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“...To Be among the Builders of Socialism.” Revisiting the Political Biography of the Former Member of the Executive Committee of the “Narodnaya Volya” M. F. Frolenko (1935)

Abstract

The article presents unique documents newly discovered in the Russian State Archive of Contemporary History (RGANI) and draws on them to reconstruct the circumstances of M. F. Frolenko (1848–1938), one of the oldest Russian revolutionaries, former member of the “Narodnaya Volya” and pensioner of republican level, joining the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks). It focuses on M. F. Frolenko’s letter of application addressed to the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the AUCP (B) J. V. Stalin, recommendation letter of the secretary of the party collegium of the Party Control Commission under the Central Committee of the AUCP (B) E. M. Yaroslavskii, and extract from minutes of meetings of the Bureau of the Party Control Commission under the Central Committee of the AUCP (B) dated November-December 1935. The introduction argues the relevance of topic and characterizes broad historical context, necessary for understanding the essence and significance of the published materials. It shows that M. F. Frolenko was not only organizer and participant of several assassination attempts on Emperor Alexander II, but one of the few members of the Executive Committee of the “Narodnaya Volya,” who, despite his arrests and katorga, lived long enough to see the collapse of the Russian monarchy. For 18 years following the establishment of Soviet power, participation of M. F. Frolenko in the socio-political life of the country was limited to public speaking to working youth and students and his membership in the All-Union Society of Political Prisoners and Exiles. Low-profile political activity of M. F. Frolenko may be explained by his advanced age, poor health, and Bolsheviks’ distrust of members of other parties. In the first years after their coming to power, Bolsheviks willingly received former socialists, if they joined the party; however, starting from the mid-1920s, the top party leadership had raised the requirements for this category at least twice. As a result, by the mid-1930s the AUCP (B) almost completely barred members of other political parties from joining it. The more surprising was decision of 87-year-old M. F. Frolenko, who remained nonparty all this time, to become the member of the AUCP (B) in November 1935. The hypothesis suggests itself, that it was initiated by the party leadership. Higher ranks of Bolsheviks wanted M. F. Frolenko to recognize the successes of socialist construction and correctness of the general line of the AUCP (B) publicly. Soon, in 1936, it laid foundations for the concept of “complete ideological defeat of narodnichestvo” formulated by E. M. Yaroslavsky.

Keywords

Narodnichestvo, narodnik, M. F. Frolenko, Bolsheviks, E. M. Yaroslavsky, people from other parties, AUCP (B) enrollment, political adaptation, Soviet ideology.

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