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Lower Segment of Productive Society of Russia in the 1950s – 1960s: Sources on the Problem of Perception of Socio-Economic and Political Inequality

Abstract

Epistolary heritage of the 20th century is a mass source on the history of the development of way of thinking, world perception, worldview, self-awareness of the Russian society. Large blocks of documents of this type are stored in many central and regional archives and libraries.

The author raises the issue of identification of letters written by representatives of the productive segment. Employees and workers from the average strata of the working class left much commentary on socio-economic and political processes in the country. As a rule, these were sent to Soviet newspapers or directly to the Central Committee of the CPSU. In the Central Committee, letters were distributed to specialized departments and registered in the press sector. A significant corpus of these documents (partially declassified) is preserved in fond 5 ("Apparatus of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1949–1991)") and in fond 100 (Subdivision of Letters of the General Department of the Central Committee of the CPSU (1953–1991)") in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History. However, establishing to which strata of productive society the authors belonged seems a difficult task. Many texts are anonymous or written by pensioners, war invalids, groups of workers of unknown specialization. Nevertheless, data obtained from the letters relates not only to material conditions, everyday life, work and rest, but also to factors influencing norms of behavior, political preferences. Analysis of documentary data informs of formation of socio-psychological portraits of groups of workers in production and overproduction, as well as of levels of public consciousness, value orientations, spiritual world, mentality that were developing in the productive environment. The article concludes that epistolary genre reflected the situation of social reformatting in the 1950s – 1960s. The letters illuminate the process of genesis of a social and labor community with new moral and managerial values and attitudes. Demarcation in the productive society deepened, as acute and urgent social phenomena of working life intensified. In state economic structure there emerged two types of behavior. One gravitated towards preservation and reproduction of traditions. This was characteristic of the lower strata of society: urban and rural workers, proletarians. They insisted on collectivism, equalization, fairness. A different type of lifestyle was associated with moneymaking part of the society, middle and upper classes: party nomenklatura, specialists, managers. They set their own agenda, one reflected in the letters of ordinary people as "abuses."

Keywords

Mass historical sources, productive society, workers, toilers, office workers, letters, consciousness, mentality, abuse, theft, standard of living.

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