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Perestroika Periodicals as a Historical Source on the Transformation of Lenin's Image in 1987–91

Abstract.

The article analyses the metamorphosis of Lenin's image in late Soviet periodicals. The method

of socio-historical phenomenology has been applied in the study. The source base of the research includes materials from the newspaper Pravda, magazine Ogonyok, and newspaper of the Democratic Union Svobodnoe Slovo. The chronological framework of the research covers the period from November 1987 to June 1991. The focus is on the interaction of three discourses in press, which introduced different purport of Lenin's image into the readers' minds. The first discourse contained positive description of Lenin's image and linked his teachings with the reforms, justifying the Perestroika transformation. The second discourse was based on ideological confrontation between Lenin and Stalin. The periodicals blamed the latter for all costs of Soviet power. Through criticism of Stalin's image, the second discourse urged to abandon shameful criminal past in favour of Leninist legacy endorsed by the society. Nevertheless, such imprudent tactics eventually widened the criticism, intensifying the political debate of more significant symbols of the Soviet system. Such was the content of the third discourse endorsing deconstruction of Lenin and other pillars of the Soviet system. The study constructs three time periods of domination of the aforementioned discourses. The first period was 1987–88, when the first and second discourses prevailed. The second period refers to 1989, when major ideological shifts took place. More articles defending Lenin's image appeared in the pages of Pravda, indicating presence of legitimate criticism in the press. The Ogonyok magazine called for a condemnation of the results of the October Revolution of 1917. The newspaper Svobodnoe Slovo was published freely, encountering no resistance from the authorities. It openly denounced Lenin's image. The newspaper became the main vehicle for the third discourse. It could be argued that 1989 was a milestone in terms of the transition to the third discourse. In 1990–91 of the third interim period, the anti-Leninist discourse took over the pages of Ogonyok, the Pravda remaining the last mass media defending Lenin's image from criticism. As a result, Lenin's image was negatively reinterpreted in the eyes of the readers and gradually disappeared from the pages of late Soviet periodicals.

Keywords

V. I. Lenin, perestroika, Soviet periodicals, historical source, Pravda newspaper, Ogonyok magazine, Svobodnoe Slovo newspaper.

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