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CHURCH AND SCHOOL IN THE SIBERIAN VILLAGE IN THE 1920S

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Abstract

The article examines regional history of Siberia on the materials of the Kuitun rural settlement of Irkutsk province in the 1920s. It is about the relationship between government, church and school. After the October Revolution of 1917 The Soviet government began a large-scale struggle against the church, depriving it of its legal status and removing it from the education system. Anti-religious propaganda was initiated. Illiterate poor rural youth and the Komsomol took an active part in these events. They criticized centuries-old spiritual and moral foundations of peasant life. The Soviet government tried to restructure the system of public education. Literacy was encouraged. The poor part of the peasantry gained the preemptive right to education. The rural teaching staff changed. Their class consciousness and loyalty to the Soviet government were taken into account. In these circumstances, the peasants were negative towards anti-religious propaganda, and often condemned general actions against believers. On the other hand, the villagers supported measures aimed at eliminating illiteracy. The authorities did not take tough measures against the believers. This process was followed by mass collectivization.

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1. Introduction

In the revolutionary year of 1917, the idea of a "secular state" was supported by Russian society. The Provisional Government abolished the compulsory teaching of the Law of God and transferred the parish schools to the Ministry of Public Education. After October 1917, the Soviet government initiated a struggle for an "atheistic state". On January 20, 1918, the Sovnarkom approved the Decree on the Separation of the Church from the State and the School from the Church. The church lost the rights of a legal entity. The decree eliminated any interference in school life by the clergy (as cited in Krivova, 1997).

In the conditions of peaceful development of the country in the 1920s, a new stage of cultural construction began. It involved changing the consciousness and psychology of the peasantry in the socialist spirit (Kuznetsov, 1992). A small owner and individualist was put in new conditions. The authorities tried to eradicate the manifestations of peasant psychology and religious prejudices, to convince them of the expediency of collective farming, which was ensured by the struggle against the church and creation of a new school.

The study of the role of religion in the people's identity is an object of scientific interest of Russian and foreign researchers (Mikhailitsina, 2021). In the early 1920s, the model of anti-religious policies in Siberia was worked out on the example of the Russian Orthodox Church (Dameshek, 2012).

2. Problem Statement

The study aims to reflect stability of the religious worldview of peasants in the context of anti-religious measures taken by the authorities during the new economic era.

3. Research Questions

The process of implementation of the decree faced difficulties. The peasantry opposed the forcible "secularization" of their traditional way of life; people were against the breaking of unshakable patriarchal Orthodox foundations (Palamarchuk, 2000; Petrushin, 2017).

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to describe activities of the authorities in relation to the church and the process of creating a new system of public education in the rural area.

5. Research Methods

The present study is based on the information provided by the State Archives of Recent History of Irkutsk region for 1921-1928. The ideographic method was used to create a general picture of events, to describe the relations between the church, the government and the peasantry in the 1920s. The comparative method reflects the dynamics of development of relations between the church and the peasantry and the role of the government in this interaction.

6. Findings

In the 1920s, the government expanded anti-religious campaigns in villages of Kuitun Rural settlement. For example, in January 1928, Komsomol members from Kundui launched a "Christmas" campaign. From the standpoint of militant atheism, they tried to explain the nature of religious holidays to peasants, held loud readings of Marxist literature and special anti-religious evenings that ended with dances. They created sharp caricatures and offensive parodies of the church and believers. Many peasants were dissatisfied. The district committee of the party regularly received instructions on anti-religious campaigns. "It was necessary to expose the counter-revolutionary role of the church." To this end, it was proposed to create cells of militant atheists, as well as to create groups of logging brigades, groups of drummers for grain cleaning, etc. on Christmas days (State Archives of Modern History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, l. 1, c. 266, s. 99). Labor on church holidays was to demonstrate the extinction of religious prejudices in the village. But this process did not give a quick effect. In fact, it turned out that even in houses belonging to Communists, there were icons; churches continued to work, albeit in difficult conditions. In early 1922, the church responded to the request of the local authorities to "organize a committee to help the starving in the Volga region" (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), l. 1, c. 11, s. 22). In response, the county government in Tulun set up a special commission to confiscate church valuables to help the starving. By the mid-1920s, the Soviet authorities declared that church activities in Kuitun district were gradually coming to a standstill, but recommended to wait until the temples were closed (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), c. 70, s. 167, 111). As we know, this tragic time came in the 1930s and coincided with the beginning of collectivization.

The Kuitun district party committee acknowledged that in the 1920s there were two currents: for the new and old churches. Local authorities encouraged the split in the Orthodox Church that began in 1922. At that time, the renewal movement supported by the Soviet government was initiated. The Soviet government took anti-religious measures. The *Bezbozhnik* newspaper was sent to libraries and reading rooms of the district. In 1925 the Union of the Atheists was created. In 1929, it was transformed into the Union of militant atheists. In 1929 the Constitution of the USSR was amended to restrict religious activity. But the church and the faithful did not deviate from the faith of Christ. The authorities increased pressure on the church.

In the late 1920s, the church was closed in Buruk. It was planned to use its building as a club. However, the believers protected the temple. The church council of Buruk wrote a petition to Moscow about the unfair decision to close the temple. Surprisingly, the church was returned to the faithful, who joyfully exclaimed: "From now on we will stand for our church and fight to the last drop of blood" (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), c. 301, s. 5). The OGPU operative officer in Kuitun district monitored activities of the clergy and regularly sent political summaries to higher bodies. Thanks to the declassified materials of these summaries, we learned that in the late 1920s parishes and priests in the villages Alkin, Listvyanka, Barluk, 2nd and 3rd Stanitsa, and Harika were active. There was no priest in the Karazey and Tulyushka churches. There were

no priests in Buruk and Haihta. In the context of the militant anti-religious campaign, the clergy were afraid to go to remote villages. The clergy also experienced financial difficulties (lack of wages and rations).

This issue was current in Kuitun church community, numbering 1,500 people. The church elder was elected by the believers themselves, he was from Andryushino. On October 5, 1930 Priest Sidorov reported on the activities of Kuitun church community, its financial situation. The income of the community consisted of income from self-taxation of believers, sale of candles, and small donations. The priest was required to pay 60 rubles a month, 5 poods of bread and taxes. The community also maintained and paid salaries to the church elder and the psalmist. Even the church caretaker was given a salary of 20 rubles, 2 poods of bread and an apartment with heating. To maintain the temples, the community collected 50 kopecks of money and 10 pounds of bread (almost 5 kg) from each believer. To heat the church in Kuitun, community members were required to take out 1 cubic yard of firewood or pay 1 ruble in cash (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), c. 301, s. 4, 5). Thus, the churches were maintained at the expense of the community members themselves. With the deployment of collectivization, this system was destroyed.

In the aggravating social and political conditions, in the remote villages, a few sectarians tried to revive their activities. There was a small group of Baptists in Mingatui. A representative of the sect sometimes came from Irkutsk. The leader of the sectarians from Irkutsk organized a baptism ceremony in Novaya Kada. About 15 old men and women gathered at the mouth of the Oka River. The peasants watched what was happening with curiosity, gradually laughed, and called the participants fools. The peasants were much surprised by the Baptist leader, who was in the water hole for more than 20 minutes (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), c. 184, s. 10).

The mood of the rural youth and Komsomol members was manifested at meetings. Official reports indicated that the poor youth were fighting against the rich peasants. Only middle-class youth were dissatisfied. They were not allowed to attend the meetings, because the authorities were afraid of their opinions. Most of the middle-class youth were well-off, adhered to religious beliefs and occupied a neutral position. The district party committee demanded village activists to be involved in the socio-political life of the village, and to conduct more active anti-religious propaganda.

Komsomol members visited households, trying to make peasants to buy state bonds and pay taxes. The Komsomol cells of Barluka and Chebotarikha were at the forefront of these events. The Komsomol members bought bonds and distributed the state loans among the peasants. But there were also "unconscious Komsomol members." For example, the secretary of the Komsomol cell in An-Stanitsa refused to buy state bonds. When the secretary of the cell in Andryushino was demanded to pay the agricultural tax, he decided to leave the Komsomol organization. All these events did not find a particularly positive response from the villagers, who distrusted new activists. People did not have money. The positive attitude of peasants was caused only by the struggle of the Komsomol members against drunkenness, which increasingly disturbed rural society.

The party and the Soviet government tried to instill the class principle of educating the youth. This concerned both general education (schools for working and peasant youth) and higher education. In 1922, the Kuitun Executive Committee received a circular on the opening of the workers' department at Irkutsk

State University. Kuitun volost received one quote. It was said that party members and Komsomol members engaged in manual labor for at least a year and knowing the basics of literacy would be accepted.

In early 1926, to involve women in the Soviet government on the initiative of the district committee of the party, a congress of non-party peasants of the Kuitun volost was held. It was attended by 27 delegates and 15 guests. The meeting was chaired by Larina and Secretary Borkovskaya from Tulyushka. After hearing the main report, the women began to ask interesting questions: Is there a stratification in the village? The answer was yes. How can women be admitted to the Councils? The answer was to nominate your candidates at meetings. Why does the government produce vodka to increase drunkenness? The answer sounded more than strange: under the king there was more vodka, and it was cheaper. Apparently, the leaders of the district "forgot" that since 1914 the non-drunkenness law was introduced in Russia. The women acknowledged the greatest evil – illiteracy – and opposed the production of vodka. The resolution supported the proposal of the delegates from Barluk: to create a nursery - one of the centers of emancipation of peasant women in the village.

In the late 1920s, meetings of peasant women were held in Kuitun. 100-200 women gathered together. Issues of medicine and hygiene, reasonable entertainment of women were discussed there. Women complained about the most painful phenomenon in everyday life - beatings by husbands. The 1927-1928 summaries said that drunkenness was massive. Representatives of the district committee of the party, who visited the villages, reported on this sad phenomenon. For example, in 1927 on Trinity the district commissioner came to Tobino. He wrote that everyone in the village was drunk. People were lying under fences and shouting or singing. There were 11 moonshine machines in this small village (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of the Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, l. 1, c. 184, s. 6).

The problem of drunkenness was exacerbated in rural party cells. The minutes of party meetings reflect the ugly deeds of some communists in everyday life. The district party leadership tried to eradicate drunkenness and home brewing. The district authorities tried to legalize the sale of vodka in order to hit home brewing.

Interesting conclusions were recorded by the party commission following the results of the 1929 party meeting. The report said about a low political and educational level of the Communists, who knew nothing about the ideological discussions in the party. Criticism in the party cell was underdeveloped. At the meetings, people tried to criticize the communists. The most painful phenomena were drunkenness and playing cards. One of the communists lost loan bonds cards fabric for his pants. He was morally condemned by his party comrades (State Archives of Modern History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of the Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, c. 264, s. 26, 27). These vices were inherent in the daily life of peasants, shook the moral foundations of rural society. Their origins were rooted in the destroyed moral foundations and the communist ideology.

In the 1920s, a campaign for the cultural restructuring of peasant life was initiated. The concept of cultural revolution entered the socio-political life. It involved the cooperation of the peasantry, the transition to collective farming. The fight against illiteracy became a priority. Primary schools, especially teachers, literate communists and Komsomol members were to be the mainstay of this work. In the 1920s, there were 25 first-grade schools and one second-grade school. There were 4,662 school-age children, but only 1,554

children attended schools. There were not enough schools and teachers. In this situation, the way of saving the village school was support by the peasant population. It was proposed by the Kuitun district department of public education in 1922. They explained how to conclude a contract with peasant society to help schools. The peasants agreed to maintain schools, but required the introduction of the Law of God and other attributes of the old school. The Soviet government did not accept these requirements and recommended the district departments of public education to make concessions to the peasants as a last resort.

During this period, a trade union of public educators was organized. A cell worked in the district center. It was joined by teachers, and even guards of the rural schools. They received membership cards, paid dues, and had all the rights of union members. Rural teachers began to be paid small salaries. The authorities recommended that teachers take a firm communist course and be guided by the slogan "Face the man!".

By 1926 41 teachers worked in the schools of Kuitun district. There was an approximately equal number of male and female teachers. They were mostly Russians, peasants, a few burghers and clergy, usually non-partisan and poor. For example, in the questionnaire, teachers indicated their financial situation: the poor, or has a house. Kureeva from Barluk turned out to be the richest. She was of the clerical rank, graduated from the theological school and had a house, a cow and 4 sheep. The most educated teachers worked in Kuitun schools. For example, K.T. Afanasyev, born in 1885, graduated from the Cadet Corps, St. Petersburg University and Irkutsk State University. Bryzgalov born in 1893 graduated from Yaroslavl Teachers' Training Institute; Kuznetsov, born in 1892, graduated from Irkutsk State University; Sizykh born in 1915 graduated from Moscow University. Yaskulo V., a Polish teacher at the Kuitun Secondary School. Was a candidate for membership in the RCPB. He studied at Dresden Academy in 1913-1914.

In other villages, there were also well-trained teachers. In the school of Alexander Nevsky village Lukin graduated from Irkutsk Teachers' Seminary taught. In Khaikhta, the Olesyuks graduated from high school and teacher's seminary worked. Ivanova from Chebotarikha passed the exam for the title of a teacher. The teacher from Karazey rural school Smolovina graduated from the second grade school and took teaching courses (State Archives of Modern History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of the Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, c. 64, s. 66-69).

The vast majority of teachers in Kuitun district attended pedagogical courses. However, their financial situation left much to be desired. In the summaries of the OGPU in the Kuitun district for 1930 the most painful points of teachers' lives were described. 16 pupils of Borovsky school came to the office of the collective farm in Barluk and told about the plight of a local teacher, who had no food. She changed her clothes for bread. The students asked the collective farm to allow them to gather ears of corn in the fields to provide the teacher with bread. Otherwise she will quit her job and leave, and they want to study.

Rural teachers were dissatisfied with the government. According to the summaries of the OGPU the teacher from Klyuchevsky school Tsyplenova told the peasants: "Your bread is being taken away. You are naked and we, teachers, are naked and hungry. Let's give up teaching." At the parents' meeting, this teacher stated: "It is not only you peasants who are ill now. We are also hungry. At least you have excess bread asked or raked. And we are obliged to sign a loan, pay dues to the union" (State Archives of Modern History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of the Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, c. 301, s. 4).

A school for peasant youth was opened in Kuitun to provide incomplete secondary and secondary education. The school of the first (initial 4-year) and second (5-9 class) levels began to work. Kungel, a well-known aircraft designer, studied in Kuitun in 1925 (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 270 of the Tulun County Committee of the CPSU (b), l. 1, c. 188, s. 20). In Kuitun, there was a district reading room, whose task was to organize mobile library work in the villages. In the funds of the district reading room there were newspapers "Selskaya Pravda", "Krestyanskaya Gazeta", "Pravda", "Krasny Pakhar", the magazine "Bezbozhnik". Here people read the Land Code. The wall newspaper Novaya Derevnya was published regularly. In the district library, there were more than 700 copies of works by K. Marx, V. Lenin and even L. Trotsky and G. Zinoviev. However, the workers complained that on Saturdays there were always market days in Kuitun, and peasants did not visit the reading room. The emphasis was placed on the mobile work of reading rooms in the villages. Kundui was in the third phase of cultural services, along with Klyuchi and Brody. When a mobile district reading room came to the villages, the peasants had the opportunity to read books (State Archives of Recent History of the Irkutsk Region, Fund 243 of the Kuitun District Committee of the CPSU, l. 1, d. 34, c. 50, 52). In total, there were 10 reading rooms in the district. There were newspapers, popular pamphlets, and a small fund of fiction. Peasants and young people willingly visited the reading rooms.

7. Conclusion

Despite the new trends in social and cultural life of the village, the bulk of peasants adhered to the old order. Little has changed in peasant life. In many households, church holidays were celebrated, the ancient way of life was observed. The peasants were reluctant to the new socialist tendencies, and were wary of the measures of the Soviet government aimed at the collective transformation of all life. People farmed on their land plots, which they considered their ownership. They did not need orders. They worked according to the needs of their families. By the end of the 1920s, the Soviet government and the party decided to stop the new economic policy (NEP), and eliminate the commodity-money relations. The destruction of the old individual way of life and implementation of a new collective farm system were initiated.

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