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Alexandr M. Pashkov

Petrozavodsk State University, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation

‘... The “Popularity” of Doctors Should Not Be the Sole Reason for Their Arrest as Hostages’:
The Red Terror of Autumn 1918 in Documents from the National Archive of the Republic of
Karelia

Abstracts

September 2018 will see the 100th anniversary of the beginning of the Bolshevik Red Terror, first announced on September 2, 1918. Although in Russia in the last 20 years there have been published some valuable synthesis works on the history of the Red Terror of 1918, many details, especially of its realization at the local level, remain little-studied. The National Archive of the Republic of Karelia stores in its fond R-460 ‘Petrozavodsk City Soviet’ a file entitled ‘Excerpts from the minutes of the Olonets Gubernia Revolutionary Executive Committee and

Military Commissariat meetings; correspondence with the gubernia Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage on arrests of hostages in response to the “White Terror,” etc.’ Virtually, the file contains documents on the realization of the Red Terror in Petrozavodsk in autumn 1918. The documents implicate that in realization of the Red Terror at least three organizations were involved: Olonets gubcheka (gubernia Emergency Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution), Petrozavodsk City Soviet, and Olonets gubernia revolutionary tribunal. Thus, headcount of the Red Terror victims should include alongside with persons executed by the VChK, those sentenced by other authorities and those who fell victim to extrajudicial execution. Besides documents on realization of the Red Terror in Petrozavodsk, the file stores command papers from the centre. For instance, the article cites telegram from People’s Commissar of Internal Affairs Gregory Petrovsky to all ‘Sovdeps’ (Soviets of deputies) of September 26, 1918. It avowed arresting doctors as hostages because of their ‘popularity’ and clarified that arrests predicated on nothing more than ‘popularity’ were unwarrantable, as gubernia doctors were ‘the most popular element’ and their mass arrests could ‘disorganize only just set going medical and sanitary activities in the gubernias, particularly, control of epidemics.’ Thus, the telegram confirms a very important fact: typically or by chance, in autumn 1918 not just active opponents of the Bolsheviks, their sympathizers or families members, but anyone enjoying authority and respect could fall victim to the Red Terror.

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Keywords

The Red Terror, archive documents, Petrozavodsk City Soviet (Sovdep), People's Commissariat of Public Health, People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, mass arrests of physicians, hostage system, Gregory Petrovsky.

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About author

Pashkov Alexandr Mikhailovich, PhD in History, professor, Petrozavodsk State University, National History Department, professor, Petrozavodsk, Russian Federation, +7-911-401-38-38, pashkov@petrsu.ru

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