

Scientific article

УДК 94(470)«1920»+470.11

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-1-259-274

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February 1920 in the Arkhangelsk Gubernia: Chain Reaction of the “Bloodless Revolution” in Arkhangelsk

Abstract

The article analyses the situation in Arkhangelsk when the Armed Forces of the Northern Region were preparing to leave the region, after the majority of the population of the gubernia (via delegates of the Zemstvo-city assembly) had expressed their desire to make peace with

Soviet Russia. All garrisons and front-line units received an order to leave warehouses with weapons and food in the hands of local authorities and those of military servicemen who wished to stay; those who wished to leave were to move in an orderly manner towards railway for evacuation. The original plan was violated, since most military units reacted negatively to the order to retreat. Uprising began in order to prevent the departure of the main forces. In these circumstances, the command announced dissolution of the disciplined units, offering them to leave voluntarily for the West (to Murmansk, and from there to Norway). Thus, the servicemen were disorganized and fell prey to the “military revolutionary committees” that were springing up on the ground. The goals of these organizations were to “restore the Soviet power” and to disarm those few volunteer units that did not want to capitulate before the arrival of the Red Army. Military revolutionary committees co-opted most authoritative local figures into their memberships and transformed into “revolutionary committees,” which were to maintain order and to prepare grand welcome for the Red units. Before decisions were made at the command level, fraternization began at the front and later delegations exchange between military units on opposite sides of the front. Scanty and scattered sources, on the basis of which the described events have been reconstructed, show that the role of garrisons in the “change of power” was less significant in the uezd centers located far from the front line. The local community sought to create loyal new government as it had happened several times in 1917 and in 1918: by peacefully transferring their power to the “Soviets of deputies” in a manner similar to the transfer of power to the “Zemstvo bodies” in August 1918. The material of the article and its main conclusions provide an opportunity to take a fresh look at the seemingly well-known events of the Civil War, namely, “the liberation of the Soviet North from the White Guards.”

Keywords

Historical sources, archival documents, Civil War, Arkhangelsk gubernia, government of the Northern Region, White evacuation, White army, self-organization, military revolutionary committees, anarchy.

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Grant information

This article has been prepared as part of the study supported by the grant from the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (science project no. 18-09-00237).

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Submitted 21.01.2020, published (for citation):

TROSHINA, T. I. Fevral' 1920 g. v Arkhangel'skoi gubernii: Tsepnyaya reaktsiya “beskrovnoi revolyutsii” v Arkhangel'ske [February 1920 in the Arkhangelsk Gubernia: Chain Reaction of the “Bloodless Revolution” in Arkhangelsk. In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2021, no. 1, pp. 259-274. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2021-1-259-274

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Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .