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Minutes of the Ural Kolkhoz Meetings as an Important Archival Source on the History of the 1930s Peasantry

Abstract

The significance of the study is due to the fact that it is the first portrayal of the true life kolkhoz democracy resulting from quantitative research of the kolkhoz meetings minutes. The author studies the actual participation of peasants in the kolkhoz self-government in the Urals region in 1930s. To achieve his goal, he had to assess possibility of using archival data for processing; to analyze the topics of kolkhoz meetings, level of activity of their participants in discussion, interest of collective farmers in the results of discussion. The quantitative method allows to investigate main tendencies of the peasants participation in the administration of agricultural

production. The initial survey of the minutes has shown their mostly unsatisfactory state for processing. The content analysis of the results of the minutes processing reveals that meetings discussed agricultural campaigns, party decisions and J. Stalin's speeches, and reports of kolkhoz management. Ordinary collective farmers rarely participated in the debate. Most speakers addressed problems of organization and discipline of labour, pay and income distribution; they mostly stated facts. More than a quarter of the speeches was of critical nature. Constructive proposals for changing negative situation were rare. The agricultural co-operative charter proclaimed the meeting its supreme governing body, but most of the collective farmers stepped back from solving important issues. Often kolkhoz meetings were unauthorized. Representatives of power structures interfered in the kolkhoz affairs, disregarded the opinion of the collective, and imposed their own decisions. The implementation of meetings resolutions was rarely monitored. The author concludes that in the context of mobilization economy and rigid political regime the kolkhoz democracy was impossible.

Keywords

Historical sources, archival documents, kolkhoz, minutes, collection, Ural region, kolkhoz democracy, quantitative method.

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