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“Such a Good Man Lenin Was, and Who Now?”: Reaction of the Population to the Death of V. I. Lenin

Abstract

Lenin's illness and then his death was an important political event that affected all sectors of the population. Even before the first government reports on Lenin's illness, there were rumors among various segments of the population about the causes of his illness. However,

government reports of the leader's health assured people of his speedy recovery. Lenin's death that followed was unexpected and made an oppressive impression on the citizens. General mood was one of confusion, and not just among common people, but among communists and leading officials. The subsequent propaganda campaign to perpetuate the memory of Lenin reduced the tension in society. The authorities succeeded in using the leader's death to consolidate society, to combat the opposition, and to form his cult. Resolutions of numerous meetings and rallies demanded that the memory of the leader be eternalized in the names of streets, settlements, institutions, and organizations. As if answering the question “who after Lenin?” the authorities assured the population not only of the strength of Soviet power, but also of the future collective government. Various events lamented Lenin's death, but also underscore his greatness, linking all achievements to his person. The authorities encouraged popular ideas about Lenin. It has been established that in some part of the Soviet society Lenin's death gave rise to criticism of himself and the power. For some part of Soviet population, the figure of Lenin was associated with the Soviet government itself, and his death gave reason to doubt its future. Many believed that after Lenin's death, Soviet power would fail and there would come a change in the socio-political system. Others transferred their negative attitude towards the new government to the personality of the leader; Lenin's illness and then his death allowed this negative attitude to manifest itself with all clarity.

Keywords

Archive, historical sources, V. I. Lenin, perception of the political leader's personality, power, illness, death, campaign, Lenin's personality cult.

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