



**“Pionerskaia pravda”
newspaper in the 1920s –
early 1930s as a new soviet
childhood constructor**

“PIONERSKAIA PRAVDA” NEWSPAPER IN THE 1920S – EARLY 1930S AS A NEW SOVIET CHILDHOOD CONSTRUCTOR

“PIONERSKAIA PRAVDA” PERIÓDICO EN LA DÉCADA DE 1920 - PRINCIPIOS DE 1930 COMO UN NUEVO CONSTRUCTOR DE LA INFANCIA SOVIÉTICA

ABSTRACT

The relevance of this problem lies in the necessity of deep, consistent and comprehensive study of the history of the Soviet childhood as an integral and almost the main part of an ambitious Soviet project to construct a “new Soviet man”. The object of our study is the newspaper “Pionerskaia Pravda” (“The Pioneer Truth”) (1925-1991), which began to form purposefully the image of an “ideal” Soviet child – young pioneer as an adherent and translator of a new Soviet ideology already from the first years of its existence. The applied research methods have been the method of hermeneutic reading and comprehensive analysis of various genres of the newspaper texts and the method of their comparative analysis. The results of study are the characteristics of the information opportunities of such an unexplored type of the historical sources, as the Soviet children’s periodicals. It is proved that the requirements for an “ideal” Soviet child was little different from the requirements for older generations that led eventually to the loss and neglect of children’s “childishness”. The article may be used for teaching socio-cultural history of Russia, history of childhood and school in the USSR, history of everyday life, and in the source studies of the media, particularly periodicals.

KEYWORDS: history, childhood, Soviet children’s / youth periodicals, “Pionerskaia Pravda” / “The Pioneer Truth”, young pioneers, USSR, the 1920s – early 1930s.

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RESUMEN

La relevancia de este problema radica en la necesidad de un estudio profundo, consistente y completo de la historia de la infancia soviética como una parte integral y casi la parte principal de un ambicioso proyecto soviético para construir un “nuevo hombre soviético”. El objeto de nuestro estudio es el periódico “Pionerskaia Pravda” (“La verdad pionera”) (1925-1991), que comenzó a formar a propósito la imagen de un niño soviético “ideal” - joven pionero como adherente y traductor de un nuevo La ideología soviética ya desde los primeros años de su existencia. Los métodos de investigación aplicada han sido el método de lectura hermenéutica y el análisis exhaustivo de varios géneros de los textos periodísticos y el método de su análisis comparativo. Los resultados del estudio son las características de las oportunidades de información de un tipo tan inexplorado de fuentes históricas, como los periódicos infantiles soviéticos. Está demostrado que los requisitos para un niño soviético “ideal” eran un poco diferentes de los requisitos para las generaciones anteriores que eventualmente llevaron a la pérdida y el descuido del “infantilismo” de los niños. El artículo puede ser utilizado para la enseñanza de la historia sociocultural de Rusia, la historia de la infancia y la escuela en la URSS, la historia de la vida cotidiana, y en los estudios fuente de los medios de comunicación, en particular las publicaciones periódicas.

PALABRAS CLAVE: historia, infancia, periódicos soviéticos para niños / jóvenes, “Pionerskaia Pravda” / “La verdad pionera”, jóvenes pioneros, URSS, la década de 1920 - principios de 1930.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Among the numerous and quite diverse of sources on the history of childhood there is a special group of texts targeted on the children's audience. The peculiarity of the author's focus audience determines other classification characteristics of the sources of this group and, ultimately, the particularity of the textual representation of childhood as a special social and cultural phenomenon. Naturally, within a given group of texts, it is possible to find different types of narratives, with their genetically inherent characteristics, adapted, however, to children's perception. A special place among them belongs to the children's periodicals, always containing the images of normative (or at least ideal) childhood (Xiangyi et al., 2016) In this regard, the Soviet children's periodicals arouse extraordinary interest, training the young readers to think and to act in the "Soviet-style" manner, forcing to perfect their own behavioral norms and practices according to the "ideal" Soviet norms laid down on the pages of the Soviet mass children's publications. So such kind of publications is extremely useful and productive in studying of the Soviet power strategies and tactics in upbringing sphere including the period of the "early Stalinism", that is the second half of the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s [Marina Balina, 2008 and Zhakipbekova, 2018) Let us take an example of one of the most popular and long-unreleased Soviet children's periodicals – the newspaper "Pionerskaya Pravda" ("The Pioneer Truth"), which began its history in 1925 as a weekly organ of the Moscow Committee of the RLKSM (the Russian Leninist Young Communist League). In 1927, it acquired the status of the all-Russian publication as a joint press organ of the Central and Moscow committees of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League and was published in the political-ideological format until August 1991 [V.A. Sulemov (ed.), 1983] (since 1991 "Pionerskaia Pravda" changed the old format and

is published now as non-politicized illustrated periodical for children and adolescents). The materials published in "Pionerskaia Pravda" in the early years of the newspaper – up to 1931, when as the result of the Soviet educational reforms quite fast "solidification" [Vladimir Paperny, 2002] of the entire Soviet educational and upbringing system started, reflect a complicated process of formation of the image of the "ideal" Soviet childhood and the indoctrination of it in the children's and teenagers' minds, taking into account that the pioneer age in this period was 10 to 14 years.

2. METHODS

Considering that the research of "Pionerskaia Pravda" and the other Soviet children's periodicals is insufficient it is very important to use traditional and modern methods of hermeneutic reading, transcription and verification of such a kind of historical sources with the aim to obtain a complete and representative information on the history of the Soviet childhood. Special attention should be given to the development and application of methods of the different newspaper genres analyzing – microtexts as the components of a single newspaper macrotext. Specific methodology should be used to the sources of personal origin created by the children themselves (for example, texts of the young pioneer correspondents), keeping in mind the specifics of authorship. Specificity of source material requires the method of the comparative analysis. Because the topic is practically undeveloped in the modern source studies, it will be productive to extrapolate some of the methodological approaches used in the adults' periodical analysis to the children's periodical one.

Methods used in such advanced area of modern humanities, as the history of childhood will help to explain and understand the complex political, social and cultural processes that occurred in Soviet Russia in the whole.

3. RESULTS

The events and processes unfolding in the Soviet Union in the second half of the 1920s – early 1930s demanded from the child entirely non-childish behavior and high levels of "consciousness". The propaganda machine of

the Soviet state used the propagandistic potential of the children's and youth periodicals widely and skillfully, saturating it with the perfect images of the young, strong and brave and persistently introducing into the mass consciousness the idea of absolute leadership of the young generation in the building of a new Communist society. It was required from the child to participate actively in the transformation of social space: "Communism will not fall from the sky – it needs to be built with our own hands" [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 24.05.1925, 12].

The young Leninist was supposed to be a carrier and translator of the new Soviet values as a propagandist at school and at home, in the city and in the countryside, among the older and the younger: the young Leninists were those who "organize, collect, align, and embed children and young people, adults, workers and peasants so as to provide the greatest victory of the proletarian revolution" [Ibid.] As one of the main objects of re-education, it was assumed the parents of the pioneer. In one of the first issues of the newspaper the program of such "re-education" was published: young pioneer had to make parents "more politically conscious and interested in current events"; "to make the house clean"; "to change the attitude of parents to the pioneers, talking about the pioneer unit, reading pioneer journals and newspapers"; "to facilitate mother's homework, to give her more free time for reading and club"; "to campaign for a public canteen, nursery, library". It was recommended to decorate the house with revolutionary slogans and portraits; "to deal with religion" [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 12.04.1925, 6].

According to the proclaimed in 1925 course on non-religious education of both children and adults, the newspaper urged the pioneers not to argue with their parents, not to swear, "less to mock, more to use science" [Ibid]. Anti-religious attitude was often accompanied by protests against the assault presented as a consequence of the forced imposition of faith in the family, when grandmothers and mothers beat the pioneers for the abandonment of prayers or religious rites [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 06.03.1927, 10]. The newspaper clearly postulated that religion equals violence. "Pionerskaia Pravda" has published various entertaining stories, which vividly and clearly demonstrated the absur-

dity of the existence of religion and its paraphernalia. The story «God and Grushka», for example, told that the appealing to God did not help the girl, and her disappointment was demonstrated through material, substantial: «I climbed onto the table, touched the icon, it is the board. Scratched with a fingernail – paint is rubbed. Looked in the corner behind the icon, there were dust and cobwebs" [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 01.01.1927, 1].

The pioneers had to extend the Soviet system of values not only in the family but also among other groups of children such as the Octobrists ("October children"), the so-called "unorganized" children and the children of "non-proletarian origin". The younger ones had to remember a few truths. Firstly, the Octobrist had to be strong and healthy; secondly, he had to be organized and love the collective activities because it is thanks to solidarity workers and peasants "succeeded" in the revolutionary struggle; thirdly, it was necessary to banish a fear of the "non-existent evil force" and God-being from the kids, they had to check everything and do not be afraid of anything.

A special group among the "unorganized" who did not join public organizations were homeless children [Dorena Caroli, 2010]. Discussions and meetings, campaigns for subscriptions to "Pionerskaya Pravda" and other social-political children's periodicals were arranged for them [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 19.02.1926, 8]. For work that is more intensive a new form of activity was introduced called "outposts". As the name suggests, they have to be at the forefront of all the work of the pioneer units. For example, according to the statement of one of the children's correspondents, "the canteen will be the most convenient place to organize the street children" [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 18.08.1925, 24]. This was the way to attach hungry and often mentally traumatized children and adolescents to Communist ideals.

Another group to be re-educated were the children of "non-proletarian origin". Interestingly that among the many overtly aggressive and irreconcilable texts in the rubric "Answers of Counselor" we suddenly find the text, which is in sharp contrast with the general rhetoric and vocabulary content of the newspaper. The answer to the question "Could non-proletarian children be the

members of the pioneer organization?” was the following: “Our task is to re-educate all children in the spirit of communism” [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 12.01.1929, 6].

However, the reality was different – the last two categories of children were rarely became the members of pioneer units and did not take part in active public life [6] despite numerous publications on the situation in orphanages and labor houses (trudovye doma).

Internationalism has become one of the key points of power policy in the sphere of childhood. Therefore, the external contacts had to be an another strategically important direction of the pioneers’ activities. The USSR positioned itself as a driving force and an example to all international children’s Communist organizations when the dream of the world revolution was presented as a probable future. In July 1930, an international meeting of pioneers was held in the city of Halle, Germany. The local authorities did not let the Soviet delegation to take part in it. It only strengthened the ideological positions of the Soviet state in the sphere of children’s Communist movement: we are not allowed to come, so they are afraid of us, therefore, we are strong.

The Soviet propaganda presented the child as a fighter, leading a constant struggle against imperialism. This child was never a pacifist. An article «Is Gandhi a Revolutionary?» confirmed it, in particular [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 14.01.1930, T.M. Smirnova, “In Its Origin No One is Guilty...?” 2003]. The authors of the article condemned the main slogan of the Indian leader of the movement for the independence of his country – “non-resistance to evil by violence” – furiously and contemptuously, as a call to cooperate with the exploiters.

However, along with foreign policy problems, Soviet pioneer had many tasks on the domestic front. The Soviet government proclaimed the policy of collectivization of agriculture. The media also massively supported accelerated industrialization of the industry. A rural school was to train future organizers of collective farms and “plowmen of the Five-Year plan” (“Lands for schools, agro-laboratories as the classrooms, agro-textbooks for the pupils!” [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 12.10.1929, 24]. The school itself had become a power station, an assistant and a stronghold

in the agronomical work. This implied obligatory work at the school area and in the laboratory, the development of agricultural methods and techniques and promoting them among the peasants. The same strategies were offered for upbringing of the future highly qualified workers [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 22.08.1928, 67].

During the ongoing radical socio-economic transformations, the pioneers have got a new internal enemy – the children of the “deprived of electoral rights” (“lishentsy”). What to do with these children and how to treat them? The whole newspaper issue dated by June 9, 1928, was dedicated to these questions, using an example of the Kaluga province’s Ugod school. The current school situation was characterized as follows: “Under the protection of the “old” teachers the children of “lishentsy” opposed themselves to the Komsomol and the pioneer organizations; one third of the Ugodsky school pupils are the children of the priests, kulaks (wealthy farmers who used hired labor – A.S., K.K.) and former manufacturers; teachers circulated among the children discontent against the Soviet power, which led to the open hostility to the young Communist League and the children of the poor” [The Pioneer Truth, 1925–1930., 09.01.1930, 4]. The newspaper pointed to the inadmissibility of participation of the kulaks in self-government and in the election commissions.

4. DISCUSSION

The process of “academization” and active development of the children’s studies as a specific trend in the Soviet historiography became possible only after the collapse of the USSR when the so-called “cognitive turns” in the Western historiography began to influence it in full measure. In the 1990s, research interest was directed primarily on the analysis of the Soviet childhood in the 1920s – 1930s and concretely on functioning of the Soviet state in this sphere [S.V. Zhuravlev, A.K. Sokolov, 1998]. The children’s world itself was poorly studied. In the 2000s and later on it is possible to find cultural and anthropological approaches in Russian and Western Soviet children’s studies with the special attention to the problems of the children’s everyday life during the first decades of the Soviet rule [Catriona Kelly, 2007;T.M. Smirnova, 2015;Loraine de la Fe, 2013]. However, children’s periodicals used sometimes as the carriers of informa-

tion were not studied specifically. The only exception are the works of Natalia Rodigina devoted to the pre-revolutionary Russian children's journal "Zadushevnoe slovo" ("The Sincere Word") [N.N. Rodigina, 2017]. During the last years some attempts were made to explore the sociocultural history of the Soviet childhood in the late 1920 – early 1930s basing on Soviet periodicals, children's ones including [A.A. Salnikova, Zh.A. Khamitova, 2015]. In general, this problem still awaits its solution.

5. SUMMARY

Analyzing the texts published in the main Soviet children's newspaper "Pionerskaia Pravda" in the second half of the 1920s – early 1930s it is possible to identify the key characteristics of an "ideal" Soviet child – a young pioneer, whose image was purposefully and persistently created on its pages. He is a builder of a new world, a propagandist and an internationalist, promoting advanced Communist ideas in the family, at school, to broad masses, and even abroad. He is a young organizer and participant of the modernization of agricultural production, a leader, *peredovik*. He is a future qualified worker, personnel fund for socialist industrialization. He is a tireless and fearless fighter with the enemies of socialism inside and outside the country. In the whole it is obvious that the image of the "ideal" child is almost fully repeated the image of the "ideal" adult. The children were charged the same requirements as the representatives of older generations, ignoring children's "childishness" and almost leaving no room for a carefree pastime. This situation continued until the mid-1930s, when the Soviet government understood, finally, the intrinsic value of childhood as a special period of life of the Soviet man and began to realize the concept of "happy Soviet childhood" in all its forms and contents.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This article is going to be a first attempt to study the informational resources of the main Soviet children's periodical "Pionerskaia Pravda" as an important historical source on the history of Soviet childhood. As the other periodicals, it consists of the texts of the different genres. Taking in sum, they

allow studying all the principal directions in the Soviet state policy in children's education and upbringing. The study proves the viability and the prospects of further research of the history of the Soviet childhood as an integral part of the political and socio-cultural history of the Soviet state, especially in the 1920s – 1930s, when the fundamental principles of the Soviet regime were formed and set.

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