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Sociological Surveys in the Gorky Region as a Tool for Studying Social and Political Attitudes of the Citizens in the Days of Perestroika: Material from the Archives of the Gorky Region

Abstract

Drawing on new archival material from the fonds of the State Social and Political Archive of the Nizhny Novgorod Region that is being thus introduced into scientific use, the article analyzes the formation of socio-political attitudes of the Soviet citizens in the days of Perestroika (1987-1989) in a case-study of the Gorky Region. Data of three sociological surveys conducted in order to study public opinion and activism and to group citizens according to their political views is presented and summarized. The surveys findings allow to identify several specific features of the process of socio-political self-definition. The level of political astuteness was insufficient, only a small percent of citizens (about a quarter of respondents) were able to identify their political beliefs. In 1987-1989, amid the sweeping changes, people faced declining living standards, unpredictable economic processes; they lost their focus and felt anxiety and confusion and had little thought to spare to political self-definition. Socioeconomically, data presented in the article demonstrates strong social anxiety among citizens, who were striving (first and foremost) for socio-economic stability and predictability; it shows deterioration of living conditions, decline of living standards, and dim outlook. The data of the surveys conducted by the Gorky sociologists in 1987-1989 is undoubtedly a valuable source, allowing to reconstruct the formation of public opinion and political attitudes of the Gorky region citizens in the days of Perestroika. The number of respondents is deemed sufficient to arrive at results reflecting the reaction of population to the Perestroika process in the Gorky region (453 Gorky residents and 264 regional residents took one of the surveys) and judge them typical for the era.

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Keywords

Historical sources, Perestroika, sociological surveys, public opinion, political attitude, Perestroika process, Gorky region.

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