

## **AVAILABILITY OF RUSSIAN ARCHIVES AND ILLUSION OF THE SOURCE STUDY UPDATING: WHAT RUSSIAN AND FOREIGN RESEARCHES DEALING WITH THE DOCUMENTS SHOULD KNOW**

Alexander A. Litvin<sup>1</sup>

---

The relevance of the investigated problem is caused by the ability to publish new documents and entire archive funds and write the objective Russian history on their basis. The purpose of this article is to clarify the authenticity of the documents studied herein. The leading approach to the study of this problem is the critical analysis of the materials of the classics of Marxism-Leninism and the documents of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, allowing presentation of the real picture of the historical processes that took place in our country. The article discovers the main stages of documents and funds, reveals the extent of their validity and the possibility of studying by historians, justifies questions, which were not fully covered, provides the ways of implementation of emerging opportunities. Materials may be useful in the study of Russian history of the Soviet period, when writing books and articles.

**Keywords:** archives ; documents ; publications ; comments ; funds.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the same beginning we should provide explanations to the title: it is possible to speak only about the relative (compared with Soviet times) access to the archives (minimized amount of the documents permitting access to the archives; written notes have not been investigated and etc.); the various methods of the source studies gives rise to assorted researchers – some of them know more, the others less, which mostly depends on the level of their professional competence...

The Russian Federation passed a law on archival storage in 1993 allowing the access to nearly all the documents after a period of thirty years from the time they were published. The law of the Russian Federation on archival storage introduced in 2004 abolished the previous one and allowed the access to the documents after a period of seventy-five years from the time they were published. A 1994 Presidential decree provided for exception in the rule for the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Federal Security Service, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defense etc. It implied the documents of these ministries would not be received by the archives and become available for the researchers in the nearest future. Moreover, such an important archival storage as Kremlin (Presidential) or Special (Trophy) is still unavailable for the chronographers (all the documents are “privatized” by the officers of the archive who publish only the documents they

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor of the Institute of International Relations, History and Oriental Studies, Kazan (Volga region) Federal University, Kazan, Russian Federation, *E-mail: museologikfu@mail.ru*

find important). The first one includes about 90.000 documents published since 1919 (Politbureau, confidential information of about 40 secretary generals and other organization men) (Chubaryan, 2008). The original Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is in this very archive and according to Boldin's recollections Gorbachev and Yakovlev were aware of it when they tried convincing us that they were ignorant about it. A committee on declassification was appointed in 1994. In 1987 half of all the archival documents were classified and in 1995 only 9000 documents were declassified. The challenge is in the fact that the archives like the Central Archives of the Federal Security Service do not give any register and a researcher depends on archive personnel's acknowledgement of the issue he needs. (Anan'ich B.V. mentioned it like "we publish what is available" while publishing investigative materials on the academicians Platonov S.F. and Tarle E.V. (Academicians' Case, 1993). There is still a departmental policy that permits to withdraw original archival documents (ex: investigative work on B.N. Yeltsin's father and uncle was withdrawn from the Central Archive of the Federal Security Service and now is kept in a family private archive etc.).

Nowadays there are 10.6 million cases of the former KGB only kept in the archives (Bakatin, 1992) which used to be unavailable for the researches.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In the 1990s it became possible to take critically the documents, which had been closed to thorough study according to Soviet censorship rules. These were works of Marxism-Leninism classics, manuscripts and transcripts of meetings of the congresses of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) and other officious documents.

Some variants of Lenin's works were not included into the PSS. His work "one step forward, two steps back", written in 1904, criticized Martov and Menshevism. In 1908 Lenin, preparing to publish a collection of his works "12 years", re-edited this work, and removed some critical remarks against Martov and Chapter I of the CP (Communist Party) statute as "unnecessary". However the first variant of this work was published in the PSS, apparently, from the perspective of political expediency. Lenin's attribution of a number of his articles was not "polished" in PSS. It is known that some articles of Vorovsky were published in the 1st edition of Lenin's works in 1920s, whereas some articles of Lenin were issued in Zinoviev's essays (according to the recollections of the compiler of the 3rd edition of Mints), besides a well-known proclamation "Socialist Fatherland is in danger!" (February 1918) was published in PSS, though the author of it was Trotsky, not Lenin (the manuscript of this Trotsky's article has been recently discovered). The researchers were to make other unexpected discoveries.

Lenin's manuscripts were edited and cut while publishing. That was especially true of his speeches, recorded in newspapers, and then included in the PSS. Moreover, there are 3724 Lenin's documents, not included in the PSS and

collections of Lenin's works, stored in the Russian State archive of the Socio-political history (RGASPI). 322 previously unpublished documents of Lenin have recently been published. Some of them are given without deletion characteristic of the PSS. This concerns, for example, Lenin's letters to Inessa Armand. U.P. Sharapov, the author of positive reviews on this collection, recalled how G.D. Obichkin the Deputy Director of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CPSU Central Committee, responsible for the publication of those letters while preparing them to PSS, did it this way: "A prepared manuscript volume,- he writes, -was on the table in front of Obichkin. He read the document title and if it was suitable for publication, he removed it to the other side of the table. When the turn of Lenin's letter to Inessa Armand came, Obichkin said, "Here is the letter beginning with the reference: "Dear friend!" - it is possible to keep. The following statement, "Dear, dearest friend!" - does not suit, regardless of content. Sharapov explained this Obichkin's behavior with his hypocrisy and reassurance, as the layout volume was sent to the Central Committee of the CPSU for approval before publishing. Now these documents are published. (Sharapov, 2000).

Among the first who read the unpublished Lenin's documents were Dolgonosov, Vaginov, Pipes, as well as the number of scientific workers of the Central party archive of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the CPSU Central Committee. Volkogonov referred to these documents in his two-volume biography of Lenin. (Volkogonov, 1994) Pipes used these documents when writing the last part of his trilogy about the Russian revolution and creating a special collection of documents about the unknown Lenin. (Pipes, 1997, 2005). Comparison of comments to particular documents, given by Pipes to the American edition and by a group of authors to a Russian one (Lenin, 1999), shows the political preferences of the authors rather than reasoning necessary circumstances. Pipes was looking for confirmation of his arguments about Lenin's relationship with "German money" for the revolution. Loginov expressed disagreement with this version in concluding remarks to the collection.

In 1990, the staff of the IML (Institute of Marx and Lenin) of the CPSU Central Committee drafted the upcoming 70-volume edition of Lenin's works. According to the plans of this publication, the documents of "unknown Lenin" would hardly find a place there. Historians having studied thoroughly a lot of mass historical publications of the 1990s, came to the conclusion that especially textbooks reproduce the structure, the problem and even the style of the short course without changes (VI World Congress for Central and East European Studies, 2000). Therefore, some authors began to state that they had written "the true history without omission and falsification" (Ismozik, Starkov, Pavlov and Rudnik, 2010). These statements were made primarily for advertising purposes to attract readers. "The true history" written by them reflected their views on events described and could not and did not become the "ultimate truth" for other investigators.

## RESULTS

Mythology and fabrication of facts were among of the main components of Soviet historiography. Fabricated documents played some role in its creation. The state's control over the archives and historical science, turned into a servant of the ruling regime, contributed to it. June 1, 1918 decree nationalized all the Russian archives. Since then the authorities, guided by the principle of expediency, decided which documents the researchers had the access to which not. In 1922 all the publications including playbills became the subject to censorship. The restrictions on the use of documents for historical research were introduced in 1925. They imposed on various statistic data of the number of imprisoned, deserters, then activity of the opposition to the regime etc. In 1929 the academician S.F. Platonov and his students were arrested and prosecuted due to keeping documents of the house of Romanov in the archives of the Academy of Sciences, which he headed.

The Central Archive of the People's Commissariat of Education supervised all the archives. New Soviet archives (the archive of the October revolution, the archives of the Red Army and the other were supplied with documents about the victory of the Bolsheviks, while the archives of Kolchak, Denikin governments were collected but their use was limited. The collections of documents of anti-Bolshevik governments of the Russian Civil war time were stored in special archives in 1920s and were available only by special permission. There were anti-Bolshevik periodicals and works of the opposing parties as well. The works of "enemies of the people", as well as Lenin's letter to the Party Congress criticizing Stalin, the book by Stalin "About the October coup" approving of Trotsky's activity and etc. were also there.

In the 1920s the institutions of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin collected the manuscripts of their works. The Institute of the Party's History and its branches in many cities of the country collected mainly Bolshevik documents in their archives. In 1928, the archives of these institutions were merged into a single Party archive, which in 1931 with the establishment of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism under the Central Committee of the CPSU turned into the Central Party archive (now RGASPI). In 1928 there was a net of state, party (central and local) and departmental archives in Soviet Russia. State departments were obliged to pass the accumulated materials to the archives every 3-5 years. Declassification period of archival documents was not set. Neither is now.

In 1931 Stalin in his letter published in the journal "Proletarian Revolution", spoke against idolized archival documents, stating that it is necessary to trust the leaders, not "archival rats". At the same time the repression of archivists was being escalated. In 1934 due to political trials in the country, arrests of dissidents, or fallen under the suspicion of the authorities, the archives were placed under NKVD control, and from 1938 to 1954, under the control of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The fact that all the archives were under these departments' control restricted the

access to the considerable part of the documents. Only the Party members with a special permission were allowed to work in Party archives. Archival resources as a rule were unavailable; researchers' notes were censored, etc.

In the period of totalitarian regime in the country, the archives were supplied with fabricated sources of repressive character: dispossession, investigation of the case on those arrested for political reasons marked as "everlasting storage", "top secret", etc. After the Second World War, the archives were supplied with the documents related to military operations, movement of resistance to the Nazis, home front activities and trophy documents (Prague archive of the Russian emigrants which is now located in the State archive of the Russian Federation).

The death of Stalin in 1953, Khrushchev's exposure of Stalin's policy at the twentieth Congress of the CPSU (1956) marked some liberalization of the state governmental system and the rehabilitation of the innocent prisoners of Gulag for political reasons. Simultaneously the archives were "cleaned" in an attempt to liquidate the documents witnessing the participation of the new leaders in repressions. In the mid-1960s the nearly opened archives were closed again. In 1985 "perestroika" changed public consciousness which simplified the work in the archives, the documents were being declassified and a great deal of archival files were liquidated. Any new Soviet leader and his team seemed to start their activity liquidating the previous "flaws".

## **DISCUSSION**

In Soviet times, source study was underestimated and considered a supporting scientific discipline. In the 1960s discussions on the General problems of the Soviet source study (Danilov and Jakubovska) and the origin of the sources were held, some attempts of source study analysis of individual documents were made, source study text books appeared. In Soviet times there were no access to the majority of the documents. A typical example might be Khrushchev's report on Stalin's policy made in 1956. The report was popular with people in many countries while Soviet people managed to read it only three decades later in 1989.

Declassification of documents was complicated and took much time. In 1987 researchers had access to less than 50 percent of archival documents. Semi closed departmental archives still exist. Lack of sufficient financial supply caused commercialization of individual archives activity. It implied selling of certain documents, the publication of opportunistic collections, etc. In the 1990s some archives changed their names and joined together.

In the 1990s having studied various sources Russian historians came to the conclusion that Soviet statistic collections introduced contradictory data. Scrupulous local chronologists' methods of source study were drastically changed since 1920s. The document publication was commissioned by the authorities. Stalin ordered to classify the data of the all-Union census of 1937, and to repress the performers.

Forced by him a new census was held in 1939, which showed the growth of the population in the country while the previous one claimed reduction. There is still no reliable data on the number of people killed in wars, in the famine of 1921, 1933, 1946, the victims of the Gulag, etc.

The majority of the memoirs, published in the Soviet period, were devoted to a positive perception of the October revolution and the country's achievements under Bolshevik rule. The accuracy of memories depended mostly on the time of the publication (there is some difference between memoirs by N. Krupskaya and Gorky about Lenin, published in 1920-ies and their reprints in the 1930s etc). In the late 1980s - 2000s military memoirs were reevaluated. G. Zhukov's recollections about Brezhnev's role in the World War II were questioned. It provoked numerous recollections of Gulag's prisoners, presidents of the USSR and Russia, KGB staff. These recollections were rarely examined and analyzed.

## CONCLUSION

In the process of investigation and rehabilitation cases the authorities themselves admitted the investigative cases, records of the meetings of extrajudicial punitive bodies ("troyka", "dvoyka", "Special Councils") unreliable and falsified. Taken as overall it required establishing methods of their study. The research experience proved the method of structure and text-based analyses of such sources the most relevant.

In order to identify the authenticity of Soviet period official documents it is necessary to use circumstantial evidences. They can help to avoid a range of historical errors. Enumeration and the exposure of the various myths of the Soviet history can be continued. However it should be kept in mind that the authors of such documents were in a certain political situation.

### *Acknowledgments*

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

### *References*

- Chubaryan, A.O. (2008). 'At the edge of tragedy. Stalin and international crisis. September 1939 – June 1941'. Moscow.
- Sharapov, Y.P. (2000). 'Review: V.I. Lenin. Unknown documents. 1891-1922'. National history, 3: 188-190.
- Volkogonov, D.A. (1994). 'Lenin: a political portrait. In 2 volumes. Moscow.
- Pipes, R. (2005). 'Russian revolution: In 3 volumes'. Vol. 3. Russia in Bolshevik era. 1918—1924. Moscow, Zakharov.
- Pipes, R. (1997). 'Russia in Bolshevik era'. Moscow: ROSSPEN.
- 'V.I. Lenin. Unknown documents. 1891-1922.' (1999). Moscow: ROSSPEN.

Bakatin, V.V. (1992). 'Deliverance from KGB'. Moscow.

Izmozik, V., Starkov, B., Pavlov, B., Rudnik, S. (2010). 'Authentic history. RSDRP-RKP(b)-VKP(b) (РСДРП-РКП(б)-ВКП(б)). Without omissions and falsifications. A short course.' Saint-Petersburg.

