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Prosopographic Portrait of Senior Officials of the RSFSR People's Commissariat for Justice in the Days of the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945: Documents from the RGASPI and the GARF

Abstract

In reference and research publications there is almost no information on most heads of the republican justice administration body, the RSFSR People's Commissariat for Justice (PCJ RSFSR), of 1941-1945. This is largely due to limitations of the source base and secondariness of

republican bodies in the USSR. Meanwhile, during the war, the republican justice administration bodies were endowed with great powers. Not only they monitored the activities of the courts and correctness of their application of legislation, but also issued secret instructions of illegal nature. In this regard, the identity of their heads, who held such powers and had such impact on court practice, is of great importance. The article draws on party nomenclature accounting records from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI) to reconstruct official biographies of two people's commissars for justice of the RSFSR and four their deputies. The prosopographic method has permitted to create a collective portrait of senior officials of the republican administrative justice bodies in the period between two personnel purges of the Soviet justice system – prewar one and postwar one. According to the documents, the nominees who took senior positions in the PCJ RSFSR on the eve of the war were relatively young and from “correct” social background. In the nomenclature system their lack of professional education and experience was compensated by their Bolshevik affiliation, following the main trend of the Stalinist personnel revolution. The official biographies of nomenclature establishment, as well as presence of odious figures and persons with dubious reputations among the PCJ RSFSR senior officials allow the author to conclude that appointment of nomenclature personnel to the republican People's Commissariat for Justice by residual principle eroded its authority. Their lack of professionalism and practical experience had a direct impact on the activities of the PCJ RSFSR under the extreme war conditions. In the purge of the justice system in 1947–52, the establishment of the republican People's Commissariat for Justice lost their posts. Thus, senior officials of the PCJ RSFSR repeated the fate of their prewar predecessors, but unlike the latter, they were not repressed.

Keywords

Historical sources, collective portrait, nomenclature personnel, Soviet justice, repression, purges in the state apparatus, I. A. Basavin, K. P. Gorshenin, I. D. Perlov, E. A. Rumyantseva, S. S. Dukelsky, I. A. Rykhlov.

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