

Elizabeth Wood

Abstract

By 1920 the Bolshevik leaders of Soviet Russia had become adept at creating participatory political pageantry. They mounted parades and pro-government demonstrations; they reenacted leading historical events such as the storming of the Winter Palace; they inaugurated public ceremonies around elections. Around 1920 they also began creating agitation trials which showcased current political issues through theatrical performances designed to break down the distance between audience and performers. These plays took the form of trials in which the heroes submitted themselves to the will of the people, only to be acquitted and thus ritually vindicated and elevated to the status of heroes for all to emulate. The plays, thus, enacted and legitimated the Bolsheviks' rule. This article will focus on one of the first of these agitation trials, a 1920 "Trial of Lenin," in order to explore the significance of this new kind of spectacle.