

ANTIRELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN OF THE SOVIET POWER DURING LATE 1920S AND "PIONERSKAYA PRAVDA" NEWSPAPER

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Abstract

Purpose: The article made in the framework of such a new, but dynamically developing trend for post-Soviet historiography, that is the history of Soviet childhood, aims to identify and study the role and the place of periodicals for children in Soviet educational practices.

Methodology: The work also used the methods of historical psychology, in particular, child psychology, in order to identify specific ways of educational impact on target reading group among children.

Result: The results of the study are represented not only by potential informational capability description of such a historical source that is poorly studied by domestic and foreign source science, as the Soviet periodicals for children (in particular, the newspaper "Pionerskaya Pravda"), but also by the determination of the Soviet child media space possibilities concerning the education of "militant atheists". The materials of the article can be used in the process of the Soviet history of Russia, the history of religion, the history of childhood teaching, as well as the history and source study of periodicals in the USSR.

Applications: This research can be used for universities, teachers, and students.

Novelty/Originality: In this research, the model of the Antireligious campaign of the Soviet power during late 1920s and "Pionerskaya Pravda" newspaper is presented in a comprehensive and complete manner.

Keywords: History, Source study, Periodicals, Anti-religious campaign, Childhood, the USSR, late 1920-ies.

INTRODUCTION

The Russian Empire is the mostly agrarian state and throughout its existence in one form or another it was based on the capacious conceptual triad by Uvarov "Orthodoxy, autocracy, nationality". It left a very difficult social environment for worldview revolutions. Bolsheviks were to carry out the cardinal "revolution" of consciousness, and the "religious front" (according to the "main atheist" of the country, the permanent chairman of the Union of Militant Atheists" (1925–1943) and the Anti-Religious Commission of RCP - AUCP Emelyan Yaroslavsky (1922–1928)) was supposed to be the war zone. Religion as a belief system contradicted the materialistic basis of communism. Besides, the role of any confessional institution as the "ruler of thoughts" was extremely undesirable for the young Bolshevik power, which claimed to be the absolute power in society. Freedom of religion declared by the Constitution of 1918 did not exist actually: Bolsheviks struggled with the religious way of life, chasing the Russian Orthodox Church especially vehemently, which had openly condemned the October Revolution and the events that followed it. Among the legislative "anti-church" documents adopted during the first years of Soviet power, the Decree of People's Commissar Council on the separation of church from state and school (January 20 (February 2) 1918) was of particular importance. [Keller, S. \(1992\)](#)

The anti-religious campaign began to gain serious momentum at the beginning of the 1920-ies, but all this activity was mainly agitation and propaganda, often grotesque-satirical one ([Lebina, 2015](#)). The situation changes after the appearance of the resolution by the Politburo of the AUCP Central Committee "On measures to strengthen anti-religious work" (January 24, 1929), which fundamentally changed the anti-religious course of "militant atheism". Special attention was paid to the "anti-religious upbringing" of children, designed to replace the former "non-religious" upbringing and "take a more decisive course to overcome the elements of school neutrality towards religion". The resolution further pointed out the special role of the periodical press, especially newspapers and magazines, in "regular and deeper coverage of religion struggle issues" ([Adibekov, 2000](#)). This resolution expanded and legitimized state control and pressure on religion, regulated many aspects of confessional activity and marked a new, aggressive offensive stage in the struggle against religion and the church in the USSR.

In the Soviet propaganda of the late 1920-ies children were always positioned as actors, as the first order actors. Therefore, the development of the "right" vector in their activity was one of the priority tasks of ideological work. This undoubtedly concerned the issues of anti-religious education. At that the periodical press for children acted as one of the main tools for the development of new views and principles. Under these conditions, the newspaper "Pionerskaya Pravda" (the body of AULYCL Moscow Committee since 1925, and the Central and Moscow Committee of the Komsomol since 1927), focused on children and adolescents (10 - 14-year-old), acquired great importance.

METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Taking into account the main goal of the work - namely, the study of "Pionerskaya Pravda" newspaper informational

potential as the source on the history of the anti-religious campaign performed by the Soviet authorities during the second half of the 1920-ies, the main research methods were the frontal review of materials from all issues of this periodical during 1925-1929, the identification of publications relating to the subject under study, the classification of the identified texts, based on their genre and meaningful diversity and the analytical reading of texts with their subsequent interpretation. The method of comparative analysis of specific newspaper publications in order to clarify the specifics of each of the newspaper genres of the source, as well as the comprehensive analysis of issues in order to identify the increasing dynamics of anti-religious propaganda and agitation in "Pionerskaya Pravda" during the second half of the 1920-ies was absolutely necessary and widely demanded. [Drieu, C. \(2010\)](#)

The work also used the methods of historical psychology, in particular, child psychology, in order to identify specific ways of educational impact on target reading group among children.

RESULTS

"Pionerskaya Pravda" as an anti-religious mouthpiece of the Soviet power and the means of "godless" upbringing of the younger generation condemned and blamed the religious worldview since the very first issues of 1925. However, until 1929 such materials were satiric, but not malignant, and, although they were published quite often, they did not occupy the central place of the issue and were not printed on the front page ([Salnikova, 2017](#); [Balina, Vyugin, 2012](#); [Ivanova, 2017](#)). Anti-religious publications have become regular since the end of 1928. And since 1929 they have become almost the main ones in the newspaper and determined the publication nature in many respects.

The topic of the struggle with religion and church was discussed in each issue; many illustrations are given represented by drawings and caricatures. Front pages and spreads have used the publication of anti-religious materials, especially on the eve of various religious holidays, often Orthodox ones.

The article by Y. Yaroslavsky making the appeal to the All-Union gathering of pioneers dated August 10, 1929 can be considered as a program. It was written using multiple ideological clichés in a militant spirit: "Religion takes away the ability to fight from the proletariat, teaches humility and patience, sanctifies the existing inequality and the existing class structure; Religion also exists due to the backwardness of our economy and due to the fact that a peasant is still at the mercy of nature, that he did not conquer it" ([Shevchenko, 2009](#); [Kalkandjieva, 2014](#); [Villalobos, Márceles, & Ayala, 2013](#)). There is a special "super-sense" of the Soviet power here, bringing up the new man, replacing the believer, the backward man, who is determined by false ideas about the world. The spheres of life are indicated for children where they must struggle — family and school, groups of "enemies" are listed: "... not only capitalist, banker, fascist, kulak and nepman, pop, rabbi, mullah, priest, your enemy is religion which prevents us from truly understanding of life" (ibid.). Finally, they cite the words that "a free man will rebuild his life in the way he needs and will create such orders that are needed by all mankind". Despite almost dead ideals of the world revolution and the turn towards totalitarianism, this "missionary" role of the Soviet proletariat is still replicated and offered to children.

Technocratic tendencies can be traced in the semantic bundle of the absurdity of faith in God against the background of scientific knowledge and the fight with religion: "Natural science lessons are dry, students sleep and flies die, natural science is ashamed to be a fly-agaric, it must become the tool of God's death!"; "Let each opened frog agitates against priest and old woman's tales", January 24, 1929. This context includes the articles about the role of planetarium in religious prejudice debunking, about imaginary "miracles" ("End of miracles - figure it out by yourself"), about the weeks of technical creativity ("Airplane against angels") ([Etcuban, & Pantinople, 2018](#)), exposing articles, like "Christ never existed" telling that the Christian tradition is only the continuation of the barbaric pagan one when man was governed by the fear of nature and belief in supernatural. A new man does not subjugate, but conquers nature, he becomes some sort of demiurge from communism. The transformation of a traditional bookseller as a middle-aged woman with religious literature, into the figure of a pioneer who brings scholarly works to villages. They recommend the lists of books for distribution. There are frequent publications advocating an insistent civil position in relation to religious buildings: "The church into a club", "Bells to factories", "The bath is in the synagogue", "Close the chapel" when schoolchildren organize a campaign to collect signatures for building transfer to public use, for leisure or organizational purposes, thus expanding the Soviet space for children ([Shatilova, Borisova, & Kasatkina, 2018](#)).

They discuss the activities of not only the Russian Orthodox Church, but also the activities of other religions: the reduction of mosque visitors and turning of madrasas into secular schools in Uzbekistan, dubious information about the killing of Dagestan children by religious fanatics for spitting into the moon reflection ("the creation of Allah") in a puddle the struggle of the Tatar pioneers for the introduction of the Latin alphabet, using the example of the Turkestan guys who have mastered the Latin alphabet. The difference in speed and effectiveness of such training compared with mullah children who "did not know anything except prayer in 3-4 years". A small fraction of the gender issue was added here, quite acute on the national outskirts: "Do not allow offending women who took off the veil. Announce the campaign against the burqa in your families"; "Fight for joint training of boys and girls!" ([Muyambiri, & Chabaefe, 2018](#)) Religion was presented as a strong social brake in all respects.

The most intense "godless" publications happen before religious holidays - Christmas and Easter. Thus, Easter is associated with gluttony and mass drunkenness, domestic violence and absenteeism at work. They proposed to replace

Sundays as a day off with Wednesday or Friday and reform the Soviet holiday calendar. International Child Week was established instead of Easter ([Ismail, Sabran, & Mohamed Ariffin, 2017](#)).

Special attention is given to a large complex of caricatures, drawings, and photographs. Almost every visual material was accompanied by a poetic text in the rhythm of a cheerful child chant of satirical orientation: "Lord! Hear the sobbing, crying voice of grief! The atheist left us more than once without attention. Take measures quickly, god the son and God the father, so that the congress and the pioneer will also be remembered at last." The main characters of the caricatures were priests and pioneers, less often kulaks, "foreign imperialists" and the representatives of other religions. A priest was usually depicted in the process of malevolent observation of his activity results; he was like a demon, insignificant and very dangerous at the same time. The priest was often with kulak making "country couple".

The children acted as the victims of their own stupidity and priestly cunning: "The enemy takes the guys to work. He took fools in the company. He turns them this way and that way. He turned them into puppets". Often religious families became the heroes of caricatures. During the pre-Easter period they published the images of drunkenness and beatings.

Photographs as documentary evidence were usually placed alongside the materials about science and scientific circles, rarely as the evidence of atheism, for example, a chapel turning into a kiosk, "where newspapers and magazines are sold nicely" or the churches into a Physical Education Institution ([Carreto, Gêgo, & Figueiredo, 2018](#)).

DISCUSSIONS

The periodical press of the first Soviet decades for children has recently attracted the increasing attention of researchers, however, the issues of anti-religious propaganda have not yet become the subject of special study in the Soviet publications for children during the 1920-ies. At the same time, a number of special works are devoted to the issues of anti-religious upbringing of children during the period under study. They consider the problems of child "godless" public organization creation and functioning, as well as the results of anti-religious propaganda among children and its influence on child outlook and world view. [Keller, S. \(1992\)](#)

During 1920-ies some stories related to anti-religious child education were reflected in more general works devoted to the study of Soviet everyday practices, the reform of the Soviet holiday calendar, and the Soviet power anti-religious campaigns of the 1920-ies, as well as in the studies devoted to "child" urban space reforming by religious urban landscape change.

SUMMARY

The analysis of materials published in "Pionerskaya Pravda" newspaper (1929) - actually the main Soviet social and political publication for children throughout its entire existence (1925-1991), which clearly declared and actively promoted power educational strategies and tactics in whole Soviet space, allowed to identify and determine the methods and the means used by the Soviet government in the process of anti-religious education of the younger generation. Let's note that anti-religious propaganda was organized on the pages of this publication very competently and consistently, the ideas and initiatives were bright, attractively designed and sonorous, and the published materials were accessible, understandable and entertaining for child target audiences. Attention is attracted by the genre variety of the published material and the frequent predominance of visual materials (photographs, drawings, and especially caricatures) over verbal sources. Such a visual series largely shaped the critical vision within the framework of a new social paradigm. Caricature taught to laugh at the backward and not to be afraid of the unknown.

The frontal review of all newspaper issues, beginning with the first ones, published in 1925, and up to 1929 - the year of the "great breakthrough" in Soviet anti-religious propaganda and authoritative anti-religious policy - showed that the anti-religious campaign, in which children were not only the objects of influence but also active fighters, became popular in the second half of the 1920-ies. It was complex and intense, and the criticism of religion and the church was cruel and merciless. The Soviet power formed and accumulated "child" capital purposefully from the adherents of the communist idea, not burdened with religious prejudices and carrying the banner of a new utopian faith high into a bright communist tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

For the first time this article considers "Pionerskaya Pravda" not only as a direct and rich source of information on the anti-religious education of Soviet children and adolescents during the second half of the 1920-ies, but also as an important tool of cultural and educational policies and educational propaganda carried out by the Soviet power among children and teenagers. Obviously, the developed educational policy was not just a one-sided process of anti-religious norm, idea and value distribution, but also took into account the needs and interests of children, including reading ones, as much as possible. This approach proved to be effective, and in the early 1930-ies the Soviet government managed to form a new reading audience among children, thinking and speaking in a new - anti-religious - language of communist ideologues.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article materials can be used to teach the history of Russia during the Soviet period, the history of religion, the history of childhood, as well as the history and the source study of the USSR periodicals.

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