

## SOVIET STATE POLICY TOWARDS RELIGION: INITIAL STAGE

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**Key words and phrases:** Islam; Judaism; legislation; Orthodoxy; religion; state; freedom of conscience.

**Abstract:** In the article the peculiarities of state policy towards the main confessions in the USSR in 1918 – at the beginning of 1921 are shown. The reasons for strengthening anti-religious activity while transferring to new economic policy are introduced.

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After the revolution the Bolshevik power considered the religion existence as a departure from the norm. That was absolutely up to the class struggle study according to which any religious differences were not important as derived from basal material factors. On the assumption of dogmas about Marxist study of class study the communist party officials as well as their Komsomol leadership followers believed that measures aimed at the liquidation of exploitation and social antagonisms (liquidation of the problems of social, individual and spiritual people existence) favoured religious prejudices disappearance. Narrowing of the religious unions sphere was considered as an obligatory factor of progressive society development.

The Decree of the Council of Peoples Commissars (CPC) of RSFSR "About freedom of conscience, church and religious societies" on the 20<sup>th</sup> of January (28 February) separated Church from the state and schools, gave freedom of consciousness to the population that was the right of each citizen to practice any religion or not to practice any one; the equality of rights and duties of all religions believers and nonbelievers; the inadmissibility of using compulsion and penalty measures by religious unions for their members. Material guarantee of freedom of consciousness was provided by the Decree: the allocation of free prayer buildings and cult property to religious societies. The publication of any local laws and regulations narrowing or limiting freedom of consciousness was categorically forbidden. Yet the norms of limiting character were introduced: nationalization of church property, depriving religious organizations of the rights of legal person, of allodial tenure and its purchase [8, p. 236, 272–273]. It is significant that as a rule the committee created in People's Commissariat of Justice of RSFSR in April of 1918 (then it became the VIII<sup>th</sup> department) to realize the Decree concerning the separation Church from the state was called as a liquidation one. The instruction of the 24<sup>th</sup> (30) of August prepared by that department for realizing the Decree "About freedom of conscience, church and religious societies" deprived confessional unions of right of property and ignored their historic specificity of functioning. Numerous confiscation measures such as capital, valuable and other church and monastery property confiscation were provided for. Insurmountable obstacles were created to prevent religious activity realization.

It was at the end of 1917 – at the beginning of 1918 when the soviet state started the liquidation of trivial religious attributes with the help of legislative measures. The Decrees of All-Russian Central Executive Committee and The Council of People's Commissars about divorce, civil marriage, children and keeping the books of acts of civil status appeared. According to those legislative acts the registration of marriages, births and deaths was withdrawn from church competence. The greater part of religious rites which had been really important for citizens before was turned into the vestiges of the past by state structure conception.

Though the Orthodox Church tried to be quite neutral Patriarch Tikhon refused to bless the White movement as its many steps contradicted legislative initiatives of Bolsheviks. Communist power was not perceived by church as legislative one. Many priests kept to believe in the possibility of the restoration of state-and-church relations based on the principle of Orthodox confessions' leadership. In "The definition of the legislative position of the Orthodox Russian Church" accepted by Local Council in December of 1917 "the independence of church from state power" was covered but "the leading position among the other confessions" was accentuated, many previous privileges were listed [7, p. 6–8]. As a result power party specifications against church prevailed and in fact the following legislative activity of Soviet state predetermined subsequent conflict intensification of religious and secular structures, atheists and church people.

At first the power attitude towards Islam was much more tolerant. Communist officials took into account that Muslims individual self-consciousness started with the religious self-identification that sometimes signified more than ethnic one. During the centuries Islam was the only system that organized way of life, education, development and social attitude. The January decree of 1918 was on the whole aimed at the destruction of this system. But this destruction was not forced. Lenin and his comrades called for acting with a glance at national peculiarities while organizing local anti-religious work. One of the Bolshevik theoreticians, Muslim by religion, M. Sultan-Galiev even pointed out: "The whole question formulation mustn't have the character of anti-religious struggle, but should have the character of antireligious propaganda" [3, p. 332].

On the 20th of 1918 Jewish commissariat was organized as a part of People's Commissariat for Nationalities (PCN) headed by Sh. Dimanshtein. The first Jew-section was created in Orel under local RKP(b). In October the Central Bureau of RKP(b) Jew-section headed by Sh. Dimanshtein was formed. According to the Decree of CPC of RSFSR of 1918 "About crushing in the bud of anti-Semitic movement" the organizers of Jewish pogroms were shot with no investigation and trial. At the same time Jew-section struggled against any forms of Jewish way of life which were not under its control. Particularly in the Decree of Jewish Commissariat of PCN from the 19<sup>th</sup> of August of 1918 it was emphasized that "religion must be absolutely excepted out of Jewish people's schools" [13].

Just that Jewish communist young people belong the initiative of holding anti-religious trials. In 1920 the heders (Jewish primary schools of Judaism bases for boys), rabbins (leaders of church people communities, ministers) as well as "Poale Zion" charged with Zionism became the accused at such trials [1, f. 42, sh. 62].

The Soviet power had dual attitude towards religious minorities during its first years of existence. The considerable number of communist party members, many statesmen, overwhelming majority of Komsomol officials treated any religious demonstrations definitely in the negative. At the same time Soviet state leadership had rather influential statesmen headed by V.D. Bonch-Bruевич and supported by V.I. Lenin who considered heterodox Christianity in their pre-revolutionary theoretical works as an ally in the struggle against tsarism that was aimed at the triumph of social

and economic equality ideas even after the revolution. One of the most remarkable consequences of the formed myth about “sectarian-communists” became the Decree signed by V.I. Lenin on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January of 1919 which gave the sectarians the freedom from army service.

Fixed in pre-revolutionary Russian society the presentation of Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) as a part of the old wheels of state and the defender of propertied classes interests greatly predetermined the special acuity of relations between the state and Orthodox Church. It strengthened the bolshevist power endeavor to delete any RDC influence on social life. Actually the church was not recognized by the state as a legal institution. But under the religiousness of the population majority the state was obliged to keep the definite relationship with confessional groups correcting the religious policy model acceptable for itself.

According to the Constitution of RSFSR of 1918 confessional unities were separated from the state so they couldn't be included into the soviet power system directly. At first the state tried to realize just power ways of overcoming church-religion influence: the so called “heaven attack” was implemented.

The campaign of opening and “disclosing” the particles of the holy relics took the central place among anti-church measures in 1918–1920. The regulations of the People's Commissariat of Justice of RSFSR from the 14<sup>th</sup> of August of 1919 about the organized opening of the particles of the holy relics on all-Russian scale became the legal grounds for keeping this campaign [9, Art. 336, p. 353–354]. During this campaign 65 shrines with the particles of the Russian holy relics were opened [12, p. 42]. However, the regulation of the People's Commissariat of Justice of RSFSR from the 25<sup>th</sup> of August of 1920 “About the particles of the holy relics” said about 58 openings of the particles of the holy relics as if it had been made “according to initiative and persistent demand of working masses themselves”. Openings of the particles of the holy relics were presented as the disclosure of “knavish acts thanks to which the ministers of religion deceive people's masses”. In the document the following point was emphasized: “Revolution consciousness of working masses protest against the possibility to transfer mummify corpses, corpses' particles or corpses' imitations to church organizations at their free disposal for mass running as it breaches the most elementary society orders and leads to the feelings insult of all conscientious citizens...”. People's Commissariat prescribed local executive committee to realize “the total liquidation of “the particles of the holy relics” relying on revolution consciousness of working masses and avoiding any indecision and halfway policy while holding these actions”. More than that, trials were provided in the case of “finding quackery, magic, falsification and other criminal acts aimed at using ignorance”. And investigation was entrusted the with crime investigators of the most special cases at the legal departments or People's Commissariat of Justice [9, Art. 336, p. 353–354].

In 1921 the changes of bolshevists' economic policy gave the hopes for weakening power actions against church and church people. According to the recollections of I.I. Skvortsov-Stepanov about the 3<sup>d</sup> of February of 1924 in the newspaper “Bezbozhnik”, it was B. I. Lenin who spoke against weakening of anti-religious activity and declared in the summer of 1921: “New Economic Policy can't oblige us in this way”. In May of 1921 the Plenum of Central Committee (CC) of RKP(b) examined the question about party member's breaking point 13 of RKP(b) Programme and demanded to stop any communists' contacts with any confession under penalty of party exclusion according to the special regulation of CC from the 9<sup>th</sup> of August of 1921. At the IV<sup>th</sup> All-Russian congress of Russian Committee of Young People Union (on the 21<sup>st</sup>–28<sup>th</sup> of September) in the Programme of union the disposition was included: “...RCYPU lead ideological struggle with religious prejudices which confuse the consciousness of young generation of working people” [11, p. 68]. As New Economic Policy was taken by the state as the deviation from social attainments that threatened soviet statehood and socialist ideology, the policy was aimed at strengthening of antireligious activity.

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### Советская государственная политика в отношении религии: начальный этап

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**Ключевые слова и фразы:** государство; законодательство; ислам; иудаизм; православие; религия; свобода совести.

**Аннотация:** Выявлены особенности государственной политики в отношении основных конфессий в РСФСР в 1918 – начале 1921 г. Показаны причины усиления антирелигиозной деятельности при переходе к новой экономической политике.

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### **Sowjetische staatliche Politik in bezug auf die Religion: Anfangsetappe**

**Zusammenfassung:** Es sind die Besonderheiten der staatlichen Politik in bezug auf die Hauptkonfessionen in der RSFSR in 1918 – am Anfang 1921 festgestellt. Es sind die Gründe der Verstärkung der antireligiösen Tätigkeit bei der Übergang zur neuen wirtschaftlichen Politik gezeigt.

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### **Politique soviétique d'état concernant la religion: étape initiale**

**Résumé:** Sont déduites les particularités de la politique d'état concernant les confessions essentiels en RSFSR en 1918 et au début de l'année 1921. Sont montrées les causes de l'activité antireligieuse lors du passage envers la nouvelle politique économique.

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