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Archival Documents from the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History as a Source
for Studying Economic Crime in the Days of the Great Patriotic War

Abstract

The article determines the value and prospects of using historical sources stored in the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI) for disclosing problems of economic crime in 1941–45. Understanding modern dangers of corruption, illegal enrichment, and malfeasance requires studying the historical experience of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45. It was a time to confront not only a strong external enemy, but also internal challenges, including, in particular, activation of criminal elements in the economic sphere. Despite an abundance of legal and historical publications devoted to economic crime and combating it, a whole layer of archival documents remains outside the field of research. The study has been carried out on the basis of institutional methodological approach using source heuristics, source analysis, historical-comparative method. The documents revealed in the RGASPI consist of previously unpublished materials of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Party Control Commission under the Central Committee of the CPSU, regional and city party committees (obkoms and gorkoms), and political departments of various agencies, through which transportation and distribution of food and industrial goods was conducted, as well as fragments of national leaders' personal funds. The analyzed documents reflect criminal acts characteristic of the war period: speculation, embezzlement, bribery, malfeasance of high-ranking officials. The aforementioned delicts are reflected in the minutes of meetings, reports, certificates, and directives describing in detail the most common types of economic crime and measures taken by the authorities to curb it. The study concludes that the identified documents possess a high degree of objectivity and confirm the thesis of numerical growth and expansion in range of economic crimes in the context of a social wartime crisis. As main strategy for combating the growth of economic crimes throughout the war, the national leadership used a tough punitive policy, but these measures did not give tangible results. The effectiveness of domestic policy measures aimed at ensuring protection of state and personal property of citizens decreased due to deterioration in the quantitative and qualitative composition of the judiciary and political pressure from the party leadership, as well as selective nature of Soviet justice and use of unnecessarily harsh punishments, while deviance resulted from need and hunger.

Keywords

Historical sources, selective nature of Soviet justice, corruption, malfeasance, documentary

sources, Great Patriotic War of 1941–45, USSR, economic crime, economic deviancy.

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