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“[...] There Are Such Moments in Political Life of the Country, When Active Influential Public Figures Must Be Imprisoned”: Letters of N. Ya. Bykhovsky and I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya to the Chairman of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee I. N. Smirnov

Abstract

This publication introduces into scientific use and analyzes three documents found in a file in the declassified series in the fond of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee stored in the State Archive of the Novosibirsk Region. These documents are personal letters written by N. Ya. Bykhovsky and I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya in Irkutsk in summer 1921. They were well-known researchers and social and political figures. N. Ya. Bykhovsky was a professional revolutionary.

For nearly twenty years, he was a member of the SR party and one of the party outstanding publicists; he was elected a member of the party Central committee. His wife, I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya, also a member of the SR party, had by 1921 abandoned political activity and was engaged mainly in teaching and studying the history of Russian peasantry of the 19th century. The letters are addressed to the chairman of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee I. N. Smirnov, who was then a candidate member of the Central Committee of RCP(B) and belonged to the Bolshevist elite. N. Ya. Bykhovsky and I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya had to write to I. N. Smirnov repeatedly, because mid-June 1921 N. Ya. Bykhovsky was arrested in Irkutsk by the order of the plenipotentiary representative of All-Union Extraordinary Commission for Siberia I. P. Pavlunovsky. The arrest was made despite guarantees that I. N. Smirnov had given shortly before in Omsk, when he had met N. Ya. Bykhovsky twice. The letters were attempts to find out, why N. Ya. Bykhovsky had been arrested, even though he had not been involved in party and political work any longer. The Bykhovskys offered several explanations of what had happened. However, the explanation of I. P. Pavlunovsky seems most likely: as he said cynically to I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya, in certain moments of political life of the country, active and influential public figures “must be imprisoned.” A shrewd historian will also find in the published letters other interesting data on political mentality and culture of the Bolsheviks, Soviet reality, and everyday life in early 1920s.

Keywords

Epistolary sources, Soviet power, chairman of the Siberian Revolutionary Committee I. N. Smirnov, professor N. Ya. Bykhovsky, I. I. Ignatovich-Bykhovskaya, university, institute, I. P. Pavlunovsky, All-Union Extraordinary Commission for Siberia, arrest, prison, prosecution.

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