

Scientific article

УДК 94(47)+82-6

DOI 10.28995/2073-0101-2022-3-891-903

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“A Mold Foreign to Leninism Fetters the Forces of the Party”: A Veteran of the Ruling Party S. S. Starostin on the Problems of the USSR of Mid-1980s in a Letter Addressed to M. S. Gorbachev

Abstract

The article studies public discussions concerning development of the USSR by 1985. The relevance of the topic is due to the need to study various points of view existing in the Soviet

society at the dawn of Perestroika. The basis of the study is classical methods of source analysis: narrative and historical-genetic. The scientific significance is due to the fact that the analytical note by S.S. Starostin on the problems of late Soviet society is being introduced into scientific use for the first time. The study fills the gap in scientific knowledge on public discussions in the USSR by mid-1980s, when the policy of Perestroika prompted both reformers and relative “conservatives” to discuss a new path of the country’s development. Of particular interest are Starostin’s ideas, which the authorities tried to implement at the final stage of Perestroika. The basis for the study is archival document found in the fond of the former chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers N. I. Ryzhkov (fond 653 of the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History). In April 1985, Starostin’s note was sent to M. S. Gorbachev, who had recently assumed the post of General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. The article is to study the nostalgic view on the development of the USSR on the eve of Perestroika. It attempts to reconstruct the value system of the author of the letter. The study is based on traditional methodology of classical source studies. The analyzed document is a monument of social thought reflecting disappointment with the Brezhnev era and hopes for a new Soviet leader. It has been established that, according to his ideological views, Starostin can be called a supporter of the mobilization model of economy built on moral and political incentives. He favoured a retrospective presentation of problems in comparison with the Stalin period. The main problem of the USSR indicated in his text is political mistakes of the authorities after J. V. Stalin. Starostin harshly criticized A. N. Kosygin and departmentalism. He analyzed personnel policy and symptoms of the crisis of the Soviet society and political system of the USSR and stated moral degeneration of the Soviet elite and ordinary citizens. In his opinion, the era of Khrushchev and Brezhnev was characterized by a growth of social deviations (deceit, corruption, falsification of figures, theft, absenteeism) and bureaucracy. Starostin insisted on the need to develop institutions of direct democracy, referendums.

Keywords

Historical sources, USSR, CPSU, M. S. Gorbachev, N. I. Ryzhkov, L. I. Brezhnev, A. N. Kosygin's reform, power crisis, social deviations, morality, officials, nostalgia, mobilization economy, personnel policy, system of values.

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Submitted 8.04.2022, published (for citation):

NIKIFOROV, Yu. S. “Chuzhdyi leninizmu shablon skovyvaet sily partii”: veteran pravyashchei partii S. S. Starostin o problemakh SSSR serediny 1980-kh gg. v pis'me k M. S. Gorbachevu [“A Mold Foreign to Leninism Fetters the Forces of the Party”: A Veteran of the Ruling Party S. S. Starostin on the Problems of the USSR of Mid-1980s in a Letter Addressed to M. S. Gorbachev. In Russ.]. IN: Vestnik arhivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2022, no. 3, pp. 891-903. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2022-3-891-903

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Полностью материал публикуется в российском историко-архивоведческом журнале ВЕСТНИК АРХИВИСТА. Ознакомьтесь с условиями подписки [здесь](#) .