95.

⁴⁹ Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. iv, pp. 232–34; Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. ii, pp. 183, 185; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 101, 103–04.

⁵⁰ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 96.

⁵¹ The exact structure of Rostov's headquarters is unclear. A. Drozdov, 'Intelligentsiia na Donu', p. 51, describes only five sections: Information, Literature, Art, Agitation and Chancellery. N. S. Katkov, who quotes only Drozdov, uses perhaps some additional evidence because he mentions seven divisions: Information; Agitation; Literature and Publications; Arts and Agitation; Organization and Control; Supplies; General; see his *Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota Bolshevikov v voiskakh tylu Belogvardiitsev v period 1918–1920*, Leningrad, 1917 (hereafter *Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*), pp. 11–12.

⁵² A detailed intelligence report summarizing the work of Osvag's office in Kharkov mentions seven divisions which resembles the structure described by Katkov: Information; Literature and Publications; Arts; Theatre; Cinema and Theatre; Culture and Education; and Technology. See WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 2. Intelligence reports prepared by Osvag mention its local offices (*uzly*) by regions: Black Sea, Crimea, Don, Kuban, Terek-Dagestan, and by towns: Baku, Batum, Ekaterinodar, Kharkov, Kiev, Novorossiisk, Odessa, Stavropol and Taganrog. See WMA, files 146 and 164.

⁵³ At full growth Osvag's personnel reached nearly 8,500 employees, see G. V. Nemirovich-Danchenko, *V Krymu pri Vrangele. Fakty i itogi*, Berlin, 1922 (hereafter *V Krymu pri Vrangele*), p. 44. Kenez, however, asserts that Osvag had no local network (*The Birth of the Propaganda State*, p. 64).

national traitors, barbarians and mass murderers, they assumed that simple information about true Soviet aims and behaviour disseminated in Russia and abroad would be sufficient. This focus on Red conduct constituted the core of White propaganda throughout the Civil War.⁵⁴ The fundamental message was supplemented by propaganda for the all-Russian goals of the movement among the southern population.⁵⁵ Gradually, as the Whites became increasingly obsessed with propaganda matters, they added manipulation, provocation, deceit and demagoguery to the arsenal of their propaganda methods, or to phrase it more generally, they accepted the principle that the ends justify the means.⁵⁶

Since Russia held great emotive value for the Whites, their main propaganda themes usually had national overtones.⁵⁷ Thus the Bolsheviks were presented not as true Russians, but as German agents, whose majority was Jewish. Germany wanted to dismember Russia, and used Bolshevism and separatism as instruments to achieve that goal. It continued to assist the Soviet regime even after the lost war.⁵⁸ Hence, the fight against the Bolsheviks was a basic patriotic duty incumbent on all Russians.⁵⁹ Everything that hindered the struggle, such as social, political, and especially regional, interests, was considered to be treason.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ WMA, file 130, 'Vremennoe uchrezhdenie Ministerstva propagandy (ili Otdela propagandy)', Azbuka report; file 167, 'Prikaz Verkhovnogo rukovoditel'ia Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii', Ekaterinodar, 10 September 1918; WPA, file 1, *Zhurnal*, no. 21, 18 December 1918, pp. 130–31; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34; Lukomskii, *Vospominaniia*, vol. II, pp. 182–83; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 95, 111. See also note no. 63.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* Originally Osvag's activity was limited to territories controlled by the Whites. After Chakhotin's dismissal, it was decided that Osvag would conduct propaganda throughout Russia. In fact, it was never able to do so.

⁵⁶ Complaints about the absence of White propaganda and about hostile agitation reveal this attitude. See also WMA, file 162, intelligence report, 21 August 1919, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Katkov presents the focus of White propaganda somewhat differently (*Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, pp. 16–17). According to him, three topics were predominant: aims of the White Government; lies about Soviet authority, and appeals to join the Volunteer Army. His analysis of 170 White brochures from 1918–19 reveals that about fifty per cent of them attacked: (1) the Marxist-Leninist theory of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat; (2) the legitimacy of the October Revolution; and (3) the Red Army. They also called for the overthrow of Soviet rule.

⁵⁸ These changes can be found in White pamphlets and press articles, for example: Leonid Kraev, *Bol'shevitskie pauki i krest'ianskiiia mukhi*, Narodnaia biblioteka 6, s.l., 1919, *passim*; Mikhail Lavda, *Veselye nekrologii*, s.l.e.a., *passim*; Grigorii Rakovskii, 'Na donskom fronte', *Donskaia rech'*, no. 18, December 1919, p. 3; 'Nemtsy i bol'sheviki', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 396, 26 October 1919, p. 3; 'Germaniia i Rossiia', *Priazovskii krai*, no. 274, 4 December 1919, p. 2; 'Germanskaia rabota v Rossii', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 409, 11 November 1919, p. 4.

⁵⁹ All declarations of the aims of the Volunteer Army, reprinted as leaflets, always attested that goal. See also leaflets in the Hoover Institution, the Poster Collection, Soviet Union, RU/SU (hereafter cited as RU/SU), Book I, nos 24, 38, 45, 68; Book III, no. 1126.

⁶⁰ 'M. M. Vinaver o Petliure', *Priazovskii krai*, no. 226, 21 December 1918, p. 1; 'Kubanskaia Rada', *Priazovskii krai*, no. 244, 29 October 1919, p. 2; V. Pavlikovskii, 'Razprodazha Rossii', *Svobodnaia rech'*, no. 251, 19 November 1919, p. 2; Evgenii Trubetskoi, 'Vyvody', *Velikaia Rossiia*, no. 343, 10 November 1919, p. 1.

A parallel theme was that the Bolsheviks, as German agents, preached the slogan of class struggle within the nation. This teaching awoke the darkest forces among the people and led to the Civil War.⁶¹ The Bolshevik message of social justice, and that of Marxism in general, was a lie.⁶² Instead of land for the peasants, they brought communes and food requisitions; instead of peace, they incited a war among the Russians capable of destroying the wealth accumulated by ages of hard work; instead of freedom, they built a sinister tyranny which threatened to throw Russia back from civilization to barbarism.⁶³

In this context the Whites exploited the problem of Soviet crimes as one of the most important themes of their propaganda. Newspapers, pamphlets and posters spread news about summary executions, tortures and desecrations of churches committed by the Bolsheviks.⁶⁴ They also contained information about the problems of cold, hunger and, more generally, the incredible hardship of life under the Soviet regime.⁶⁵

As far as positive messages of White propaganda are concerned, the main themes were: the salvation of Russia, one and indivisible; law and order on White territory; civil liberties; and the determination of the

⁶¹ Evgenii Chirikov, *Narod i revoliutsiia*, Rostov-on-Don, 1919, *passim*; M. Ometov, 'Pomiteli vy', *Vechnoe vremia*, no. 412, 14 November 1919, p. 2; Evgenii Trubetskoi, 'Ocherednoi vopros', *Velikaia Rossiia*, no. 337, 3 November 1919, p. 1.

⁶² *O neravnopravii liudei*, Pis'ma ranenago bol'shevika 1, s.l., 1919, *passim*; *Razskaz plennago krasnoarmeitsa*, Narodnaia biblioteka 8, Rostov-on-Don, 1919, *passim*; *O tom kak i zACHEM pioavilis' bol'sheviki v Rossii*, Pis'ma ranenago bol'shevika 2, s.l., 1919, *passim*; Iv. Nazhiniv, 'Obrashchenie pisatel'ia k rabochim liudiam', *Svobodnaia rech'*, no. 175, 15 August 1919, pp. 1–2. RU/SU, Book III, no. 1042, has an interesting poster which shows Bolshevik leaders thrown into hell because of their lies; see also RU/SU, Book I, nos 19, 45; Book IV, nos 1360, 1480, 1507.

⁶³ E. D. Grimm, *Kak bol'sheviki zakhvatili vlast' na Rusi*, Rostov-on-Don, s.a., *passim*; Aleksandr Nizhegorodtsev, *Pochemu Dobrovol'cheskaia Armiaia voiuet protiv kommunistov Lenina i Trotskago*, Kharkov, 1919, *passim*; A. M. Obukhov, *Sovetskii rai. Pod vlast'iu bolshevikov*, Narodnaia Biblioteka 2, s.l., 1919, *passim*; *O zemli i kommunakh*, Pis'ma ranenago bol'shevika 5, Rostov-on-Don, 1919, *passim*; see also leaflets in RU/SU, Book I, no. 19; Book IV, nos 1453, 1480.

⁶⁴ To make such information more trustworthy, the government set up a 'Special Commission to Investigate Bolshevik Atrocities' (*Osobaia komissiiia po razsledovaniiu zlodeeranii bol'shevikov*) and devoted considerable resources for the commission's activity as well as for publishing the results of its findings, see WPA, file 1 and 2, *Zhurnal*, no. 22, 3 January 1919 (21 December 1918), p. 146; no. 59, 20 (7) May 1919, p. 81; no. 63, 3 June (21 May), p. 109 and no. 105, 6 November (23 October), p. 146. See also posters in RU/SU, Book IV, no. 1360; Book IV, nos 1507, 1508, 1509, and Library of Congress, the Rare Book Division, a series of Russian posters from the Civil War.

⁶⁵ Newspapers usually had a regular section devoted to news from Soviet Russia focused on the suffering of the population.

future order in Russia by the Constituent Assembly.⁶⁶ Despite the view of traditional historiography, these national and political slogans often made for effective propaganda, even among the workers.⁶⁷ Propaganda also stressed the socially progressive nature of the White regime. Hence, it made wide use of two of Denikin's March letters to the Special Council promising land reform and labour legislation.⁶⁸

White authority assigned an extra task to Osvag which severely damaged its work. In addition to information and propaganda directed at the population, it was to gather news, originally domestic and later also foreign, for the White leadership.⁶⁹ A simple rationale behind this practice was that the leadership had to know the mood of the population under its control, as well as the political situation inside the country and abroad.⁷⁰ Yet quite quickly some information about morale in White territories turned into intelligence reports about the corruption and scandalous conduct of the administration and Army. The most confidential reports were on the activity of political parties and social groups.⁷¹ These were typed only in two copies and delivered directly to Denikin and Dragomirov. Besides the ideological differences with the Left, the Right and the nationalities, those reports seem to have been the main cause of the hatred which Osvag aroused from its inception.

White information policies could serve as a model for any authoritarian regime. Osvag created a complex mechanism which allowed it to promote ideologically desirable information and to control, directly or indirectly, any unwanted news. The Press-Bureau, its information agency, collected domestic and foreign news, edited it, and sent it to

⁶⁶ Those goals were proclaimed in official White declarations of aims and in Denikin's speeches. Denikin used several other terms for Constituent Assembly. See also Roman Makoshin, *Chto sdelala Dobrovol'cheskaia armia*, Narodnaia biblioteka 9, s.l.e.a., *passim*. The pamphlet, as many others, has also the text of Denikin's declaration from 23 April 1919 (NS) entitled 'Za chto my boremsia'; B. Rostov, *Pochemu i kak sozdalas Dobrovol'cheskaia Armia i za chto ona boretsia*, Biblioteka Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii, s.l., 1919, *passim*. RU/SU has several posters and leaflets presenting the Army's aims, see Book I, nos 18, 28, 30, 46, 56; Book IV, no. 1486.

⁶⁷ See, for example: Pavel Dergachev, 'V tsarstve Belykh', *Narod*, no. 2–3, 10 March 1920, p. 7–10; B. Kolesnikov, *Professional'noe dvizhenie i kontrrevoliutsiia. Ocherki iz istorii professional'nogo dvizheniia na Ukraine*, Kiev, 1923, pp. 250–51; G. Kuchin, *Dobrovol'cheskaia Zubatovshchina*, Moscow, 1924, pp. 12–14, 25. See also a leaflet describing the workers' greeting of the Volunteer Army after the liberation of Tsaritsyn in RU/SU, Book IV, no. 1479 and Vladimir Brovkin, 'Political Parties and Social Movements Under the Whites', unpublished manuscript in author's possession.

⁶⁸ Issued on 5 April (23 March) 1919: Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 212–14; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 102. See also leaflet in RU/SU, Book I, nos 42, 45, 57, 101; Book IV, nos 1476, 1481.

⁶⁹ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 113; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34. A whole series of Osvag's confidential reports can be found in WMA, files 116, 133, 163, 164.

⁷⁰ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 113–14; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. IV, pp. 232–34.

⁷¹ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 113–14. WMA, file 164 contains such reports.

press organizations.⁷² Foreign news from independent sources was rarely available because of communication difficulties. Access to confidential information was granted only to the most trusted newspapers.⁷³ Osvag even attempted to monopolize governmental information by placing itself as an exclusive intermediary between the authorities and journalists.⁷⁴ As a last resort, military censorship could suppress anything it wanted.

Another powerful means of Osvag's control over press organizations was the distribution of subsidized paper.⁷⁵ Paper was generally scarce during the Civil War and its price on the black market was extremely high. Thus the press could be easily manipulated by the granting or withdrawing of official favours.⁷⁶ Osvag also established numerous newspapers and journals of its own which it could supervise directly.⁷⁷ Additionally, the Information and Literature section and Publication section printed books, pamphlets, leaflets and posters.

It is difficult to assess the total quantity of White publications. The Soviet historian N. S. Katkov estimates the number of White press titles in the summer of 1919 at more than one hundred. It was still increasing through the autumn of 1919.⁷⁸ Soviet historiography tended to exaggerate the magnitude of anti-Bolshevik propaganda; yet it seems that in this case Katkov underestimates it. We were able to establish approximately ninety press titles mentioned in White sources for the period of 1918–19, which, it appears, represented only a small sample of those which actually existed.⁷⁹ Even considering the great fluctuation of the White press, with some titles being closed and opened almost daily, its number at any given time seemed well above one hundred. There are no exact data as to the number of copies printed daily. It is obvious, however, that the figure quoted earlier, 284,000 copies per day for the Kiev area, has to be multiplied by several times

⁷² Agency news occupied a large section in all newspapers. Regional Osvag branches collected local news. See WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 3.

⁷³ WMA, file 145, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence reports, Ekaterinodar, 10 and 21 January 1919.

⁷⁴ 'V Osobom Soveshchaniu. K polozheniiu pechati', *Priazovskii krai*, no. 270, 29 November 1919, p. 2.

⁷⁵ Drozdov, 'Intelligentsiia na Donu', p. 52.

⁷⁶ Nemirovich-Danchenko in *V Krymu pri Vrangele*, pp. 32–44, describes in detail this practice during the Wrangel period. Drozdov's account indicates that Osvag applied similar methods ('Intelligentsiia na Donu', p. 52).

⁷⁷ Drozdov, 'Intelligentsiia na Donu', p. 52; G. Pokrovskii, *Denikinshchina: god politiki i ekonomiki na Kubanii (1918–1919 g.g.)*, Berlin, 1923, pp. 77 ff. See also WMA, file 145, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report, Kharkov, 21 September 1919, p. 2; file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 4.

⁷⁸ Katkov, *Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, p. 16.

⁷⁹ Based mostly on a review of WMA.

for the entire territory controlled by the Whites, especially at the peak of their fortune.⁸⁰

Sokolov complained that paper shortages, as well as general technical difficulties, greatly limited Osvag's ability to conduct propaganda work. 'Instead of millions we had to print thousands', he lamented.⁸¹ In fact, Osvag was functioning better than even its chief suspected. An intelligence report, written by a White military agent strongly prejudiced against Osvag, provides surprising figures relating to the activity of Osvag's Kharkov office. During three months of the summer of 1919 it printed: four million posters bearing images of White leaders; one and a half million leaflets and short pamphlets; and an unknown though smaller number of other propaganda materials.⁸² Lack of paper reduced Osvag's capability to print larger publications. For example, the Kharkov office was able to print only three brochures. Still, the list of such publications produced by White propaganda reached at least 316 titles.⁸³

Books, brochures and pamphlets were sent to the Army or given away and sold to the general public. They were also made available through a network of small libraries organized by Osvag posts.⁸⁴ Portraits of leaders, posters, appeals and short leaflets were directed to the front lines and behind them to the Red Army.⁸⁵ They were also shown in 'window exhibits', ridiculed so much by Osvag's detractors, and displayed throughout towns and, to a lesser extent, villages.⁸⁶ Such prints, in addition to propaganda slogans and maps showing the changes of front lines, became, as Sokolov put it, 'a familiar sight on our streets'.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ See note no. 6.

⁸¹ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 107.

⁸² WMA, file 146, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 3.

⁸³ WMA, file 241, 'Literatura Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii'. This catalogue contains a list of propaganda brochures and books produced for the Army. The article 'Krasnyi koshmar', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 349, 28 August 1919, p. 4, contains information about the printing of fifty brochures and leaflets devoted to the question of Bolshevik atrocities. To this material there should be added the propaganda literature published by various social and political organizations and by local southern governments.

⁸⁴ WMA, file 146, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 5. Libraries are also mentioned in WMA, file 150, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report no. 95, Don, 21 March 1919.

⁸⁵ WMA, file 146, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 3.

⁸⁶ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 111–12. Osvag was also displaying its newspapers, see WMA, file 146, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 4. The 'Rosta windows', i.e., the Soviet equivalent of the White 'window exhibits', are considered a great propaganda achievement (Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State*, pp. 115–16).

⁸⁷ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 111–12. Anyone who visited Eastern Europe while still governed by the Communists could see a striking resemblance between its streets in local towns and the picture described by Sokolov. Both were full of propaganda slogans which no one believed in.

Osvag's use of public address as a propaganda instrument has been regarded as particularly weak.⁸⁸ The organization lacked talented agitators able to deal with peasant and worker audiences.⁸⁹ Denikin's social programme did not make this task easier.⁹⁰ Additionally, White propagandists were underpaid for performing very onerous and risky duties.⁹¹ Their constant travel, during which they carried heavy packets with propaganda material, often ended fatally.⁹² Many were stricken with typhus, or caught by the Bolsheviks and executed.⁹³ Still, Osvag repeatedly attempted to attract new candidates and to train them properly for propaganda work.⁹⁴ Apparently, those endeavours produced results which even Osvag's critics could not disregard. During three months the Kharkov office organized in its region 681 public lectures and sixty-seven musical concerts and plays.⁹⁵ The office also had at its disposal three mobile movie theatres, as well as several stationary theatres located in counties.⁹⁶

Film was an important propaganda instrument which made a great impression on both urban and rural audiences.⁹⁷ Being aware of its

⁸⁸ Kenez, *Civil War in South Russia, 1919–1920*, pp. 75–77.

⁸⁹ 'We had to work without socialists and Jews. People who know the racial and party composition of that segment of our intelligentsia which was able to speak and write to the people, will understand what this policy meant in practice' (Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 103).

⁹⁰ Two of Denikin's letters on land and labour questions and the declaration of aims of the Volunteer Army, issued on 5 April (23 March) 1919; Denikin, *Ocherki*, vol. iv, pp. 212–15. As Sokolov bitterly commented, promises of social reforms, not followed by deeds, created a very unfavourable climate for White propaganda (*Pravlenie*, pp. 101–02).

⁹¹ Service in the White Government generally brought very meagre remuneration: propaganda was not exempt from Denikin's parsimonious policy.

⁹² The author of this article worked for several years in underground publishing houses in Poland during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and can appreciate the *weight* of printing materials.

⁹³ The article 'Pamiati geroev propagandy', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 407, 8 November 1919, p. 4, gives a long list of Osvag's employees who fell in the course of their duties. See also Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 106, 109, 115.

⁹⁴ For example, Osvag's office in the Kuban had already in July organized a seventh series of courses for White propagandists, see 'Kursy propagandistov', *Svobodnaia rech'*, no. 149, 10 July 1919, p. 1. It seems that constant complaints about the quality of Osvag's personnel forced the institution to use very rigorous criteria in its employment policy. This is at least suggested in a military intelligence report from Kharkov which provides interesting information on Osvag's hiring standards, although it condemns them. Out of a larger number of participants in a course of agitators organized in Kharkov, fifty-four candidates were admitted to the final examination. Only thirty-four passed, from which twenty-six were hired. Ten of them had not completed high school, but by Russian standards of that time, they could not be considered uneducated, as the report asserts: WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, p. 5.

⁹⁵ Katkov writes that Osvag's Don office organized 125 public lectures between April and August (*Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, p. 19). He quotes an article in *Velikaia Rossiia*, 5 October 1919, as his source. I checked issues dated on 22 September (5 October) and on 5 (18) October and did not find this evidence.

⁹⁶ WMA, file 146, Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel, intelligence report no. 153, Kharkov, 28 October 1919, pp. 4–6.

⁹⁷ See, WMA, file 133, Otdel Propagandy, political report no. 129, 15 May 1919, and 'Golgota Zhenshchiny', *Vechnnee vremia*, no. 40, 9 November 1919, p. 3, both describing the strong reaction of the public to film shows.

propaganda value, the Whites heavily financed film production. In spite of tape shortages, they were able to produce documentary as well as feature movies glorifying their cause and showing Bolshevik crimes.⁹⁸ Katkov alleges that they also made forgeries of Red documentary films (*kinofal'shivki*) to defame the Soviet authorities.⁹⁹

Another spectacular propaganda technique was the agitation train. As in many other methods, the Whites followed the example set by Bolshevik propaganda. The first White *agit-poezd* was organized in May 1919 and sent to newly liberated regions. It had six cars decorated with flowers and covered with slogans like: 'Land for the Toiling Masses', 'Eight-Hour Working Day', and 'Let Us Be One Russian People'. The train had an electric power generator; a printing press to print leaflets and a small newspaper; a store to sell rare commodities like 'colonial goods' and products in great demand such as cigarettes; a restaurant; and a library with reading room. Agitators travelling in the train organized lectures, showed films, and disseminated propaganda materials.¹⁰⁰ Osvag leadership understood well the influence which this propaganda medium had on the population, and therefore it devoted substantial resources to the trains.¹⁰¹ As Sokolov tells us, by late 1919 Osvag was able to organize four agitation trains.¹⁰²

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In theory, Osvag was to conduct and control all propaganda work. In practice, the White Army, like its Red counterpart, constituted a powerful branch of propaganda, largely independent from any civilian authority. As mentioned earlier, the Volunteer Army was the original source of White propaganda. Its Political Department printed and distributed the first declarations and appeals of the movement, and organized its first press. After Osvag was established, the Department was supposed to pass its propaganda work on to the civilian institution. In fact, it continued to conduct propaganda work, especially on

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*; Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 112. Support for film as a propaganda medium did not appear without resistance. In November 1918 Denikin rejected a decision of the Special Council to spend fifty thousand roubles for cinematography (WPA, file 1, *Zhurnal*, no. 16, 23 November 1918, p. 62).

⁹⁹ Katkov, *Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, p. 20.

¹⁰⁰ 'Agitatsionnyi poezd', *Priazovskii krai*, no. 112, 10 May 1919, p. 2. Another agitation train used in the autumn of 1919 had eighteen cars. A huge printing press which occupied three cars printed a newspaper *Prizyv*, and 'many appeals, leaflets, posters and portraits': 'Pervyi agitatsionnyi poezd', *Velikaia Rossiia*, no. 354, 26 November 1919, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, pp. 112, 114.

¹⁰² Sokolov, *Pravlenie*, p. 114. Katkov says that Dragomirov organized the first White propaganda train in May 1919 and sent it to the Tsaritsyn front. He also adds that in the autumn of 1919 the Whites had three agitation trains (*Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, p. 20). Yet as usual, he is very careless with his evidence. The sources indicated by him — N. N. Alekseev, 'Iz vospominanii', pp. 235–38 and A. Drozdov, 'Intelligentsiia na Donu', pp. 45–58 — do not mention Dragomirov, the Tsaritsyn front, or the number of agitation trains.

territories outside direct White control. The Political Department had its local branches functioning within Enlistment Bureaux and regional organizations of the Volunteers.¹⁰³ By the end of 1918 they had grown to very large offices employing hundreds of people.¹⁰⁴

Co-operation between Osvag and the Army was never satisfactory and the two organizations blamed each other for the inadequate supply of propaganda materials to the front lines. To improve this situation, Osvag created a Special Division (*Osobaia chast'*) attached to the Army's headquarters, which was to serve as an intermediary body. The Division, however, gravitated towards the stronger of the two, that is, the Army, and gradually lost its civilian character. It also developed its own structure, down to local military units with its own agitators and printing presses.¹⁰⁵ Military propaganda thus became a rival of Osvag, and Sokolov's attempts to subordinate it were futile.¹⁰⁶ Although certainly worrisome for bureaucrats, this competition had beneficial, rather than harmful, effects on White propaganda.

The Army also cultivated its own specific type of propaganda in the organization of military parades and troop reviews. The Whites were particularly fond of these spectacles and organized them frequently. Their number seemed to be the greatest during the period of White victories in the summer and autumn of 1919. Newspapers and journals were then full of descriptions of enthusiastic public greetings for the approaching Army.¹⁰⁷ Yet even in the most unfriendly circumstances at the beginning of the White movement and during Denikin's retreat, the Army still performed parades and reviews.¹⁰⁸ Such ceremonies, which often blended military and religious elements, reflected not only the peculiar predilections of the White leaders; the display of the national flag and military banners, the sounds of music, the view of

¹⁰³ By the end of 1918, there were branches at least in Kiev, Odessa and Crimea. Two Azbuka reports explain the mutual relations and chain of command for local agencies of the Political Department and Osvag: WMA, file 167, 'Prikaz Glavnokomanduiushchego Dobrovol'cheskoi Armii', Ekaterinodar, 19 December 1918; file 132, 'Doklad', Odessa, 8 January 1919.

¹⁰⁴ WMA, file 136, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, Shulgin to Stepanov, correspondence, Odessa, February 1919, p. 8. Although Shulgin wrote this letter in February, he had described a situation from December 1918: cf. file 136, 'Slovu ot Aza', Azbuka report, Kiev, 30 December 1918.

¹⁰⁵ Sokolov, *Praвление*, pp. 112–13; Katkov, *Agitatsionno-propagandistskaia rabota*, p. 14. For examples of military propaganda activity, see: WMA, file 164, *Razvedyvatel'nyi otdel*, intelligence report, Kiev, 26 October 1919, and file 162, intelligence report, 21 August 1919, p. 7. Military propaganda was able to use the Army's equipment for spectacular actions, such as the dropping of leaflets from aeroplanes, see 'Vozvanie k krest'ianam', *Kievlianin*, no. 5, 25 August 1919, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Sokolov, *Praвление*, p. 113.

¹⁰⁷ For example: 'Poezdka Glavnokomanduiushchego', *Velikaia Rossiia*, no. 242, 28 June 1919, p. 1; L. S. Semenovskii, 'Otkrytki s fronta', *Velikaia Rossiia*, no. 241, 27 June 1919, p. 1.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, a series of pictures of White military parades in the Library of Congress, the Rare Book Division, American Red Cross, Pictorial, no. 2918.

marching soldiers and the Orthodox priest blessing them or performing a mass for the troops, all were bound to evoke strong emotions. It certainly raised the morale of the soldiers and aroused patriotic feelings among the civilians, and thus served also as effective propaganda.

* * *

Perhaps the Whites were not professional propagandists, unlike the Bolsheviks, but rather amateurs. Perhaps they did not like propaganda and considered it something disreputable. Yet they immediately understood its vital role in the conditions of the Civil War and their 'conservatism' mattered very little. Their frustration with the disorder, the disintegration of the Empire and the collapse of the civilized world as they knew it, fed their obsession with propaganda. Ultimately, like the Bolsheviks, they believed in the omnipotence of propaganda, which could transform the world and man — although in their case, not forward to Utopia, but backward to civilization. That conviction led them also to a complete misjudgement of the strength of their own propaganda. Since propaganda work could not restore law and order and Russia, 'Great, One and Indivisible', they assessed it as useless, or even harmful to the White cause. With little criticism, many historians have accepted that conclusion.

Initially, White propaganda was very modest, as were the origins of the movement. Alone, it could not have been a match for the efforts of the Bolsheviks; together with the propaganda endeavours undertaken by various other anti-Bolshevik forces, it was able to offset Soviet propaganda work. As soon as the Whites established a firm territorial basis, they devoted huge resources and great energy to propaganda, and created a powerful propaganda organization of their own. The White military predominance in the anti-Bolshevik camp in the South clearly had its equivalent in propaganda matters.

Osvag did not invent attractive and captivating propaganda. Denikin's ideology and policy made it a Sisyphean labour at any rate. Yet within the framework imposed on Osvag by the conditions of the Civil War and by the White government, the institution fulfilled its tasks well. It was a very effective instrument of information control and manipulation of press organizations. Furthermore, together with the White military propaganda, it was able to propagate the aims of the White movement and to counteract Bolshevik propaganda.

