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Everyday life in a concentration camp in Soviet Krasnoyarsk, as documented by the commandant of the military town, 1920

Abstract

The paper considers two historical sources, previously unpublished and permanently stored in the fund of the Commandant of the Military Town at the State Archive of Krasnoyarsk Krai (GAKK). These documents are informational in nature, being office materials generated by the audit work of the provincial bodies of the VChK and the People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection. The sources describe colorful episodes of everyday life in Krasnoyarsk during the restoration of Soviet power, related to the operation of a concentration camp in the northeastern suburbs. This military penitentiary institution became a detention center for tens of thousands of former participants in the anti-Bolshevik movement, who were captured widely by Red Army units near Krasnoyarsk between 1919 and 1920. A significant number of the concentration camp's inmates were generals, officers, military officials, and cadets of Kolchak's army. The published sources shed light on a number of important aspects of the operational environment in a military penitentiary institution. Specifically, the methods of filtering prisoners, as well as the living conditions of the camp (sanitary conditions of the premises, prisoners' diet, and their contact with the outside world), are described in considerable detail. The purpose of the study is to analyze the substantive features of the published sources in the context of the specific historical context in which they were produced. The theoretical basis of the work is represented by a combination of an institutional approach, the principle of systematicity, source studies, and comparative historical methods. This methodological approach, taking into account the conditions of an era of social upheaval, allowed us to characterize the measures of Bolshevik policy during the restoration of Soviet power in Eastern Siberia in relation to captured White Guards, who were rightly viewed simultaneously as both a counterrevolutionary threat and a valuable human resource. The cited sources, interpreted, among other things, as products of the Soviet system, also demonstrate its weaknesses, which were reflected in the inability to quickly overcome the devastation and general humanitarian catastrophe in the macro-region during that period. The paper may be of interest to a wide range of researchers studying the final stage of the Civil War in Eastern Siberia, the actions of the regional Soviet authorities toward captured White Guards, the everyday life of those years, and Krasnoyarsk regional studies.

Keywords

Historical sources, Civil War, White Army, Red Army, Soviet power, VChK, People's Commissariat of Workers' and Peasants' Inspection, Soviet concentration camp, everyday life, Krasnoyarsk.

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