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URBAN ZEMLIACHESTVA AND RURAL REVOLUTION: PETROGRAD AND THE SMOLENSK COUNTRYSIDE IN 1917

In a recent essay on the language of revolution in 1917, Orlando Figes argued that urban political "missionaries" to the village could not bridge the linguistic gulf separating them from peasants. According to Figes, "All these missionaries faced the same problem: how to talk to the peasants about politics so that they would listen and understand." But two groups most active in spreading the revolutionary word in fact spoke the peasants' language fluently—either as their principle tongue or as "bi-linguals"—peasant soldiers and members of urban zemliachestva (fellow villagers associations).

That soldiers carried the revolution (and rifles) home to the villages is well known. In contrast, the part played by zemliachestva in organizing the countryside remains an under-examined problem. While studies of pre- and post-revolutionary otkhodniki (labor migrants) have investigated urban class formation, the evolution of migrant identities, and the effect of migration on rural life, most work on zemliachestva in 1917 has been limited to their supposed function as conduits for Bolshevik propaganda.

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Examination of Smolensk zemliachestva in Petrograd in 1917 allows discussion of political missionaries who "spoke peasant." It also uncovers forms of organization utilized by "peripheral" workers at the revolution's epicenter and ways in which zemliachestva leaders framed migrants' public and political identities. Smolensk zemliaki translated urban politics into the language of the village and helped move peasant organizations to the left in fall 1917; they also translated peasants' demands into the language of urban politics. Moreover, zemliachestva were better organized (and migrants' public and political identities more complex) than historians have granted.

**Urban Zemliachestva**

Labor migration from the western Russian province of Smolensk followed patterns of regional economic development. Topography divided the province into three regions: the Dniepr River region (Smolenskii, Krasninskii, Dubkovshchinskii, and Dorogobuzhskii counties); the heavily forested Northwestern region (Bel'skii and Porech'skii counties); and the Eastern region (El'ninskii, Gzhatskii, Lukhovskii, Roslav'lskii, Sychevskii, and Viazemskii counties). Local climate and soils suited hemp, flax, and potato cultivation, and by 1917 industrial crops and livestock and dairy farming had largely replaced subsistence agriculture. But the market economy developed unevenly. The peasant economy in the Northwest, which was cut off from...