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Republican Ideas in the Russian Political Thought in 1905: Based on Notes Sent for Consideration of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire

Abstract

The article studies republican ideas as reflected in the Russian public consciousness of the early 20th century. The material for the research is documents identified in the fond of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire of the Russian State Historical Archive (RGIA). In

recent decades, the problem field of intellectual history, the methods of which have been used in this research, has expanded dramatically: from studying the “great ideas” of outstanding thinkers of the past to researching such ideas that were accepted by a significant number of educated people. In their study of political thought, historians are increasingly turning not just to statesman who held power and were directly involved in decision-making, but to officials and public figures whose influence was indirect. At the height of the revolutionary crisis of 1905 brought about by the Russo-Japanese war, the representatives of the Russian public, together with the government, strove to overcome it as soon as possible. According to the Imperial Edict to the Governing Senate of February 18, 1905, their notes, letters, and suggestions on issues of improving state order were to be sent for consideration of the Council of Ministers; from October 19, 1905 they were directed to its chairman S. Yu. Witte. These documents represent a unique public opinion survey, mostly of representatives of the Zemstvo, urban milieu, and nobility; they have not yet been considered in Russian historiography. Although republican ideas were firmly associated in the Russian public consciousness with revolutionary ideas, as early as in 1905 some fundamental principles underlying modern republican theory were reflected in the political thought of the Russian public loyal to the government. The research shows that many public figures who addressed to the power their proposals for resolving national political crisis, defended ideals of political freedom, preponderance of law over the “human factor” in politics; they saw the main task of the existing and planned political institutions in protecting rights and freedoms of imperial citizens and in realizing interests of the society and proposed to expand the independence of local government.

Keywords

Archive, sources, 1905, First Russian Revolution, public opinion, Council of Ministers of the Russian Empire, republicanism.

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