

MSC 2020**International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.
COMMUNICATION»****REVOLUTION'S MEMORIALIZATION IN THE RITUAL
PRACTICES OF THE NOVGOROD COMMUNISTS (1921-1925)**

Irina Samoylova (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation
helgad@yandex.ru

Abstract

This study is devoted to the study of the interaction of government and society during the NEP period by analyzing a group of communists who exercised ideological influence on the peasants. This process is considered from the point of view of everyday practices that allowed the dissemination of ideological postulates in an easy-to-understand form. The focus of attention is the festive and memorial rites. The author examines the existence and ideological justification of new memorable dates of the Soviet calendar, such as the day of the October revolution: the forms of memorialization, its actors, and the content of memories. Both official events and everyday practices that were not ritualized during the specified period are indicated. The article also analyzes memorial practices related to communists, first of all, the funeral rite on the example of memorial events dedicated to the death of V. Lenin and some party workers. Secular forms of grieving are considered, the content of obituaries is studied, and the normative place of the revolution in the biography of a communist is studied. Memorial practices are considered as a means of identifying a party employee, as well as a means of constructing Soviet everyday life on the example of this social group.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: Ideological influence, NEP, memorial practices, memorial rites, Soviet festivals



1. Introduction

The revolutionary events of 1917 led to the formation of a new society. Soviet society, its values, culture and ideology were constructed by the new political elite, which sought to indoctrinate all the social spectrum of the nascent post-revolutionary society. In recent decades, researchers have approached the study of the formation of a new Soviet identity, considering this process not from the point of view of struggle and resistance, but from the perspective of peaceful interaction forms between society and authorities. The history of everyday life and the history of memory allow us to identify the features of management, interaction between society and authorities, and the interiorization of a new ideology (Rendle & Retish, 2017).

The memorial practices, that allowed us to structure a new everyday reality through the selection of memories forms and content, are important to emphasize the special position of certain social groups and a new worldview. Their study makes it possible to understand the values of the new era. Both memorial practices related to revolutionary events and those related to participants in the revolutionary movement are important for study.

2. Problem Statement

This paper examines the forms of memorialization of revolutionary events related to the activities of communists and their daily practices. It is especially important to study their activity in the countryside in the first years of the NEP (New Economic Policy); since in rural areas, compared to the city there were fewer channels and resources of ideological influence. In addition, the peasants were perceived by ideologists as a class group alien to the proletariat, carriers of petty bourgeoisie values.

The adaptation of ideological postulates for this social group was considered earlier. We are interested not only in adapting the content of agitation to the characteristics of this group, but also in ways of self-presentation and representation of the party's decisions for the peasant environment, as well as in the communists self-perception and their everyday, above all, holiday practices.

The most important holidays of the nascent Soviet calendar were those associated with pre-revolutionary opposition movements (International Workers' Day on May, 1) and October (Proletarian) Revolution Day, dedicated to the events of October 1917. In addition, the new calendar mentioned the events of the French Revolution, the First Russian Revolution (Russian Revolution of 1905). The questions of festive ritualism are considered by M. Rolf, however, he paid more attention to urban practices (Rolf, 2006). The researchers also analyzed individual elements of holidays (Godunov, 2015). It is more interesting to consider the penetration of new ritual and festive forms, designed for the city and the social stratum of the proletariat, into the countryside.

In the 1920s, new Soviet rites of passage began to take shape. There were introduced Octobering (a ceremony of giving a name to a newborn), Soviet weddings and Soviet funerals. The latter allow us to trace the commemoration of the revolutionary events participants; they were actively manifested among the communists and served as a standard for the population, a marker of the new revolutionary ritualism. It is necessary to determine how much these rituals were demanded by the communists and were known to the rural and provincial population. From the point of view of ethnography, this issue is studied by Sokolova

(2016), who considers the formation of funeral rites from the ideas of ideologists (first of all, L. Trotsky and Yaroslavsky) to practical implementation and reception by the masses (first of all, residents of large cities). At the same time, it offers new ritual forms, the implementation of which should be studied on provincial and rural materials.

3. Research Questions

This study involves answering several questions.

3.1. The consideration of festive memorial ritualism.

This question allows us to trace the role of the communists as organizers of events related to memorable revolutionary events, the forms of memorialization offered by the party, their refraction at the local level, as well as deviations in behavior. In addition, the analysis of memories evenings shows how the local communists saw their role in the revolution, how much the imaginary role corresponded to reality (Orlovsky & Kolonitsky, 2018).

3.2. The consideration of mourning memorial rituals related to the activities of the communists.

This part of the study allows us to see how the standard of the revolutionary person, the image of the communist in general, was created, to see the sacralization of revolutionary events and the communists themselves.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the forms of reference to revolutionary events and their participants used by the Novgorod Communists, including the rural areas. Everyday practices allow us to trace the mechanism of introduction of new ideological postulates or external forms of their manifestation in post-revolutionary society.

5. Research Methods

The study is performed within the framework of a structural approach using the comparative-historical method.

Sources of the party, preserved at in the State Archive of Contemporary History of Novgorod Region. These include the minutes of meetings of the Novgorod provincial committees of the RCP (b) (Russian Communist Party – Bolsheviks), province executive committee (gubispolcom), county party and Soviet party committees, their resolutions, circulaires, resolutions, work plans of county committees, district (volost) committees, and methodological materials. Party structures, receiving instructions from the center, reworked them and sent them to the lower organizations of the RCP (b), making some changes to their content. They allow evaluating the list of issues discussed at such meetings and track the echoes of discussions and debates. The analysis of work plans should be supplemented with a review of reports on

the work done, information reports, and circulaire letters suggesting unscheduled campaigns, which will allow assessing the density of the impact agents' work. Minutes of meetings of district committees (since 1924) and village cells, as well as village gatherings are more detailed, but require determining the degree of reliability. Consideration of this document type makes it possible to trace the acceptance or rejection of activities carried out by party structures, by the peasants themselves.

Questionnaires and autobiographies of members of the RCP (b) – AUCP (b), as well as questionnaires of lecturers and propagandists who were the party members, are a valuable source for assessing the material, educational, and level of communists, their involvement in revolutionary events (Karavaev, 2018). A comparison of the questionnaire form and autobiographies, as well as a special type of biographies, obituaries, allows us to draw conclusions about the value system of agitators and their preparation for propaganda work. This type of sources also has some disadvantages: the safety of questionnaires and autobiographies in some cases does not allow them to be used comprehensively.

The periodic press is also a valuable source for studying this topic. The local authorities initiated the creation of newspapers and actively distributed them. They contained, however, the notes and letters of ordinary citizens. Special newspapers were intended for the peasants: the national “Bednota” (“Poverty”) and “Krestyanskaya Gazeta” (“Peasant Newspaper”) (from 1923), the provincial “Krestyanskaya Zvezda” (“Peasant Star”) (from 1924). A number of county newspapers, such as the “Serp” (“Sickle”), being published in Demyansk, and the “Krasny Pahar” (“Red Plowman”), published in Staraya Russa, were closed in 1922. An important fact for studying the role of newspapers in the organization of agitation and propaganda work is the study of letters of rural correspondents sent from places that were edited (the newspaper “Zvezda” (“Star”) was stored in the funds of the State Archive of the Novgorod Region). Based on such publications, it is possible to restore the system of ideological influence on the masses from drawing up a plan to evaluating the quality of the work performed. According to these reports, it is possible to judge the application in practice of a set of methods of ideological influence on the population, taking into account local characteristics and the activities of party cells. “Critical” and “positive” letters came from the peasants, although some of them were written by people close to the government. The authors analyze agitation and propaganda activities in the country, and present their understanding of the role of rural residents and communists in “socialist construction”. From them we learn about anticipated, but with the labor embodied in the life of the option following the instructions above. They make it possible to compare the expectations of farmers and party members. Criticism of these or those phenomena, however, is part of propaganda campaigns, expressed in a authorities language.

Statements and complaints from countryside communists and non-party citizens are also an important source. There are a lot of such documents in the funds of financial inspections and land offices, that is, those institutions that farmers directly encountered in everyday life. Statements were drawn up in a certain form, for ease of writing in some village library and reading rooms and Soviet institutions were their samples. The petitioners had to present arguments understandable to the authorities in a language acceptable to them. The analysis of a number of such statements makes it possible to determine the hierarchy of values of the new government reflected in such documents, including the memorialization of revolutionary events (Malysheva, 2019).

6. Findings

The ideological influence of the RCP (b) on the peasants was not limited to propaganda from the pages of the press and from the meetings platform. The new way of life, different from the pre-revolutionary one, was in itself a way of agitation and solidarity with the new system. In the countryside there are village library and reading rooms, offering not only library services, but also hobby groups work forms that was interesting for the countryside's young people. In the life of the countryside includes a community theater, lectures and reading, as well as of Soviet holiday rituals. There is a new Soviet calendar of holidays and memorable dates associated with the history of the revolutionary movement and revolutionaries.

Let's consider the forms of preserving and constituting the memory of revolutionary events and figures of the revolutionary era, as well as the content of these forms.

The most important holidays of the nascent Soviet calendar were the International Workers' Day on May, 1 and Proletarian Revolution Day, as well as the Fall of the Autocracy Day and the day of the Paris Commune Day. If the last two holidays were of a lecture and informational nature, then May, 1 and November, 7 had a pronounced memorial character, while officially offering both the content of memories of revolutionary events and numerous design options.

The problem of forming scenarios of the Soviet holiday is considered in detail by M. Rolf (Rolf, 2006). After analyzing the scheme of the October celebrations, having taken as an example circulaires of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) from 1921, and documents of the lower court, we conclude that the main elements of the celebration night held on the eve (this event took place before May, 1) and November, 7's meetings, demonstrations and concerts, and free performances in the evening. At the meetings, it was suggested to touch on the history of the revolutionary movement. By 1923 from the instructions of the county committee the paragraphs on meetings are excluded, although they are stored in the circulaires of the Central Committee of the RCP (b) – they have probably established as standard elements of the holiday, the holiday remains identical: memories evenings the night before, performances in schools and village library and reading rooms on the day of the festival. In some cases, anti-religious propaganda was also carried out: for example, local communists forbade young people to brew beer on the patronal feast of Paraskeva Pyatnitsa, in 1922 they appointed a meeting during the Easter Liturgy, etc. In this example, we see the opposition of new dates to the traditional calendar, the introduction of new holiday forms in contrast to the ceremonial ones (Godunov, 2018).

The meetings organizers and speakers at memories evenings were precisely the party workers, the new elite. Memories evenings were held by heroes of the new age: members of the party who joined it before the revolution or during the revolutionary period, who participated in clandestine activities or the Russian Civil War. At the same time, there was a shortage of agitators, and there were complaints from rural communists who had to speak at several meetings in one day. The revolutionary experience of agitators – quite young people – also raises questions. The next research question is how much it manifests itself in their self-presentation. Let's turn to the study of communists' questionnaires (analysis of rural bureaucracy is also given (Mazur, 2015, 2016; Ulyanova & Sidorchuk, 2018).

Informants pay special attention to their activities during the February Revolution, October events, participation in the establishment of Soviet authorities or in the Russian Civil War; according to the

questionnaire, information is also provided about the nationalization of land. The most active participants of the February Revolution were peasant Ivan Blinov from Molvotitsky District, a member of the regimental committee (later provincial revolutionary committee) R.A. Oleynikov, and a former socialist-revolutionary Kolesnikov. The rest of the communist agitators try to identify them with the working class, mention their participation in the Russian Civil War or their role in the October events, or at least describe what they did in October 1917. So, memories are a means of identifying the interviewee with the values of the new regime, attempts to “age” their party experience, justify belonging to a social stratum other than the proletariat, as well as a means of ideological influence are noted.

The archive documents mention not only the activity of communists in organizing various forms of celebrations: meetings, memories evenings, but also everyday manifestations of the holiday. Deviant commemoration forms of both memorial and mourning dates also deserve special mention: excessive use of alcoholic beverages by communists is noted in letters to newspapers, as well as in statements and reports. Against the background of restrictions on the production and sale of alcohol, this method of memorialization is sharply condemned by both colleagues in the party and farmers. In other words, traditional rural feasts and the consumption of alcoholic beverages are thought of as a relic of the old regime, but new everyday practices (unlike public meetings and concerts) were not considered enough. The food was provided only for children, and these conclusions do not contradict the data for other provinces (Lebedeva, 2015; Neumann, 2008).

Let's turn to the rites of passage analysis as a way to memorialize revolutionary events by commemorating their participants. Sokolova (2016) focuses on the burial of V.I. Lenin, emphasizing the formation of its sacredness (materials of party discussions, for example, the diary entries of L. Trotsky and N. Bukharin are also involved). Indeed, the funeral of the leader was widely covered in the press, including the Novgorod province. Sokolova (2019) reasonably suggests that the scenario of the “red funeral” was influenced more by the tradition of burying the victims of the February Revolution on the Field of Mars. The author's thesis about their distribution among a narrow circle of communists and non-partisan atheists with a pronounced active political position also deserves attention. The author assumes that the communists in some cases did not seek to bring this ritual outside their circle (Sokolova, 2016, 2019).

The materials of the Novgorod province do not allow us to judge the wide spread of the new funeral rite. The “red funeral” is more likely to be spread among long-serving communists, and it seems that it is more of an elite funeral rite. This thesis is confirmed by the organization of the funeral rite “old clandestine, comrade Reinhold Petrovich” Putsit, a member of the party since 1909, Executive Secretary of the Borovichi county committee of the RCP (b), who died on January 10, 1925 after moving to Novgorod. The farewell scenario includes a meeting of communists, The All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (Komsomol) members and pioneers, professional organizations in the apartment of the deceased, seeing off the coffin with banners and an orchestra to the railway station, making speeches mentioning both revolutionary events and the deceased's participation in them. It is worth noting the participation of the military in the organization of the funeral: it is proposed to provide a company with weapons to the house of the deceased (perhaps for a farewell salvo – the source text does not specify), as well as a “guard of honor” near the car, consisting of members of the railway cell of the RCP (b). In our opinion, these elements go back to the burial of the victims of the revolution on the Field of Mars, the list of participants in the

farewell indicates the elitism of the funeral. The use of an orchestra suggests a secular nature of the rite, since sources usually contrast “pastor’s singing” and a funeral March. The extraordinary nature of the funeral is also emphasized by the fact that the organization is handled directly by the bureau of the provincial committee. This is a tribute to the honored communist, and a role model. The “red funeral” in Novgorod province is a way for communists to prove their party identity, new worldview, and merits in building a new society and state.

The funeral rite involved not only speeches, but also the formation of an obituary and memoirs (in the case of R. Putsit, the compilation of memoirs was entrusted to three members of the provincial committee, including Secretary Soms (1925). The problem of forming the identity of party workers based on the study of their biographies and obituaries was considered earlier. The text of the obituaries contains a lengthy description of the communist, is a series of facts of the life of the deceased, selected and processed in accordance with a certain scheme. The obituary presents us with a kind of “perfect type” of party agitator. Obituaries were distributed in provincial newspapers with an increase in the “Zvezda” (“Star”) format in 1923. Obituaries reveal certain personality traits and biographical facts that are inherent in the image of an ideal party worker: an initiative, educated person, who began his career in the lower party cells, did not avoid working in the countryside (work in the county executive committee, the countryside is the front line), who represented the ruling class, a good speaker and agitator (lecturer). He works to the detriment of his health without adequate remuneration, and leads an ascetic lifestyle. In the studied texts is found the memorialization of the revolutionary events. First of all, attention is drawn to the experience of the clandestine pre-revolutionary struggle (the most valuable was the mention of the First Russian Revolution, participation in the strike movement, as in the biography of Ya.Ya. Dutsman, A. K. Makarov), the events of 1917, as the February and October events (obituary A. Makarov, R.P. Putsit), and events of the Russian Civil War (obituaries of A.K. Makarov, Ya.Ya. Dutsman, R.P. Putsit, I.M. Korolev). The obituaries allowed both to construct the image of “new person”, a positive identity of a party employee, and to carry out memorial practices. Thus, the revolutionary events also sacralized the party elite.

Conclusion

Memorial and mourning practices, according to the plan of party workers, were supposed to offer new forms of everyday life, first of all, holidays, as well as the design of so-called rites of passage. The festive new rite associated with the revolutionary holidays was actively planted and spread both in the city and in the countryside. Its spread was controlled by various reports, and the permissible content of memories was determined.

Mourning practices, rather, take on a tinge of elitism, are used to identify with the corps of party workers or “progressive-minded” non-party, in the masses, only the rules of mourning for the death of the leader and the established traditions of his remembrance apply. Participation in the revolution sacralizes both the party worker and new forms of everyday ritual.

Everyday practices, including due to their entertainment and spatial accessibility, included rural residents in the circle of Soviet holidays. In the end, the result was the spread of new postulates and standards among participants and spectators of everyday rituals.

References

- Godunov, K. V. (2015). Obrazy vragov revolyutsii v prazdnovanii godovshchiny Oktyabrya: sozhzheniye izobrazheniy protivnikov (1918–1920) [Images of revolution enemies in the celebration of the October revolution's anniversaries: burning of the images of opponents (1918–1920)]. *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Istorica* [Perm University Bulletin. History], 2(29), 104-112.
- Godunov, K. V. (2018). Celebrating the first anniversary of October and waiting for the world revolution. *Modern History of Russia*, 2(8), 441-448.
- Karavaev, D. L. (2018). Soviet Newsreel Stories on the Anniversaries of the 1917 October Revolution as Instrument of Development of Historical Memory. *Mezhdunarodnyy zhurnal issledovaniy kul'tury* [International Journal of Cultural Research], 2(31), 19-29.
- Lebedeva, L. V. (2015). Formirovaniye sovetskoy prazdnichnoy kul'tury v 1920-ye gody: novyye ritualy v protsesse sotsial'nogo konstruirovaniya [Formation of the Soviet festive culture in the 1920s: new rituals in the process of social construction]. *Fundamental'nie issledovaniya* [Fundamental research], 2(8), 1784-1787.
- Malysheva, S. U. (2019). Evolution of the historical mythology of "November" holidays in Russia.). *Vestnik Permskogo universiteta. Istorica* [Perm University Bulletin. History], 1(44), 138-147.
- Mazur, L. N. (2015). Osobennosti evolyutsii sel'skoy byurokratii v sovetskoy Rossii [Rural bureaucracy in Soviet Russia: development characteristics]. *Izvestiya Uralskogo Federalnogo Universiteta-Seriya 2-Gumanitarnye Nauki* [Izvestia. Ural Federal University Journal. Series 2. Humanities and Arts], 2(139), 146-159.
- Mazur, L. N. (2016). Sem'ya kommunistov Yekaterinburgskoy gubernii (po materialam Vserossiyskoy partiynoy perepisi 1922 g.) [The Family of Yekaterinburg County Communists (with reference to the 1922 All-Russian Party Census)]. *Izvestiya Uralskogo Federalnogo Universiteta-Seriya 2-Gumanitarnye Nauki* [Izvestia. Ural Federal University Journal. Series 2. Humanities and Arts], 154(3), 85-105.
- Neumann, M. (2008). Revolutionizing mind and soul? Soviet youth and cultural campaigns during the New economic policy (1921-8). *Social history*, 33(3), 243-267.
- Orlovsky, D., & Kolonitsky, B. I. (2018). The Russian Revolution centennial: new themes, scripts and narratives. *Russian history*, 45(2-3), 147-148.
- Rendle, M., & Retish, A. B. (2017). Introduction silences and noises: commemorating 1917. *Revolutionary Russia*. 30(2), 151-157.
- Rolf, M. (2006). *Das Sowjetische Massenfest* [The Soviet mass festival]. Hamburg: Hamburger edition.
- Sokolova, A. (2019). Soviet funeral services: from moral economy to social welfare and back. *Revolutionary Russia*. 32(2), 251-271.
- Sokolova, A. D. (2016). Pokhoronnyy obryad v 1920-ye gody [Funeral rite in 1920]. In V.A.Lipinskaya (Eds.), *Traditsionnaya kul'tura russkogo naroda v period 1920-kh – 1930-kh godov: transformatsiya i razvitiye* [Traditional culture of the Russian people in the period of 1920-1930: transformation and development], 423-452. Indrik.
- Soms, M. (1925, January 10). On the death of R. Putsit. *Star*. <https://primo.nl.ru>
- Ulyanova, S. B., & Sidorchuk, I. V. (2018). "What Have We fought For?": The Heroes of the Civil War in "the Intoxication of the NEP". *Modern History of Russia*, 8(2), 424-440.