

Scientific article

doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2024-1-85-97

For citation

Shishkin Dmitry V., Dialogue with «the leader»: letters and notes to G. E. Zinoviev as a means of communication between citizens and authorities. 1918–1921 (In Russ). IN: Vestnik Archivista / Herald of an Archivist, 2024, no. 1, pp. 85-97. doi 10.28995/2073-0101-2024-1-85-97

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Dialogue with «the leader»: letters and notes to G. E. Zinoviev as a means of communication between citizens and authorities. 1918–1921

## Abstract

The article examines the practice of communication between the population and G. E. Zinoviev, the first chairman of the Petrograd Soviet after the October Revolution, during the Civil War (1918-1921). Based on the material of written appeals to the leader ("letters to the authorities") the problematic components of the public image of the head of the local government and their solutions within the framework of Zinoviev's campaigning activities. Researchers had previously used this type of source mainly to reconstruct public sentiment in subsequent eras of New Economic Policy and Industrialization, without focusing on the importance of this form of dialogue with the population for the authorities themselves during the period of war communism, especially at the regional level. The article describes three types of written appeals: letters and notes received at meetings. Analyses of both type based on the peculiarities of the communicative situation in which the appeals were written: the possibility of establishing authorship, the proximity of the authors to the addressee at the time of creation, the format of the appeal and its goals. The study analyzed 349 records (142 letters and 207 notes) from G. E. Zinoviev's personal funds stored in the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF) and the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI); in the funds of the departments headed by him during the specified period, in the Central State Archive of St. Petersburg (CGA SPb). For letters, the most common motives for their appearance are identified: the plight of the author and his family; dissatisfaction with the work of Soviet, party and military bodies; the desire to acquire a certain position in society (a place in the service, in the Red Army); the reaction to Zinoviev's speech or publication of employees–intellectuals. As an important underlying motive, the desire of the authors of the letters to establish personal contact with the leader through a meeting or to emphasize a previous acquaintance was revealed, which may illustrate a crisis of trust in society to the authorities or the lack of a culture of written appeal. The popular aspects of criticism of the head of the Petrograd Soviet contained in letters and notes are highlighted: privileges in the supply of food, the use of personal vehicles, Jewish origin and the discrepancy of statements with policy. In the final part of the article, Zinoviev's self-presentation techniques are analyzed in the context of the above-mentioned criticism. Such a characteristic feature is noted as the use of the letters received by the leader to demonstrate solidarity with the population, as well as the consonance of the claims made to him with his own criticism of the "attached" communists.

## Keywords

Letters to the authorities, Zinoviev, Petrograd, notes, the image of power, privileges.

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## Grant information

The article was prepared with the financial support of the grant of the Russian Scientific Foundation No. 20-18-00369 "Processes of legitimization of violence: Culture of conflict in Russia and the escalation of civil war" ([https://rscf.ru/project/20-18-00369 /](https://rscf.ru/project/20-18-00369/))"

The article was received in the editorial office on 19.10.2023, recommended for publication on 20.12.2023.

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