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Salutatory Telegrams from Peasants of the Central Black Earth Region to the State Duma in March – April 1917: Source and Its Information Potential

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of salutatory telegrams from peasants of the Central Black Earth Region to the State Duma in the spring of 1917. This source has significant cognitive

capabilities. Being a mass source, it lends itself to quantitative analysis. 274 telegrams sent by peasant gatherings, rallies, and committees have been studied. It is indicated that 16,8 % of telegrams were also signed by representatives of non-peasant population, mostly, clergy and teachers. There is no doubt in the sincerity of most messages: good wishes for the Duma and curses on tsarism came directly from the population, but they were formalized in salutatory formulas by the village administration representatives, teachers, and clergy. However, it is obvious that there were telegram clichés that circulated in adjacent volosts and uezds, and the "telegram activity" appeared in the territories and specific settlements, which soon came into conflict with the authorities, trying to solve their problems not only peacefully, but also by force. The peasants' ideas about the bearers of supreme power were inadequate. Having played its outstanding role in the events of February – early March 1917, the Duma did not manage to become a full-fledged authority, and M.V. Rodzianko was not a key figure in the revolutionary politics. Nevertheless, until mid-April, the peasant population perceived him as a leader and the State Duma as a true parliament or even a government, thus expecting from them a radical solution to the accumulated problems. It is indicated that the telegram senders, being agents of modernization in the village, were simultaneously carriers of traditional values, the presence of which is found in the source. Limitations of cognitive capabilities of the studied source are highlighted. Firstly, in order to provide emotional support to the revolutionary power, the telegrams contain few concrete proposals from peasants to the revolutionary power. The peasants rationalized only conditions under which there would be a transition to the "brighter future." Secondly, the movement involved the minority of provincial population, which prompts to raise the question of the wishes of the "silent majority," who undoubtedly reacted warily to the revolution.

Keywords

Archive, mass sources, February revolution of 1917, State Duma, peasant movement, salutatory telegrams, dialogue between the population and the authorities, revolutionary leaderism.

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