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(NOT)FORGETTABLE HISTORY OF VLADIMIR LENIN ALL-UNION PIONEER ORGANIZATION

Abstract

The article focuses on the research on the most massive children's organisation of the 20th century, i.e., Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization, and its activities. The period of soviet pedagogy has been most actively investigated by Russian scientists, who have analysed its various phenomena, including pioneer activities, not only from historical but also from anthropological, sociological, educational, literary and other perspectives. However, the scientific discourse on the soviet pedagogy issues is relatively stagnant in the Baltic States and in Lithuania in particular. The soviet history is considered to be too 'fresh', 'painful', whereas the pioneer organisation, as one of the cogs of communist propaganda, does not deserve any attention of researchers. Attempts are made to compensate the deficit of theoretical discourse by the data of empiric research.

Introduction

Young Pioneer Organization, also Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization was the most mass communist organisation for 10-15 year old children in the 20th century. It is said to have been born 19 May 1922. On that day the resolution on establishment of the organisation for the children of proletarians was adopted in the Congress of the Russian Union of the Communist Youth. It was decided that this organisation shall be formed on class-based (proletarian) foundation, whereas the main method of activity organisation shall be 'reorganized scouting' (Мальцева, 2006). The main symbols, rituals and activity forms were borrowed from scouts, though all this was slightly 'reorganised'. The green scout's neck tie was replaced by a red one, the three lily petals in the scout's badger were changed into three flames of the bonfire. Similar division into detachments, principle of play-based activities organisation, romanticisation of activities, young pioneers' rallies around the bonfires, jamborees similar to scouts and other rituals remained. Even the scouts' motto '*Be Prepared*' and the response to it '*Always prepared!*' were used and only later they were detailed.

However, a big number of elements of pioneers' and scouts' organisations look similar only at first sight. Penetrating deeper into the activity of these organisations, obvious differences may be observed. The most considerable difference may be identified comparing goals of these organisations. The scouts' organisation focuses on common human values: help to the weaker, love of the Motherland and environmental protection, whereas pioneers emphasise the class struggle. Comparing the texts of regulations of scouts and pioneers it is revealed that the regulations of scouts contain personal qualities that have to be acquired. On the other hand, the regulations of pioneers lack dynamics. The pioneer has to meet the ideal. An ideally educated pioneer is ready for everything: even to die if the party asks for it (Леонтьева, 2007). The soviet propaganda used an image of pioneer-hero as a prototype of an ideal pioneer. This image was being created employing both life

stories of children, who really existed and various propaganda tricks. The examples of heroism were also illustrated employing artistic means as well: music, fine arts, photography, films, literature and others.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991), the pioneer organisations met different fate in separate soviet republics. In some countries (e.g., in Russia, Byelorussia) pioneers' activities were continued, whereas in other former soviet republics pioneer organisations ceased to exist (e.g., in Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia).

For a long period of time educators and educational scientists in the Baltic republics have avoided looking back to the soviet experience. It has been gradually understood that forgetting some fragments of the near past is not an advantage because soviet heritage (or/and collective behaviour) appears to be more vital than expected. A. Trimakienė (2007), who is encouraging researches on soviet pedagogy, points out that timely and self-critical reaction would have been much more effective than silent push or oblivion. However, the scientific discourse on the soviet pedagogy issues is relatively stagnant. The analysis of spare publications of researchers about the soviet period would probably create an impression that pioneer organisations as well as other achievements or failures of soviet pedagogy have never been observed in the Baltic States.

However, the soviet period has been a part of the history in the Baltic States, i.e., the part of it which is remembered again and again. This reference is of varied nature: sometimes it contains pain and sometimes nostalgia may be clearly noticed. On the other hand, a big number of people perceive this not as '*plain*' history but as years of their childhood. Therefore their belonging to pioneer organisation at that time may be evaluated from different perspectives.

Therefore, one of the objectives of the article is to provide a short overview of how researchers from foreign countries evaluate activities of pioneer organisations. An attempt will be made to analyse remembrances of Lithuanian people who were born and grew up in the soviet period about pioneer activities in their childhood. This objective will be attained employing the data of the research started in 2013 employing the method of qualitative unstructured interview.

Young Pioneer Organization - an organizations for children, 'a monster of Communist propaganda' or 'a bureau for collection of scrap-iron and scrap paper'?

Analysing pioneer activity, the focus is mainly laid on the works by Russian scientists, who extensively analysed this children's organisation. Some of these studies, typical products of soviet period such as 'Theory and Methods of Pioneer Work' are perceived as 'an aggregate of generalised, interrelated and reliable knowledge of pioneer organisations and its activity' (Мальцева, 2006). Since pioneer origination and school fully merged in 60s–70s of the 20th century, in soviet pedagogy 'pioneer problems' were frequently ascribed to various pedagogical problems encountered by 9 (10) – 15 year old children.

The majority of post-soviet Russian authors (representatives of pedagogy science) express a moderate attitude towards the pioneer organisation. Some of them present the pioneer organisation as one of the most important institutions of pedagogical system in 30s–90s of the 20th century, which contributed to upbringing of a soviet individual as 'a builder of communism' enormously, while the others

(culture anthropologists, literature scientists, sociologists, etc.) carried out researches on pioneerism as a specific socio-cultural phenomenon of the 20th century. The later express a more critical attitude towards this organisation. Analysing the activity of pioneers in the context of other children movements that emerged after the crash of the soviet system, the biggest emphasis is laid on differences in the pioneer organisation, the researchers show a transit from impregnable 'monolith' to a broad variety of separate children organisations, from one ideological focus to a variety of goals and objectives, from orientation only to the collective (troop, brigade) to communication between the collective and an individual, from obligatory involvement to voluntary participation, from governmental control to self-government, from rigidity to flexibility and others (Попович, 2008). However, according to M. I. Rozkov (Рожков, 2007), one of the main differences between the pioneer organisation and other children organisation is that the latter ones are not '*organizations for children*' but '*children organisations*' and are established following not only ideological goals but mainly interests of children. On the other hand, the pioneer organisation declared 'pursuance of high communism ideals', though these ideals were hardly reflected at subjective level (Мальцева, 2006: 117-118). Being particularly 'high', these goals were very distant to children and neither provided them with a choice, nor stimulated their individual and social activity. Though social activity of adolescents was particularly propagated (this was characteristic of 70s-80s of the 20th century (Фарафонова, 2000)), the researches conducted during the soviet period revealed that children's perception of the social values (such as patriotism, internationalism, diligence, etc.) that were encoded not only in the resolutions of the Communist party but also in the Statute of Pioneers was not comprehensive and lacked depth and, moreover, this perception did not find any reflection in daily activity (Мальцева, 2006: 188). Orientation to large-scale campaigns (events, programmes, etc. at national level) did not bring expected results and children were just observers and listeners as well as passive 'mass movement units' (ibid: 163). The mechanism of compulsion and obedience resulted in formation of conformists (ibid: 192). The pioneer organisation was identified as an organisation 'controlled by educators' as well as an 'organisation controlling children'. The individuals, who did not obey the control and did not meet the required standard, i.e., 'behaved in an inappropriate way', were expelled from the organisation. The analysis of separate cases showed that the reasons for expulsion sometimes were absurd (Безпоров, 2010: 56).

At the sunset of the Soviet Union some scandalous works were published, where the organisation of pioneers was showed as an ideologised formation of the soviet propaganda compared even to the Hitlerjugend organisation or mockingly presented as 'bureau for collection of scrap-iron and scrap paper' (Северин, Кудинов, 1990). The book *Informer 001. The Myth of Pavlik Morozov* by Y. Druzhnikov (1995) about the most famous pioneer Pavlik Morozov attracted considerable attention not only in Russia but also abroad. Y. Druzhnikov doubted not only Pavlik's heroism but also the fact that he had ever been a pioneer. His book was met as defamatory or even blasphemous by a big number of members of the Russian society (for example, Бушин, 1998; Кононенко, 2003). And the version that Pavlik Morozov was murdered not by his relatives but by the squad of OGPU

(Unified State Political Administration) caused the wave of indignation in Russia's state institutions.

The life and death of Pavlik Morozov received a considerable attention from foreign researchers as well. In her book *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (2005) C. Kelly doubted the reliability of information presented by Y. Druzhnikov. Responding to that, the author of *Informer 001* accused the Oxford professor of plagiarism and subservience to the Committee for State Security (Дружников, 2005). Analysing stories about P. Morozov as well as those about other pioneers, various Western authors emphasise that such stories are frequently predetermined not only by particular behaviour of children but more by interpretations of adults that are under influence of ideologies and propaganda mechanisms. For example, the American researcher J. K. DeGraffenried (2009), who analysed pioneer stories in the context of World War II, notices that military and pioneer narratives differ. The research conducted by another American researcher M. E. Peacock (2008) analysed how the propaganda mechanism operated not only in the Soviet Union but also in the Western world.

The examples of the overviewed researches show that it is complicated to present a unified picture of the pioneer organisation: images are different approaching pioneers through the prism of political history or analysing the organisation in the light micro-history or daily history, culture anthropology and other sciences. Different emphases are laid highlighting educational rather than ideological aspects. According to S. Leontjeva (2007), the most holistic view may be formed following inductive principle, i.e., going from separate cases to the aggregate image. The outcome is different analysing belonging to pioneer organisation as a certain collective experience and describing experience of children, who saw pioneer organisation not as 'a totalitarian monster' but rather a community, where they spent their childhood peacefully, free from serious conflicts or hesitations.

What did it mean to be a pioneer in Lithuania?

In Lithuania illegal and barely legal pioneer (Spartak) groups were formed in 1923. The pioneer organisation was legalised during the first period of soviet occupation (1940-1941), whereas its growth in Lithuania accelerated after World War II. In 1960s to 1980s pioneer participation in the pioneer organizations became formal, as most of the pupils age 10 to 15 became its members. The informants of the research stated: 'We all were pioneers'. Only children of dissentients or the ones from extremely religious families would remain outside pioneer organisations. Despite prosecution, active elimination of 'religious prejudices', religiosity of families and activities of the Catholic Church were the main reason, which prevented attainment of hundred-percent membership of Lithuanian children and youth in Communistic organisations.

However, the informants remembered only very few cases, when classmates were not members of pioneer organisation:

Some parents who were stronger believers did not let their children join the organisation. (Woman, 1949);

We had only one girl who was not a pioneer in our class. She was from exiles' family. A group of us visited her home to ask her mum to let her be a pioneer. But she didn't. (Woman, 1947).

Taking into account the fact that the pioneer organisation as well as school were fully converged, the life of children, who did not belong to this organisation, was not very easy:

So, she [the girl, who was not a pioneer] was virtually an outcast. Because we all felt that we all belonged to a group. There was a sense of collectivism. Nearly like some sort of musketeers: 'All for one, and one for all'. (Woman, 1947);

Children did not push away. Only some teachers did. One teacher called the pupils who were not pioneers a circle of prudes. But nevertheless such child was excluded. They did not take part in the events, school celebrations, excursions. They were already different. And children want to stay all together, don't they. (Woman, 1949).

Thus, one of the main stimuli to become a pioneer was 'not stand out from others at school' (Woman, 1949). In fact, officially it was announced that only the best children deserved to be pioneers and that it was 'some sort of honour' (Man, 1950), however, the ones, who believed in this, became disillusioned very fast:

It was a question of status, promotion to a higher level. All my classmates were Little Octobrists, while Gintarė and I became pioneers, since we were born in 1971, while all the others in 1972. I always was of petite physique, short, therefore becoming a pioneer as if added some 'weight' to me - I was no longer a midget. <...> But more than that I wanted to become a Komsomolet, because I was bored to death of being a pioneer, I was sick of all that rubbish, like meetings, lines. (Man, 1971).

A big number of the informants pointed out that being a pioneer 'meant nothing, absolutely nothing'. According to one of them:

If it meant anything, I would remember, wouldn't I. One day those pioneer's neckties came from somewhere and we all were rushed to join the organisation. (Woman, 1951).

Namely the red necktie was pointed out by the informants as the main indication of belonging to the organisation. It did not only decorate a boring school uniform (this fact was mentioned by all the female informants) and evidenced being a pioneer but also obligated and disciplined:

Necktie was some kind of disciplinary thing as well. If you wear a necktie, it means you are a pioneer and must behave. (Man, 1950).

On the other hand, there were informants, who pointed out that 'necktie on your neck hardly meant anything':

We just had to wear it. You could not be without it. If you come to school without it, teacher would ask you immediately, why you forgot it. You got

fed up of it, you would think why on Earth I need this burden on my shoulders. You had to wear a necktie, while you were not allowed to have a sacred medal on your neck. Teachers would rip it off your neck. They even checked under the uniform. But we still wore both, necktie and sacred medal. Because everyone did that. (Woman, 1949).

This episode clearly demonstrates a certain antithesis between ideologies (communist and Christian) and their symbols (red necktie and saint medallion). However, refusal to wear a necktie, or calling it ‘*a herring*’ or ‘*red snot*’ (Woman, 1974) was more frequently an adolescent revolt against moralising and controlling adolescents rather than against the soviet ideology. When asked about the latter, the informants would frequently answer: ‘*What ideology are you talking about?*’ However, their further stories showed that the fingers of ideology and propaganda were rather sticky. This could have been hardly noticeable in daily life, where behavioural bilingualism prevailed, i.e. the difference between private and official self-expression (Stonkuvienė, Tilk, Kestere, 2013: 119).

Both, the analysed scientific publications as well as presented episodes from the interviews enable the author to reveal the multiple dimension and contradictoriness of the organisation as well as the period, when the pioneer organisations flourished. It is hardly surprising that evaluations are also different, quite contradicting and range from admiration for ‘*exotica*’ to condemnation, repulsion or, what is even worse, conscious ignoring, from non-critical description of exclusively positive features to highlighting of absurd situations. On the other hand, a complete and clear picture of pioneer organisation is hardly possible taking into account not only a period of almost a hundred years of its existence but also a vast geographical territory. In fact, historical research is necessary next to a comparative analysis.

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