

Gorizontov L.E., Moscow, Russian Federation

Conflicts in the Soviet ruling elite and regional priorities: Non-Black Earth – Virgin Soil

The ending. The beginning is in “Herald of an archivist” № 4, 2013.

Annotation

Having put forward in the first half of the 1970s the initiative to support Non–Black Earth, former Virgin Soil activists L.Brezhnev and M.Solomentsev tried not to stress controversy between the two regional and economic strategies. Yet before perestroika Russian creative intelligentsia began to express its discontent with the treatment of Central Russia as the second Virgin Soil, demonstrating the archetypal perception of the center and periphery of the country. The Non–Black Earth program failed to compete with all-union and industrial programs, including those implemented on the Russian territory. The system however didn't exclude direct contacts between regional leaders and the “first person” in the state. Supervising agriculture since the end of the 1970s, M.Gorbachev as a representative of the Russian South didn't initially understand the significance of Non–Black Earth. At the beginning of the 1980s Brezhnev declared, that it was high time for national republics to help Russia. In the second half of the 1980s Non–Black Earth received resources previously assigned for the turn of northern rivers - a project with anti-Russian reputation. Under the conditions of economic crisis works in the Non–Black Earth region were stopped. After the collapse of the USSR the discussion on alternatives of regional development during the Soviet period assumed a special acuteness. New memoirs and archival materials enabled better understanding of the decision–making in

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post-war Soviet Union. The author traces the way from the local reforms' experience to macro-regional programs and setting tasks in all-union scale. A difficult choice of regional priorities intertwined with the struggle for power and determining the model of development, competition between union republics and various Russian regions, inter-agency rivalry, opposition between bureaucracy and public opinion with the influence of certain public moods on the officials. A choice between investments into the Russian Non-Black Earth or Virgin Soil regions was discussed during the entire post-war period. Emphasizing the priority importance of Virgin Soil's plowing, Khrushchev by no means ignored the agricultural problems of Non-Black Earth: he kept in mind the order of priorities with limited resources. The resistance to the strategy of raising Virgin Soil was firmly linked to the activity of the so-called anti-party group. This stereotype didn't lose its topicality after Khrushchev's dismissal.



Keywords

Soviet Union, regional policy, political struggle, non-black earth, virgin soil, mental geography.

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About the authors

Gorizontov Leonid Efremovich, Doctor of Historical Sciences, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Professor, Russian Federation, Moscow, 8-905-760-36-30, lgorizontov@yandex.ru

You can read completely article in the russian historic-archival magazine “The Herald of an Archivist”. Read more about terms of subscription [here](#) .

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