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Biographies of the Communists of the “Revolutionary Turning Point” Generation (1917–20s):
Materials from the Archives of the Tambov Region

Abstract

The relevance of studying biographies of the representatives of the revolutionary generation

stems from public interest in the fate of the makers of the era of change, as well as from heuristic potential of the “history of generations” approach in historical science. Drawing on archival fonds containing personal data of the Tambov communists born in the 1890s, the biography of the “revolutionary turning point” generation has been studied. Prosopographic study permits to establish their origin, social status, activities, and life strategy. It uses autobiographies, personal data cards, materials of the party census of communists registered with the Tambov Provincial Committee of the RCP (B) in 1918–22. Most sources are being introduced into scientific use for the first time. The object of the study is biographies of five communists. Our “protagonists” occupied various positions in the punitive and repressive bodies of the Soviet government system and took an active part in the suppression of the peasant uprising of 1920–21 in the Tambov gubernia. The research is to identify factors of social mobility and determine forms of “revolutionary” career of the young party members. It is interesting to study the society’s means of survival during systemic crisis and operation of “social lift” mechanism during social upheavals. The research methodology is based on “history of generations” approach and interdisciplinary nature of the work. Historical-comparative, historical-genetic, retrospective, systemic methods, and method of cohort analysis have been used. The novelty lies in recreation of life paths of the representatives of the studied group through the prism of most important events of the era of wars and revolutions. It has been established that career advancement was facilitated by education (as a rule, town or uezd school), military experience (in the Red Guard and special forces), and mandatory membership in the Communist Party. Four of the five protagonists were not native to the uezd, they arrived from the capital as appointees to strengthen the activities of the local authorities. As a result, a typical biography of the representatives of the studied generation, young communists of the Russian periphery during the Civil War has been reproduced.

Keywords

Historical sources, biographies, Tambov gubernia, communists, “revolutionary turning point” generation, social lift, peasant uprising, emergency commission, revolutionary tribunal

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