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AZERBAIJANI PRESS AT THE TIMES OF THE Azerbaijan Democratic Republic

Even though multiple forces were seeing the sovereignty of Azerbaijan as disadvantageous for their colonial policies, upon the fall of the tsarist Russia, aspirations for independence in the Azerbaijani

society were high. In this respect, the Bolsheviks and British were the main players. The Ottoman Imperial Army was responsive to calls for support, which were coming from some Azerbaijani intellectuals. Following

Editorial staff of newspaper "Azerbaijan" (1919)



Uzeyir bekk Hajibeyov (1885-1948)*Ali bekk Huseynzade (1864-1940)*

the fall of the Russian Empire, each of the above-mentioned forces were active in their own way on the territory of Azerbaijan.

As a result of the complex political situation on March 31, 1918 mass killings happened in the Baku, Şamaxı, Quba, Salyan and Neftçala regions of Azerbaijan. On this date approximately 30 000 Azerbaijanis were killed, many historical monuments destroyed. «*Açıq söz*», «*Bəsirət*», «*El həyatı*», «*İstiqlal*», «*İttihad*» newspapers printing houses were burned down. The printing house of the Orujev brothers in Baku was destroyed. Upon this, newspapers «*Açıq söz*», «*Bəsirət*», «*El Həyatı*», «*İstiqlal*», «*İttihad*» terminated activity.

In addition, by the decision of the press office of the Baku Council of People's Commissars: «*Kaspi*», «*Baku*», «*Bakinets*», «*Vesti Baku*» and menshevik «*Naş golos*» newspapers were shut down.(1)

The establishment of the ADR opened a new chapter in the history of writing and journalism on the territory of Azerbaijan, bringing liveliness to the involvement of intellectuals in expressing of their ideas; along with le-

gal and structural developments in the field. Another milestone in terms of importance of ADR historiography was free access of women to journalistic activity. Factually, women such as Shafiqə Efendizadə who were silenced during the Tsarist era of Azerbaijani journalism, had many tasks to perform. Next to her we can see poetess Ümmügülüm, Madina Qiyasbeyli and Eynulhayat Usubbeyova to mention just a few from women who represented patriotism and national prosperity oriented publicists.

The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic took decisive steps to create a legal base for the development of the press and journalism. On October 30, 1919, «*Regulation on the Press Act*» was adopted by the Azerbaijani Parliament. Specifically, this is when the first legal foundations for the press were established in the history of Azerbaijan.(2)

Stating that «the government will not ask for any license or permit», it was declared that «the press will be under the supervision of the head of the governmental department.» The chief inspector was entrusted



Front page of "Molla Nasreddin" (1906-1933)

with management and general control. The draft of the law was submitted for discussion in parliament on October 23, 1919, by the editor of «Azerbaijan» Shafi bey Rustambeyli.(3)

Remarkably, intense debates were noted on the draft of the law, and the socialists who advocated no limits to the press left the hall in protest. Among the notable occurrences of those discussions was the speech of Rustambeyli, in which he presented information on the European experience and relevant laws regarding the press. Underlining the history of social and political movements in Europe, Rustambeyli suggested that unlimited freedom is not an option. According to him, if the freedom of press and speech is granted without limits, this could influence the political situation in the country, increase external threats, intensify ideological pressures, and damage the newly established state's stability. He insisted with examples that, as in any field, the press must also obey the rules. After intense discussions, the law was adopted.(4)

The press of 1918–20 can be roughly grouped as follows in terms of ideological directions: the national Azerbaijani press, which promoted ideas of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic; the Bolshevik press, which was in opposition to the government; the Eser-Menshevik press, which was in opposition to the Bolsheviks; the Armenian and Armenian-Dashnak press; in addition there was also the press, which defined itself as neutral, not belonging to any political party, being solely informative newspapers and magazines. Following freshly established periodicals: «Azərbaycan» (1918-20), «Övraqi-nəfisə» (1919), «Müsəlmanlıq» (1917-19), «Qurtuluş» (1920), «Mədəniyyət» (1920), «Gənclər yurdu» (1918), «Şeypur» (1918-19), «Zənbur» (1919) were representing national independence ideals.(5)

“Azərbaycan” (1918-1920) (Azerbaijan) was the official state newspaper of the ADR. On July 3, 1918, the government decided to give start to its official publication under the definition «The Newspaper of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan». The first issue of «Azerbaijan» appeared as a parliamentary periodical and was published in Ganja on September 15, 1918, that very same day the Caucasian Islamic Army liberated Baku city. One of its first editors was Uzeyir Hajibeyli. Later on, the editor of Azerbaijani language version was Halil İbrahimov. The newspaper was published till December 28, 1919 under the signature of Uzeyir's brother Jeyhun Hajibeyli.



Nasir Tahirov, Alimardan beyk Topchubashov, Ali beyk Huseynzade in 1887

Front page of "Açıq söz" (1915-1918)



Front page of "Azərbaycan" (1918-1920)



Among Azerbaijani periodicals published at the times of the Russian Empire, the newspaper «Azerbaijan» was actually a continuation of the initiatives which Azerbaijani intellectuals had in earlier decades. An attempt to create a press tribune bearing the name of the country was already done almost 30 years earlier. In 1891, after the closure of the «Kashkul» newspaper, which was edited by the well-known Azerbaijani intellectual Jalal Unsizadeh, he officially applied to the Russian Caucasus Press Affairs Department in Tbilisi with a request to publish a newspaper «Azerbaijan», yet then the permission was not granted.

First issue of the newspaper was published on September the 15th in Ganja at the Yelisavetpol Governorate Printing House. That issue consisted of 4 pages, of which two were in Azerbaijani and other two in Russian language. Subsequently, the «Azerbaijan» moved to Baku, starting from the 5th issue, which also consisted of 4 pages, published on October 3, and in this issue it was defined as «the daily social, literary, financial Turkish newspaper».

While in Baku, the editorial staff of the newspaper broadened, involving such writers as: Muhammad Amin Rasulzadeh, Uzeyir Hajibeyli, Ahmed Javad, Ali Muznib, Jeyhun Hajibeyli, Sayyid Huseyn, Ali Yusif, Ali Shovqiy, Yusif Vazir, Farhad Agazade, Jafar Jabbarli, Shafiq Efendizade.

As the newspaper was published in two languages, each had its own editor in chief. The Russian language editor was a graduate of the Kyiv University Faculty of Law Shafi Rustambeyli. After the first four issues of «Azerbaijan» were published in Ganja, 75 following issues were published in Baku in 1918, 358 in 1919 and 85 issues were published in 1920.

The subject area of «Azerbaijan» was broad. Political-social and ethical aspects important for the patriots of Azerbaijan, verbalising the struggle to protect the interests of national independence were the top publication topics. Along with articles on news of the Baku city, news on theatre and musical events, columns dedicated to interviews, political-social reviews along with other rubrics were present. The «Azerbaijan» newspaper had also special correspondents in various regions, which allowed



Shafiga Efendizade (1883-1959)

covering developments operatively. Additionally, rubrics such as: *"In Türkiye"*, *"Paris News"*, *"Developments in Russia"*, *"Iranian Matters"*, *"Autonomy Strive in India"* were featured on the pages of the newspaper.⁽⁶⁾

As for statistical numbers on Azerbaijani press: prior to the times of ADR (May 1918) the entire number of published newspapers and magazines in Azerbaijan was 80. From the times of the first independent Azerbaijani newspaper *"Ekinchi"* (Ploughman), till the establishment of the Republic the number of published newspapers was 40. When we look at the numbers of periodicals published in Azerbaijan during the 23 months of ADR, we see that their number was 200.

Years of republican press (1918-1920) in Azerbaijan, represents a time of severe struggles, in which the idea of building an independent state was a priority. In this process the Musavatists and the Bolsheviks were in fierce opposition to each other.

Importantly, the agenda of the Azerbaijani national press was not limited to the internal political issues; the condition of Azerbaijanis in Iran was sensitive and frequently raised on the pages of newspapers. During the existence of ADR satirical journals *"Zənbur"* (1918-1919) and *"Şeypur"* (1918-1945) initiated their activity. The *"Tartan-Partan"* satirical magazine was published by well-known bolshevik editor Aliheydar Qarayev in Tiflis in 1918, yet it appeared solely in one issue.

Simultaneously, during the times of Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (1918-1920) numerous newspapers of bolsheviks in Azerbaijani (*"Hümmət"*, *"Al bayraq"*, *"Əxbəri"*, *"Zəhmət sədası"*, *"Azərbaycan fəqərəsi"*, *"Məşəl"*, *"Oktyabr inqilabı"*), Russian (*"Bednota"*, *"Qolos truda"*, *"Nabat"*, *"Bakinet"*) (1907-1920), *"Bakinskaya jizn"* (1919), *"Bakinskoye slovo"* (1918-1920), *"Bakinskoye utro"* (1919), *"İskra"*, *"Naşa jizn"* (1919), *"Proletariy"* (1919), *"Znamya truda"*, *"Yedinaya Rossiya"*, *"Naşe vremya"*, *"Vperyod"*) and Armenian languages (*"Artsax"*, *"Aparay"*) were published in Azerbaijan.

Alternatively, during the existence of ADR: Georgian, Jewish, Polish, and Persian newspapers were also available. Particularly some of those which were representing the Bolshevik press were aggressive in their publications towards the newly established democratic state. As a consequence: *"Al Bayraq"*, *"Nabat"* and *"Bednota"* were shut down due to anti-independence propaganda.

On April 28, 1920 Bolsheviks came to power and Azerbaijan became a part of the soviet system, which brought forward a new type of the press in the country.



Ummugulsum Sadigzade (1899-1944)

Shafiq Rustambeyli (1893-1953)

Azerbaijani journalism comes forward as a legacy of the Republic's population in general. In the historiography of the press, the quality and evolution process of the majority of non-governmental Azerbaijani newspapers, particularly those of a central and right wing exemplify the geopolitical situation of the Caucasus as a geographical region, simultaneously reflecting streams of political thought of the most prominent intellectuals of Azerbaijan. Here remarkable is the fact that almost every Azerbaijani intellectual was engaged in journalistic activity, and this type of engagement, apart from being totally unprofitable, influenced the fates of each of those individuals and their entire families. In other words, when the political situation changed, the majority of publicists became victims of persecutions by the newly arrived communist regime. Some details of those occurrences are still not known and are awaiting relevant research.

Fundamentally important fact is the availability of the originals of Azerbaijani periodicals of the time, which are well preserved. Thus, the entire 56 numbers of the newspaper «*Ekinchi*» were published in Cyrillic Azerbaijani script in the 1970s. While the majority of other newspapers presented above are not republished, the archival copies are accessible.

Azerbaijani press of the republican era constitutes a rich legacy of intellectuals dedicated to a broad variety of topics, establishment of national awareness and the propagation of education among the masses, particularly women. ✨

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Jeyhun beq Hajibeyli (1891-1962)