

## EXPERT OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Veleva Ivanova,

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Member of the scientific jury for awarding the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“ in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and archeology, doctoral program "Modern and Contemporary General History", appointed by Order ПД -38-593 / 30.09.2024

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Professional field 2.2. History and archeology

PhD program “Modern and Contemporary History (Contemporary History)”

PhD Thesis: "AMERICAN AND BRITISH ANTI-SOVIET CINEMA PROPAGANDA (1961-1968)"

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gergana Aleksieva

### **I. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student**

Magdalena Danielova Vlastanova was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of Modern and Contemporary History at the Faculty of History, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" under the PhD program Modern and Contemporary General History (Contemporary History) in February 2019. The submitted documents and materials are in full compliance with the Law on the State Administration of the Republic of Bulgaria and with Art. 67(5) of the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She meets the minimum of the national requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor".

The procedure for defending the dissertation is complied.

### **II. Relevance of the topic, knowledge of the issue, methodology and evaluation of the dissertation work**

The presented dissertation work "American and British Anti-Soviet Cinema Propaganda (1961-1968)" consists of 289 pages and contains a preamble, introduction, three chapters, conclusion, bibliography, appendices and synopses.

The topic is relevant and strongly interdisciplinary, based on Magdalena Vlastanova's master thesis, defended in 2018, in which she investigated the film industry in the United States at the beginning of the Cold War. The enduring interest in the seventh art and its use for political purposes is a guarantee of a good knowledge on the topic.

The chronological framework of the research is well chosen and covers not only an important period of relations between the two superpowers during the Cold War, but also a period in which a significant number of anti-Soviet propaganda films were created and distributed in the USA and Great Britain, allowing the necessary analyses and conclusions to be made.

The introduction formulates the thesis that in the period from 1961 to 1968, entertainment films with anti-Soviet propaganda themes were actively produced in Great Britain and the USA, which served the goals of the Cold War (p. 6). The main purpose of the

research is to highlight the common features and specifics of American and British films in the period 1961 – 1968 through the prism of propaganda. The object and subject of the dissertation work are indicated and the criteria for selecting the presented films are very clearly described.

The research methods used are suitable for achieving the previously set purpose and, quite logically, in view of the topic, in addition to the chronological-thematic approach, the interdisciplinary and multicultural approach have been applied.

The introduction also provides a detailed overview of the sources used, and I would like to emphasize their large number and their exceptional diversity, which is an indicator of the thorough work of the doctoral student and the high value of the study.

The structure of the dissertation is subordinated to the realization of the defined thesis. The first two chapters are divided into identical paragraphs and thematically related to the construction of the Berlin Wall and the third chapter compares American and British films related to the USSR nuclear threat.

At the beginning of the first chapter, the importance of the film industry in the strategy for waging the Cold War, after the USA lost the atomic monopoly, is correctly emphasized. The characteristics of the foreign and domestic political prerequisites for the emergence of anti-Soviet film propaganda made in the first two chapters set the historical context of the researched issue, which the author does well to clarify. In the analysis of the films, she demonstrates her skills in successfully applying the interdisciplinary approach, and in the third chapter - her ability to make comparisons.

In accordance with the requirements for a scientific text, each paragraph and each chapter end with conclusions, and in places I recommend that they be more analytical.

The conclusion of the dissertation meets scientific standards and summarizes the results of the study. It clearly shows that the purpose set in the introduction has been achieved. The comparison between propaganda films can be highly appreciated, as well as the statistical analysis of box office successes. The factors for the failure of American film propaganda are also indicated.

The appendices, which provide additional information on some of the presented topics, as well as the synopses, summarizing the films' content, are really impressive.

### **III. Evaluation of the doctoral student's abstract and publications**

The dissertation abstract consist of 23 pages. Its structure and content are methodologically sound and present the thesis, object, subject, purpose, objectives of the research, as well as the expected results. The methodology and chronological boundaries of the dissertation are clarified, a detailed historiographical overview is made and its structure is presented. The contributions of the dissertation, which are fully justified, are indicated.

11 publications on the topic of the dissertation are attached (in national and international journals), which emphasize Magdalena Vlastanova's lasting interest in the researched issues.

### **IV. Critical notes and recommendations**

Although the work is very valuable, I would like to make some notes and recommendations, which I hope will be useful for the doctoral student, especially in case she decides to publish her research.

I would recommend the choice of a chronological framework for the study to be clearly justified with events, significant for the Cold War, and not to foreground a period of the domestic political development of the United States, such as the rule of the Democrats (although

it undoubtedly had a strong influence on East-West relations in the 1960s). The construction of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 is the undisputed marker and symbol of the bipolar division of Europe and the world, and it cannot be interpreted as coincidence that a large part of the films, presented in the dissertation, are dedicated to the Berlin issue. In turn, 1968, as an upper limit, is also marked by important events that left their mark on the relations between the two superpowers. If the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact troops and the announcement of the Brezhnev Doctrine can be considered as an internal incident for the socialist camp, the initiative of President L Johnson in March 1968, mentioned on p. 44 in the text, to begin negotiations to end the Vietnam War was directly related to the decreasing of the tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. During this period, the diplomatic probes and negotiations for the reduction of strategic armaments began, leading to the signing of the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks I in May 1972 and the period of détente.

- Due to its importance for the Cold War period, the construction of the Berlin Wall could be presented more detailed, while too much attention is paid to the clarification of the baby boom.

- It is advisable to indicate the government period of the politicians, mentioned in the text, e.g. the governments of Harold Macmillan (1957 - 1963), Alec Douglas Hume (1963 - 1964), Harold Wilson (1964 - 1970) in the UK.

- The bibliography, which consists of 27 pages, is impressive, but I recommend all the authors' names to be written in the same way - in this case, the spelling of both names prevails. Anatoly Dobrynin's book "Top Secret" is listed as a monograph, but it is better to be located to memoirs. When arranging the different types of sources, the collections of documents and journalism should be summarized before the collections of articles.

- Although the doctoral student has a very good linguistic culture, the text contains misspelled words, as well as some technical and punctuation inaccuracies.

However, these omissions are not significant and in no way have a negative influence on the good impression of the doctoral student's research.

#### **V. Conclusion**

Magdalena Vlastanova's dissertation reveals her skills in processing, analyzing and summarizing information. It contains scientific results that represent an original contribution to science, thereby meeting the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff and Art. 64 of the Regulations on the terms and procedures for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

In view of the above, I categorically give my **positive assessment** of the dissertation on the topic "American and British anti-Soviet cinema propaganda (1961-1968)" and I propose Magdalena Danielova Vlastanova to be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of higher education 2. Humanities, professional field 2.2. History and archaeology, PhD program "Modern and Contemporary General History".

Date: 02.12.2024

Member of the scientific jury:

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Veleva Ivanova

