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0521313988 - The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization,

1917-1929 - Peter Kenez

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THE BIRTH OF
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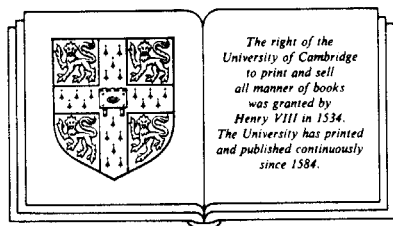
The Birth of the Propaganda State

Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization,

1917-1929

PETER KENEZ

University of California, Santa Cruz



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE

LONDON NEW YORK NEW ROCHELLE

MELBOURNE SYDNEY

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To P. D. K.
with love

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
32 East 57th Street, New York, NY 10022, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1985

First published 1985

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Kenez, Peter.

The birth of the propaganda state.

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Propaganda, Russian. 2. Kommunisticheskaia
partiiia Sovetskogo Soiuza – Party work. 3. Soviet Union –
Politics and government – 1917–1936. I. Title.

DK266.3.K43 1985 303.3'75'0947 85-5725

ISBN 0 521 30636 1 hard covers

ISBN 0 521 31398 8 paperback

Transferred to digital printing 2003

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Preface

This book took a long time to write, and the final product turned out rather differently from what I had originally planned. The Russian Revolution was one of the great social revolutions in history: People suffered dreadful hardships and saw around themselves a remarkable transformation of their world. My first intention was to study the changing perceptions of ordinary people in extraordinary times. I wanted to know how well people understood what was happening to them, what in fact they thought of their leaders, the political institutions, and of new ideas that must have appeared strange to them.

As I read more and more of the available source material, it became clear to me that I would never be able to reconstruct the world view of the average citizen. Workers and peasants left no memoirs; the thoughts and feelings of the ordinary people appeared in the sources only in a distorted fashion. Under the circumstances, my study gradually turned into an examination of the ways with which the new political elite attempted to bring its message to the common people; I was, in fact, writing a book on propaganda. I did not then, and do not now, believe that the Bolsheviks at the time of their Revolution or in the 1920s were cynical. They had a burning desire to convince their fellow citizens that the new order would bring a better world of social justice. They were certainly manipulative, and that was an attitude born out of their ideology and practical experiences. They came to their task of ruling an almost ungovernable country, however, with no clear ideas about propaganda. They had not given a thought to how exactly the masses should be mobilized; they were creating the instruments and methods of propaganda as they were going along. The Bolsheviks were the great unconscious innovators of twentieth-century politics.

Even though the focus of my study shifted, I have not changed my intention of writing about the experiences of the common people. In this

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book I have little to say about high-level politics. I spend little time in discussing the work of Party and government bodies that were responsible for the organization of the propaganda network. Instead, I have much to say about the movies people saw, the books and newspapers they read, and the characteristics of the mass meetings in which they participated.

I have used the transliteration system of the Library of Congress. However, in the transliteration of such well-known names as Trotsky, Kerensky, and Gorky, for example, I have sacrificed consistency for the sake of avoiding confusion. Nor did I succeed in maintaining perfect consistency in the vexing matter of sexism in language. By and large I preferred to use the word "humanity" instead of "mankind" and "people" instead of "man." Nevertheless on occasion I did allow "man" to stand for human being. Phrases such as "he or she might have if he or she could have" seemed ludicrously clumsy. Very likely in the not too distant future the English language will evolve so as to reflect changed social consciousness. At this time, however, the language is creaking under the burden of new requirements.

In the revolutionary years, the Soviet leaders created a large number of institutions and introduced many new concepts. Under these circumstances, abbreviations proliferated, and many of these became new Russian words. Therefore this book includes a Glossary, which the reader is encouraged to consult.

Several institutions supported me in the course of writing this book. Through an International Research and Exchange Board—Academy of Sciences of the USSR exchange, I spent three months in the Soviet Union during the fall of 1977. My description of the literacy campaign is based on archival sources that I was able to see while in Moscow. In the academic year 1979–80, I held a fellowship from the Kennan Institute of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The center provided a wonderfully congenial environment for work. I wrote the first draft of the first half of the manuscript while in Washington. The Research Committee of the University of California, Santa Cruz, gave me several grants, which enabled me to hire student assistants and do my writing on a computer. In addition, I received support from the Comparative International Studies Organized Research Activity of UCSC. I am grateful to these institutions.

Of the numerous libraries and archives in which I worked, I enjoyed most the days I spent at the Pacific Film Archives of the University of California, Berkeley. At the Library of the Hoover Institution, I always turned with my problems to Hilja Kukk, who is an exceptionally knowledgeable librarian. I used extensively the inter library loan services of UCSC and was aided by Joan Hodgson and Betty Rentz.

Among the many student assistants I had I would like to acknowledge in particular the help of Richard Johnson and Amy Roitshteyn.

In the course of the many years I was working on this book, I received valuable help from friends and colleagues with whom I discussed my ideas

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and who read all or parts of the manuscript. At the early stages of my work I benefited from the advice of Victoria Bonnell, Richard Stites, Jeffrey Brooks, David Joravsky, and Tom Gleason. I presented several chapters of the manuscript to the faculty seminar of the Comparative International Studies Organized Research Activity, and I learned from the criticism of my colleagues. Robert Kraft, Charles Neider, Wally Goldfrank, Susan Mann, Buchanan Sharp, Jonathan Beecher, Mark Traugott, Vivian Sobchak, Josephine Woll, and Andrew C. Janos made helpful comments on individual chapters. I am particularly grateful for the extensive criticisms and friendly encouragement of George and Kristina Baer, David and Elizabeth Mayers, Laurence Veysey, Isebill V. Gruhn, Murray Baumgarten, and Paul Hollander. Dorothy Dalby, once again, read the entire manuscript and improved my style. I received by far the most extensive and valuable help from Penelope Kenez.