

Soviet-British Public Relations in 1941–1945

У статті визначаються особливості розвитку радянсько-британських громадських зв'язків у 1941–1945 рр. Спираючись на численні архівні матеріали, автор доводить протидію у цій сфері двох тенденцій: об'єктивної необхідності розширення в умовах військово-політичного союзу СРСР та Великої Британії суспільно-політичного співробітництва, з одного боку, та авторитарною практикою радянських державних структур і протидією їй британських властей, що гальмували це співробітництво, з іншого. Ключові слова: громадські зв'язки, ідеологічна експансія, тоталітаризм.

В статье раскрываются особенности развития советско-британских общественных связей в 1941–1945 гг.. Автор доказывает протидію в этой сфере двух тенденций: объективной необходимости расширения в условиях военно-политического союза СССР и Великобритании общественно-политического сотрудничества, с одной стороны, и тормозившими этот процесс авторитарной практикой советских государственных структур и вызываемым ею протидією британских властей, с другой. Ключевые слова: общественные связи, идеологическая экспансия, тоталитаризм.

The paper deals with specifics of development of the Soviet-British public relations in 1941–1945. The author emphasizes antagonism of two trends in that area: objective necessity of expansion of public co-operation within the framework of military-political alliance of the USSR and Great Britain, on one hand, and authoritarian practices of Soviet governmental bodies and negative reaction of British authorities, which impeded that process, on the other hand.

Key words: Public relations, ideological expansion, totalitarianism.

The creation of the Anti-Hitler Coalition and common purpose of its members – liberation of the mankind from the Nazi conquest threat – provided the USSR and Great Britain with the unique opportunity for the development of different forms of public relations. However, the cooperation between the totalitarian Stalinist regime and one of the most developed Western democracies proved to be complicated and conflicting. Though the study of the Soviet-British public relations within the framework

of Anti-Hitler alliance history studies was started in 1960th already, it has not been completed yet; only some aspects of history of the "public diplomacy" in the Second World War has been analyzed. As a result there are two diametrically opposite historiographical trends now: one part of scholars supposes, that international public contacts in the war period were interrupted, other one emphasizes their intensification. Besides that, Soviet historiography seems to be one-sided: it's focused on the movement of solidarity of British people with the heroic USSR struggle against Nazi invasion, specifically emphasizing the "mobilizing role of the Communist party of Great Britain", as well as Labour party and British trade-unions for inspiration of national campaign of support of USSR [1]. At the same time, studies of activities of the Soviet agencies in that area, in particular, the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR (BOKC-Rus.), are lacked. From the middle of 1980th, especially in connection with celebration of the 40th and 50th anniversary of the Victory over Nazism, studies of public cooperation within the framework of Anti-Hitler coalition were intensified significantly, the circle of sources for scientific analysis was extended. V. A. Nevezhin and L. M. Mytsyk in their PhD dissertations disproved the traditional claim of the Soviet historiography about great impact of the Soviet society on "democratic and progressive circles of the West". They argued the conclusion about high level of ideologization and politization of the Soviet society under the totalitarian Stalinist rule, which caused the deformation of the development of international public contacts [2]. That historiographical tradition had poor extension in Ukraine last years. Therefore, this scholarly paper seems to be topical.

The beginning of the Soviet-German war made direct contacts between public organizations and some public figures of the USSR and Great Britain difficult that was a result of breach of communications as well as change of priorities in the Soviet state system of financial support of international humane cooperation. At the same time Nazi German invasion and firm resistance of the Soviet people inspired ardent response of British public circles. Their representatives called for immediate aid to the USSR.

As a result first months of the Soviet-German war were marked by the creation and quick growth of the movement of solidarity with the Soviet people in Great Britain, which manifested itself in various forms. One of them was Weeks of friendship with the Soviet Union, which took place in Edinburg in September 7–17, 1941, in Glasgow in October 1–8, 1941, in Manchester in November 3–10, 1941 etc. And the wave of such weeks continued to rise. For example, 18 Anglo-Soviet weeks were organized in March 1942 [3]. They included photo exhibitions about life in the USSR such as "Military Forces of the Soviet Union", "Stalin's Gift to

Beaverbrook", "Soviet Women", "Soviet Children" etc, presentations "Russia and We", "Russia – Our Ally", "Russia Today", movies about situation on the Soviet-German front, concerts of Russian and Soviet music. Participants of "friendship weeks" greeted Soviet people; expressed support of their heroic struggle; joined the fund-raising movement for assistance to the USSR.

That movement was started by the many thousands meeting in London in June 1941, and reached national scope soon. At first, that movement coordinator was the Soviet embassy in London. According to A. Mayska, the Soviet Ambassador's wife, who has headed the Soviet Society of Red Cross fund at the embassy until the summer 1943, Dr. Johnson proposed to organize the Committee for Soviet Aid in July 1941. At the same time Federation of miners of Great Britain expressed their wish to spend 70 thousands pounds sterling for assistance to Soviet workers. "As soon as intentions of those organizations have been made public, different committees have begun to arise across the whole country", therefore Mayska has tried to establish direct contacts with such committees since October 1941. Dr. Weavers, vice-manager of London zoo, helped her with that very much [4].

According to Mayska, British Red Cross offered its assistance by means of the creation of special Fund and medical aid only when "public committees of aid to the Soviet Union have become mass phenomenon" [5]. Turning-point in British Red Cross policy from formal support of idea of collaboration with the Soviet Red Cross to practical steps in establishing that collaboration, which was marked by "great pump" [6], was determined, according to I. Maysky, the Soviet Ambassador in London, by two reasons: firstly, the public movement of assistance to the USSR has influenced on the British government; secondly, British ministries and politicians felt awkward in autumn 1941, because they refused the Soviet request of immediate opening second front in North France so they were ready to help the Ally in other different forms as a compensation"[7]. The first meeting of A. Mayska with the head of the British Red Cross sir Philip Chetwood and his deputies J. Kennedy and major Abrahams took place in the Soviet embassy in London in October 14, 1941, and after that "common work with the BRC has begun" [8].

However, according to Mayska, immediately the Soviet partner faced with the desire of leaders of the British Red Cross "to crush mass movement of assistance to the Soviet Union", which reached great scope and tended to overflow the framework of usual activities of the BRC, and concentrate all assistance in its hands [9]. In Mayska's opinion, not so much the desire to intensify the support of the USSR at all as namely those

considerations was the reason of the decision of Clementine Churchill to chair The Fund of Aid to Russia affiliated to the BRC [10]. However, because of the Soviet partner's insistence equally with Mrs. Churchill's Fund two other public funds were kept, namely Fund of National Labour Council (trade-unions fund) and so called "Joint Committee" headed by the Dean of Canterbury Hewlett Johnson, which included National Anglo-Soviet Fund of Medical Aid to the USSR, Anglo-Soviet Friendship Committee, Women Anglo-Soviet Committee, Fund for Facilitation of Circumstances of Women and Children of the Soviet Russia (Atoll Countess Fund) and Five Arts Fund. However, that caused "competition" in fund-raising and other forms of activities between those three funds, therefore Mayska was forced to apply "much energy" "to settle different contradictions and conflicts between different instances, which were engaged in the Red Cross aid to our country" [11].

From the Soviet part all activities in the area of public contacts with Great Britain were monopolized by the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR (BOKC-Rus.), which was controlled in its turn by the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs presented by its second European department and the Administration of propaganda and agitation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (of Bolsheviks) of the Soviet Union. All efforts of the British partner to establish direct contacts with Soviet public organizations and figures omitting those bodies have been nipped in the bud [12]. The Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR was highly centralized bureaucratic body with limited staff, who were oriented not so much to maximum contribution to rapprochement and mutual contacts between public representatives of the USSR and Great Britain as to using of those contacts mechanism as a Soviet political propaganda to the West channel.

All its activities the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR considered in the light of the achieved "political effect". Even exchange of greeting messages between Soviet and British public figures started from the beginning of the Soviet-German war was transformed into the single-minded process controlled by the staff of the English department of the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR, who tried to inspire appeals of Soviet citizens preferably to those representatives of British public circles, whose political orientation and loyal attitude to the Soviet regime were beyond doubt.

In fact, pro-Soviet political orientation and loyalty to the totalitarian regime in the USSR were key criteria of evaluation of any event or phenomenon in international public cooperation for the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR. As a result the area of Soviet-British public

contacts in war period was an arena of antagonism of two influential trends: objective necessity of expansion of public co-operation within the framework of military-political alliance of the USSR and Great Britain, on one hand, and authoritarian practices of Soviet governmental bodies and negative reaction of British authorities, which impeded that process, on the other hand. Temporary predominance of one of those trends was determined by the state of bilateral ally's relations at different stages of the Anti-Hitler coalition existence.

Stalingrad victory, allies' success in North Africa, essential growth of aid to the USSR within the Lend-Lease framework, as well as general intensification of the Soviet foreign policy and Communist International dismissal were factors in significant "warming" of relations between the USSR and its Allies, including Great Britain. Thus, opportunities of the development of the Soviet-British public contacts were extended.

One of forms of the movement of anti-fascist solidarity in war period was patronage of British cities over cities of the Soviet Union with the purpose of strengthening contacts between two peoples and deepening their understanding. The initiator of such patronage became the National Council of British-Soviet Unity in summer 1943. In Canada that campaign was started with the mass meeting in Toronto in November 14, 1943; its coordinator was the National Council of the Canadian-Soviet Friendship.

From the Soviet side twin cities movement was also under the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR control. "Grand scale" of its activities in order to implement the British initiative, as well as the "enthusiasm" of authorities of Soviet "assisted" cities, proved the adherence of Stalinist state bodies and their staffs to the principles of self-isolation of the Soviet society, which were formed in 1930th already; their desire to limit the area of direct contacts between Soviet and foreign citizens as maximum as possible. The Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR functionaries confirmed that when emphasized in its reference, that "in most cases appeals of English cities were not responded, attempts to establish correspondence between cities were not supported enough by the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR and Soviet cities" [13]. Not surprisingly, that, according to the letter from the secretary of the National Council of British-Soviet Unity Mr. Fern to Kemenov¹, till September 1943 British cities have sent 46 appeals, which offered fraternal assistance and cooperation, and have received only 4 responses [14].

However, the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR tried to regulate even such modest bilateral contacts strictly. It intended to reduce

¹ The head of the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR.

those contacts to the correspondence exchange between 17 cities. In the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR staff's opinion, "the first letter from the Soviet city, should agree warmly with the proposal to establish fraternal relations", and after that, "... if conditions of wartime allow, it could be possible to exchange greeting telegrams on the occasion of such important dates as June 22, November 7 and Red Army Day" [15]. That was the limit of possible cooperation!

However, in spite of more than "cool" attitude of Soviet authorities to the idea of direct contacts between peoples of Great Britain and the Soviet Union, it was carving its way, finding ardent response in hearts of citizens of both countries. Till the end of the war 57 English and 18 Canadian cities have established the correspondence with their Soviet twin cities. The closest contacts existed between Coventry and Stalingrad, Acton and Voronezh, Manchester and Ivanovo, Nottingham and Alma-Ata, Birmingham and Kyiv, Wood Green and Kursk [16]. The Canadian city Victoria took Sebastopol under its patronage; the Soviet twin city of Halifax was Novorossiysk, the twin city of the Fort of Williams was Poltava etc [17].

The English garrison of the Fort of Tobruk in Libya wrote to inhabitants of its Soviet twin city Odessa: "From our African fortress we are looking after your struggle with enthusiasm and wishing you all kinds of success" [18]. Inhabitants of Coventry, which ruins have become an awful symbol of fascist barbarity for British people, raised 10 thousands pounds sterling for building the hospital in Stalingrad; the Canadian city of Toronto delivered 41 thousands dollars, as well as warm clothes, which cost was 105 thousands dollars, for heroic defenders of the fortress on Volga river [19].

Those and many other examples indicated sincere wish of British people to provide manly Soviet Ally with all possible aid, to strengthen ties of friendship and understanding between both peoples and in that way to lay the foundation of wide postwar cooperation. Unfortunately, that wish was not always supported by official authorities.

At the final stage of the war the Soviet propagandist machine has completely given up the "ideas diplomacy", which it implemented more or less consistently during the hardest period of struggle against fascism, in favour of "ideas war" against Western democracies, that is confirmed by minutes of the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR governing board meetings dated 1944–1945. For example, at the meeting in November 2, 1944, which was devoted to the design of the Society plan for 1945, Kemenov said: "We must switch to the offensive tactics and must request what we need and not wait, while they thrust their propagandist topics on us". The head of the the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR considered it expedient "... to forestall Englishmen and Americans

and to suggest that they should make exhibitions which would be helpful for us ...The same should be with foreigners visits to us. Here we must also switch to the offensive, we ourselves must invite and invite those visitors, whom we need..." [20]. Thus, public contacts between the USSR and Great Britain were transforming openly into the channel of the Soviet propagandist offensive.

In fact, till the end of 1944 no English public figure has visited the USSR, that was an evidence of conservation despite of existence of the Soviet-British military-political alliance of the ideological intolerance and autarkic tendencies, which Stalinist regime artificially cultivated in the area of international relations at the end of 1930th – at the beginning of 1940th. However, the official directive at strengthening ideological expansion to the West forced Soviet state bodies to implement some contacts with representatives of the British public. In the letter to Kemenov, L.Kislova in principle spoke for invitation of English public figures to visit the USSR "with the information purpose", but emphasized that "it's more expedient to invite those people, whom we need, than receive those, who are sent by official circles" [21].

Obviously, the criterion of "a need" was the pro-Soviet political orientation of the expected visitor, his loyalty to Stalinist regime i.e. that was a reason to consider him as a potential propagandist of "achievements of the Soviet socialist system" in his native country. Among those, who met that criterion in the eyes of leaders of the Society of Cultural Relations with the USSR, was the Dean of Canterbury Hewlett Johnson first of all.

Hewlett Johnson's candidature attracted the attention of Soviet authorities not accidentally. In wartime he headed the "Joint Committee for Soviet Aid", which provided the struggle of the Soviet Union against fascism with both material and political support. Hewlett Johnson was one of initiators of immediate opening a second front in Europe and being the chairman of the editorial board of the communist newspaper "The Daily Worker" contributed to a propagandist campaign appealed to Churchill's government. However, the weightiest argument in favour of Johnson's candidature was his pro-Soviet ideological orientation. In 1937 already, after his first visit to the USSR he published the book "Socialist Sixth of the World", appeared as an apologist of Stalinist regime in fact, "and since then, according to the report of the People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs, almost totally devoted himself to activities aimed at declaring truth about the Soviet state" [22]. His "great services" in that area were pointed to in Stalin's greeting telegram on February 25, 1943 [23]. Johnson made many reports about the USSR: only in 1944 he made more than 200 ones. Titles of some of them ("Moral Results of the Socialist Planned

Production", "The Most Democratic Constitution in the World" etc.) are eloquent evidences of their content and ideological tendency [24]. Some Hewlett Johnson's statements about the USSR are of the same kind. For instance, in his statement in November 1943 about the Soviet authority's attitude to Church, Johnson has called the restoration of Patriarchate in the USSR "the new evidence of Stalin's religious tolerance". In Johnson's opinion, the official recognition of Church in religious area is analogous with the Communist International dismissal in political one. Those both acts demonstrate the power and stability of the Soviet system" [25]. According to the other Jonson's statement, in the USSR such society is built, "where citizens' liberties are protected, abilities inherent in each person have incentives and are developing"! [26].

Such statements, which met the worst traditions of Stalinist propaganda, were grounds for the Soviets authorities to rely on Johnson's political loyalty and his favourable reviews of the situation in the USSR. Johnson's figure seemed to be especially attractive, because as the Dean of Canterbury he was close to the Archbishop of Canterbury, the head of the Anglican Church, and that being so he could have an influence not only on the Canterbury congregation, but also on the whole of the Anglican Church [27].

Thus, the character of the Soviet-British public relations was changed on the final stage of the war significantly. Despite the tendency toward cooperation extension, which got new impulse after the opening of the second front in Europe, the tendency toward transformation of that cooperation into the channel of the Soviet political propaganda to the West is intensified. Contacts between trade-unions, youth and other public organizations and public figures became a part of "ideas war" of the Soviet totalitarian state against its British ally that weakened an interest of the later in the extension of those contacts and made their postwar future too limited.

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