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The First World War and the Reconstruction of the Petrograd Railway Junction: 1914–18

Abstract

The study of the Russian railways functioning in the days of the First World War is one of most important topics for understanding Russian economy problems on the eve of the Russian revolution, as well as for comprehending the 1917 revolution itself. The transport crisis, which in 1915 already became a manifestation of the governance problems, was obviously one of the

components of the revolutionary situation that had developed in the Russian Empire by 1917. Identifying government capabilities for preventing crisis is one of relevant tasks for studying the history of Russia during the First World War. A key aspect thereof is consideration of the transport situation in the capital — Petrograd. The expansion of source base for this topic is the main goal of the author. The article analyzes the text of the explanatory note to the general scheme for the development and reorganization of the Petrograd railway junction, drafted in the Administration of the Nikolaevskaya railway by engineers S.I.Kulzhinsky and A.A. Glavatsky (late 1915). This document shows that Russian engineers were well aware of the transport problems in the Russian capital and proposed solutions that could have helped to avoid food crises, such as the one that arose in February 1917. Moreover, the plan was to take into account planned cargo turnover up to 1930 and difficulties that were to emerge in the future (for example, connecting the railway network to the city metro). After its approval by the Special Council on Transportation, in March 1916 loans were allocated for the work. But it was too late: the revolution and the ensuing Civil War prevented the implementation of the project. In 1919, construction works finally stopped and constructed sections were dismantled. Some of the recommendations were implemented in the 20th century, but a significant part of the proposals remained on paper. However, many proposals remain relevant today for improving the transport system in St. Petersburg. For instance, the main theses of the plan may prove useful for the development of plans for linking St. Petersburg to the high-speed highway Moscow—St. Petersburg. The study has drawn on materials from the Russian State Historical Archive and from the Central State Historical Archive of St. Petersburg.

Keywords

Historical source, Petrograd, Railways, Russia, World War I of 1914–18, Railway Junction, Transportation, Transport, revolutionary events of 1917 in Russia.

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