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**Komsomol (the Communist Union of Youth) of the first half
of 1920s in the struggle against religious influence among
western colonists**

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Abstract

The article reveals the features of resistance between the Communist Union of Youth and immigrants from Europe religious influence in communities and colonies in 1921–1925. The authors conclude that the inception of secularism into public life of "western" nations was held on "backward" scheme (in comparison with the work among Russian population).

Keywords

Komsomol (the Communist Union of Youth), youth, religion, Catholicism, Protestantism, sectarianism.

Introduction

At the time of the October Revolution in Russia there were many communities and settler colonies of Western nations (Germans, Latvians, Estonians, Poles, etc.). Living in Russia, they have retained their distinct culture and faith (Catholicism, Protestantism, various kinds of sectarianism). Of course, the situation of migrants does not insulate them from subjection to Soviet law and the spread of propaganda. General policies of religion eradication in the country affected Western nations as well.

Komsomol struggle against religious influence among western colonists

The first mention of the Komsomol anti-religious propaganda among Western nations are associated with conducting "Komsomol Christmas". In 1922 in the report on its activities among the Volga Germans from 1 September 1921 to 15 February 1922 political education department of the Central Committee of the Revolutionary Young Communist League (RYCL) reported how the first anti-religious propaganda was moved to the street. In Pokrovsk on Christmas Eve

in the square between two churches the youth, at time when the bells began to ring, singing the "Internationale", started a great fire. It was followed by speeches of the members of the RYCL and the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (RCP(B) covering the celebration of Christmas – "our Sonnwendfeuer". The event was attended by about 1000 people. "Festive" actions of Komsomol members forced pastor to finish divine worship quickly. After a description of the action there was a conclusion: ""The result of the holiday makes it desirable to conduct it in the all-Russian scale".

Let us recall that the campaign "Komsomol Christmas" became all-union only in the following winter of 1922-1923. The Republic of the Volga Germans along with major industrial areas was chosen by the party leadership as one of the best areas on political activity for the pilot campaign "Komsomol Christmas".

The first Christmas campaign was concurrent with the famine, seizure of church property and clergy abuse lawsuits. In this context, we can assume that the Volga German Republic was chosen for the first "Komsomol Christmas" also because a severe famine prevailed in the early 1920s in the Volga. Across the country the confiscation of valuables

occured under the slogan "Help for the starving of the Volga region". "Komsomol Christmas" in this region was necessary for approval and victory if not over religion, then at least over famine.

The "Komsomol Christmas" of 1922/1923 among the Volga Germans was named the most important propagandistic event. Annual report of the RYCL regional committee of the Volga Germans from October 1922 to October 1923 reported on the "Komsomol Christmas" held in the two strongest cantons: Pokrovsk and Marksstadt. In the rest there was no holiday, but there were reports on anti-religious themes. In Pokrovsk and Marksstadt carnivals were held, which were attended by members of the RYCL, Red Army men and non-party working youth. Totally 2200 people participated, 6 reports were held. Regional Committee based on the results of the campaign revealed a number of major achievements: the beginning of the struggle against religion and explanation of religious dope; the first and strong impetus to the development of anti-religious feelings have been made among the masses of the Komsomol, Red Army men and non-party youth. The regional committee of the republic in accordance with the official party line largely duplicated the abstracts of Moscow politicians.

In 1923, in the Republic of the Volga Germans the "Komsomol Easter" was held as well, but already in the four strongest cantons: Pokrovsk, Marksstadt, Krasnyi Kut and Karamysh. The festival was attended by 1050 members of the Komsomol, 3400 non-party youth, trade unionists and Red Army men. Meetings, lectures and plays about the origins of the Easter and the holiday of the May 1 were given. The campaign was called "the second stronger assault on the gods". And, indeed, from the figures stated the Komsomol godless festivals, despite the specificity of the colonies of "western" national minorities, gained some popularity among the youth. Four months later the main performance measure of propaganda for that point of time – a number of young participants – succeeded to double.

A similar pattern was observed not only in the German colonies. The report on the activity of the Estonian section of the RYCL Central Committee in winter 1922 – 1923 also mentioned anti-religious activities. Estonian section Central Bureau has developed and distributed the materials for their implementation. Antireligious campaign presented the "Komsomol Christmas" and was held in Petrograd province and Siberia (Estonian sections were in Omsk,

Tomsk, Yeniseisk and other areas). Representatives of the Central Bureau were sent to Petrograd province to instruct local Estonian section. An attention from the central government to Petrograd confirms the continuation of its importance as a capital of the proletarian revolution. Besides, the geographical position of Petrograd, its proximity to Europe, contributed to the accumulation of settlements of "Western" national minorities in this region. Herefrom we may observe the desire of the authorities to achieve the most effective results of the campaign in this area.

"Komsomol Christmas" was performed in Latvian settlements. Latvian section of the Yeniseisk Governorate Committee of the RYCL in December 1923 discussed the prospect of working for January 1924. The meeting decided to hold "Komsomol Christmas" in the old style, and the Secretary was asked to go to one of the grassroots units and make a scientific report with anti-religious content.

In the colonies of "western" national minorities propaganda of atheism was held not only by means of large anti-religious campaigns. The report of the German section within the RYCL Central Committee during the 5th All-Russian Congress of the RYCL (11-19 October 1922) until May 1, 1923 commented

on the methods used. According to the report anti-religious debates and lectures were held in some villages. In the organizers' opinion – very successfully.

National periodicals did not fall aside as well. Among Germans antireligious propaganda was conducted mainly in the journal "Die Arbeit" where all Christian feasts were intended to coincide with the articles on the origin of religion. Publication of such journals greeted by the Komsomol authorities. Thus, in March 1923 the German Bureau of the RYCL Central Committee suggested that a good way to combat bourgeois and religious influence is the publication of a monthly journal in German. Moreover, it was proposed to focus all attention and energy on the publication of this journal. In addition, it was attempted to use summer period that in the early 1920s traditionally characterized by lull in propagandistic work. Latvian section of the RYCL Central Committee in May-July 1923 considered various theses on the methods and content of anti-religious propaganda in the colonies among Latvian youth. Despite the reticence of data on the atheism promotion at the beginning of the 1920s, we can talk about the government attempts to provide systematic anti-religious propaganda among "Western" national minorities.

In addition to the results of propaganda the reporting data informed a strong religiosity of the colonies. German section reported to the RYCL Central Committee: "Official Lutheran and Catholic churches collapsed, but appeared many sects. There are original among them, for instance, the sect of "atheists and dancers". Special widespread among Germans gained the Mennonite sectarian movement. Central Bureau of the Latvian section of the RYCL Central Committee hastened to inform the Latvian section of the RYCL(b) Central Committee on the sectarians in Novgorod. In Novgorod province sects existed before the revolution, and by 1922 sectarian movement became of a rampant size for for Komsomol and party. Correspondingly sectarianism fed by growing religiosity of the population. In the letters Novgorod Komsomol workers reasoned: "Latvian colonies already became not only a haven for religious sects, but also a center of the counter-revolutionary activity". During the famine and "military communism" people preferred to advocate religious societies rather than pro-communist organizations, thereby, in the light of ideology turned into a counterrevolutionary opposition. One may conclude at least about unfriendly relation of the colonists against the current government.

The exhumation of the Catholic saint Andrei Bobolya in 1922 caused strengthening of negative trends in relation to the authorities. The event produced an international scandal: "Public representatives of Catholic countries were indignant requiring the transportation of the remains of the saint to Poland". However, the mummified remains were urgently delivered to Moscow, to the museum of the People's Commissariat for Health¹.

Poorly concealed antipathy of "Western" national minorities to Soviet power was manifested in agitation of sectarian and cultural national organizations for the emigration from Soviet Russia to one's motherland or to America. By estimate of the German section of the RYCL Central Committee in 1922 emigrated 2500 Mennonites from Russia, about 7000 people prepared to emigrate. The authorities found explanation of this phenomenon, on the one hand, in the decline of agriculture, on the other – in religious

1 Alekseev, V.A. (1991), *Illusions and dogma [Illyuzii i dogmy]*, Politizdat, Moscow, p. 79; Sokolov, V.I. (2002), *History of the youth movement in Russia (USSR) in the second half of the XIX to the XXI centuries. 2nd ed., rev. and enl. [Istoriya molodezhnogo dvizheniya Rossii (SSSR) so vtoroi poloviny XIX do XXI veka. 2-e izd. ispr. i dop.]*, Uzoroch'e, Ryazan, p. 211.

fanaticism. However, they did not want to lose even non-indigenous population. Economic and cultural level of "western" national minorities could have been used in the future socialist construction. One of the measures to counter the wave of emigration was a publication of articles in the press about the negative aspects of emigration. "An inevitable then, sooner or later, a bitter disappointment" was promoted. A settlement of "ordinary bourgeois paradise" opposed to "a grand, full of exciting interest experience of the Soviet authorities to build a new life".

In the forefront of the increased public discontent, a campaigning period of struggle against religion has ended among "Western" national minorities. European culture with alleged good susceptibility to communist doctrine allowed the authorities to include the "Western" national minorities to politically active groups. In particular, it can be seen from the analysis of the country's holidays "Komsomol Christmas" held in German colonies. The focus of Soviet ideologists on the European type of society of "Western" colonists justified itself only partly. Estimated broad response from the public has not been received. Local Soviet government bodies were not different in the use of initiatives. For the analysis of the campaign results key

aspects the official conclusions of the Central Committee were used, which saw only what it wanted to see.

Notwithstanding, in obedience to a steady course of events, Komsomol antireligious carnivals motivated an increasing proportion of young people. In the same period the provoking efforts to conduct a comprehensive systematic propaganda were made among 'Western' national minorities. For this the national press was involved, lectures and debates were held not only on the Komsomol "Christmas" and "Easter", but at other times, not associated with these festivities. Disruption in the economy, famine in the country, widespread discrediting of the church caused a rise of sectarianism, closer to religious population than the doctrine of communism with its godlessness. Part of the sects as a one way of escape from religious persecution and devastation was pushing forward the emigration to "good old" capitalist countries. Though the Komsomol leadership was convinced in the inevitability of disappointment from relocation. "Full of lies and crimes in the face of its workers and peasants" – in this way only was called the activities of the nationalists, calling for resettlement.

In 1924 the government was forced to admit that among the Latvian

peasantry religious prejudices still were developed. Also there was developed such a type of sectarianism as a baptism. Resolution on the work of the Polish labor youth characterized young people as being heavily influenced by religion and family. Peter Panteliya, a student of the communist university, traveling to Bila Tserkva (Kiev Province) by order of the university for the research work, later described his trip. In the village of Korolevka of the Malinskii district, which consists of 100% of the Polish population, he made a report and after the meeting led a conversation with young people on various topics. There was no chance to organize something more substantial because, according to Panteliya, the youth was under the influence of religious parents.

During this period the topic of parental custody upon Komsomol members and nonpartisan youth was quite popular and discussed in all national sections in general. Thus, in December at the enlarged meeting of the Regional Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League of Russia (LYCLR) of the Republic of the Volga Germans sounded statements on the most important task of the Komsomol – to release youth from parental dependence. In the promotion of a new life Komsomol leaders suggested

to use "all kinds of Komsomol weddings" for visual propaganda. Noteworthy is the wording of the proposed method. Such a negligence and arrogance was presented in all anti-religious propaganda Komsomol theses. But parental discretion and the standing of the older generation did not allow national youth to abandon their roots. Rejection of the role of high religious spirituality in human life led to a purely practical view on the national and cultural continuity of generations. Parental authority based on a high religiosity was considered by Komsomol as a fact of economic dependence of young people from their parents.

In turn, having a great missionary experience in attracting believers, the Catholic Church strengthened its religious-nationalist groups. Komsomol stamped such organizations as "reactionary". Discussing the growing activity of the clergy, at the beginning of January 1924 the Estonian section has sent information to the political education department of the LYCLR Central Committee on the existing network of Estonian Komsomol organizations and the proposal to extend it. In Pskov, Vyshne-Volochevsk, Altai province, Crimea, Abkhazia, Severodvinsk and Petrograd densely resided Estonian youth, and there was no work of the Union for the lack of

such laborers. Nothing prevented youth to participate in the activities of national organizations and religious circles, which, in terms of power, worked under the influence of the White Guard Estonian intellectuals and clergy. Activation of group activities of the Catholic clergy, which could have well happened in the background of always growing spiritual needs of the population in times of adverse life (revolution, civil war, famine, destruction) and without additional pressure on the church, was interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, this was due to the weakness of Komsomol units that failed to kindle young workers' interest. On the other, the introduction of a new program of the circle (the clergy became organizing dancing, singing, music) was conditioned by the decline of religion and the growing influence of the party and Komsomol. Ostensibly church, feeling a reduction of its influence on young people, tried to return it. Anyway, the Komsomol, seeing the beginnings of counter-revolution at any non-Communist organization, treated them negatively, trying to get rid of them.

The Soviet government recognized Catholic clergy as a strong ideological opponent. Organizational hierarchy and subordination, a lot of experience in the field of population management,

skillful adaptation of the church to the conditions – a set of advantages, accounting for more power and influence of Catholicism. The authorities had to recognize its weakness. The prevalence of Catholicism can be judged by the number of Catholic priests, several times greater than the number of Komsomol members and party workers in the Western colonies. Moreover, the level of education of priests was significantly higher than that of propagandists. To put it mildly, this drawback was contrasted by consciousness and belief in achieving the goals of communism, the desired high (though still expected) discipline Komsomol and party members. The authorities, relying on the fervent belief of the Komsomol members in revolution, despite the obvious lack of preparation, fought against the powerful influence of the Catholic Church.

A serious disadvantage of the Komsomol anti-religious propaganda was a poor use of national language. In this regard Polish office exemplified a disaffection on the part of population concerning the Komsomol behavior: "... good things hanging out, and no Polish language can be heard from you, at least once a year, that's what the Catholic priest will be gladly listened to". Such cases were not uncommon. Peo-

ple deplored the fate of the Komsomol members, calling them "misguided", and representatives of Soviet government bodies, browbeating, repeated phrases on insufficient communist education of youth, its coming under the influence of the clergy. Within the shift of the point of influence from anti-religious propaganda to cultural and educational work – the introduction of the principle of the Komsomol convergence with people – may have tried using a mother tongue in working with ethnic minorities. At the same time anti-religious propaganda in the native language was assigned to separate Komsomol and party members, as many of them were not able to cope with such tasks. Komsomol did not feel like discrediting itself due to inept approach to this issue.

Influenced by a number of factors listed in the reports (e.g. , in the report of Burmistenko on the meeting of the LYCLR Regional Committee of the Republic of the Volga Germans on the visit to Rivne, Golo-Kamyshensky, Markstadtsky cantons in 1924) messages on a paucity of a live contact of units with villages began to appear. And especially with the Catholic peasant youth. Komsomol units alienation from life and the pressing issues of the peasants led to their mutual misunderstanding.

Assessing the situation, the LYCLR Central Committee has put forward new challenges of the anti-religious struggle. by Direct struggle with religious feelings and prejudices have been condemned. Elements of antireligious propaganda were skillfully prescribed to incept fully in educational work.

The question on the massive involvement of the union was thoroughly considered. Prevalence of Komsomol units has been directly identified with the confidence of the population. In this regard Komsomol flippant attitude towards Catholics received a great disapproval. Komsomol recognized the need to examine their ideology, foreign relations, working methods sensitively adaptable to the needs of the masses by virtue of circles of trade unions, employers associations, agricultural circles and cooperation. Leadership was forced to accept a high level of awareness of the colonists on any ongoing propaganda. Therefore the clarification conformation of "godless" lifestyle to their level of perception was of a great importance.

To achieve this goal Komsomol theorists fundamentally changed the direction of anti-religious propaganda in the direction of strengthening cultural and educational work. In particular, they decided to use science and agricultural

propaganda to clarify religious superstitions. Cultural forces in the countryside were used by means of professional skilled agronomists, teachers and doctors. The use of literature, mobile libraries organization designed for antireligious propagandist have been an asset.

Komsomol declared a tough fight against religious nationalist circles by developing their own circle activities. In these circumstances, the Komsomol has called for self-dependence: "In this struggle against the Catholic clergy of the Party and the Komsomol do not have to rely on assistance from the state, and it is necessary to properly promote themselves by approximating to the masses". Most likely, it meant achieving growth and influence of the Komsomol in the natural competition with the church without administrative measures. Ideally, it desired closing national-religious circles, not because their work was forbidden, but because as if there was no one to go there, since all would join the Komsomol. This cautious tactics developed for "deracination" of youth from the influence of clergy included the work of the Komsomol circles (dramatic, choristic, musical, sports and others) during religious ones. Young people were provided a more interesting choice – religious or communist. In any case it was not neces-

sary to put this question squarely, offending religious feelings. It was supposed to increase the interest of young people, and then it might come to the circles of the Komsomol. Basic work had to be done in the circles "Heathen" and to be organized in those places where there was Party and Komsomol attention.

New challenges have caused a new approach to Komsomol combating with clergy. It was suggested to interpret the advocated equality before God principle as attempts of the clergy to unite various segments of the population owing to religion and national unity (poor, medium and wealthier peasants). By the same token, there has been an advancement of the concept of veiling of religious class divide, which further led to the class approach in the fight against religion.

A situation with high influence of parents on the behavior and choices of young people was presented in the Komsomol as a result of improper anti-religious propaganda aimed only at young people. Komsomol leadership decided to correct the situation and start anti-religious propaganda so that it does not turn adult peasantry against Komsomol. This work should be carried out systematically and in depth on the basis of natural and agricultural sciences. Rejection of

the general mass antireligious propagan-
da was chosen to avoid misconceptions
at peasants on a young revolutionary
generation, its attitude toward religion.
Paying tribute to the activities of the So-
viet authorities, it should be admitted its
responsiveness on the state of the anti-
religious front, the ability to highlight
the essence of the problems and adapt
further work to them.

The work of Komsomol grass-
roots organizations was put under control.
Latvian sections began to practice send-
ing representatives for lectures listening
to the district committees. "Komsomol
Christmas" of 1923/1924 years was held
in a more moderate way, without carni-
val. Comrade Likhkolm, the Secretary
of the Estonian section Central Bureau,
having committed a trip to Tver province
to Estonian colony Nurmekunde, com-
piled a report of his trip. According to
the report on January 7 was held the first
day of the "Komsomol Christmas" at the
club in the Pochinkovo village, which
was attended by peasants. Likhkolm
and listener of the Estonian workers'
faculty comrade A. Proos gave a lecture
about the origin of the Earth, human be-
ing and religion. Then a banner was pre-
sented to the young Pioneers pack, a gift
from the Estonian Komsomol Moscow
club. On the second day of the "Kom-

somol Christmas" was held an evening
performance where a lecture on the slave
revolt in Rome and the report "Urban and
rural industry" were given. On the third
day of the "Komsomol Christmas" in the
village Konakovo was held an evening
meeting for young Pioneers, which pro-
duced a report on children's movement.
It was greatly important to involve stu-
dent proletarian youth in the campaign.
On holiday students actively participated
in the anti-religious work in those places
where they came from to study. Setting
an example for the youngsters, the Kom-
somol did not forget about the pioneer
movement, strongly supporting its par-
ticipation in the anti-religious activities.
The changes in lecture topics became
quite noticeable. Lectures "How the gods
are born", "Religion is the opium of the
people" and the like have been replaced
by more abstract to increase sympathy
for the Soviet power. However, an ide-
ality of the report fueled suspicion. Per-
haps these results are explained by the
presence of Likhkolm – the Secretary of
the Estonian section Central Bureau of
the LYCLR Central Committee. Also it's
unlikely that every Komsomol festival
passed off without a hitch everywhere.
For instance, the Polish Bureau of the
RYCL Central Committee reported on a
satisfactory and, therefore, more or less

corresponding to the new party orientations implementation of the "Komsomol Christmas".

In addition to traditional anti-religious campaigns a summer work was carried out as well. For example, the Central Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League of Ukraine in August 1924 reported on the state of anti-religious work among young Germans in Odessa. Anti-religious propaganda was conducted individually, by means of agricultural and worldview circles.

Following the results of the "Komsomol Christmas" in 1924/1925 the information reports of the LYCLR Regional Committee of the Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic of the Volga Germans stated on strengthening of the Komsomol anti-religious propaganda transition to a new path, ascertaining the rejection of active carnival techniques.

Rethinking the struggle against religion among European colonists, a focus on the use of moderate methods and natural science propaganda were getting through in the framework of the course held in the country "face-off to the countryside". A distinctive feature of this process was an active opposition of the Catholic clergy and sects. Extensive experience applied to spread their religion, as well as a total high cultural sensitiv-

ity of the pious population caught the Komsomol off balance. It is in the working with "Western" national minorities was observed a clear manifestation of the Komsomol unpreparedness to fight against religion.

The following year emerging trends continued. In September 1925 at the plenary meetings of the Komsomol organization of the Volga Germans (Pokrovsk) the introduction of new methods of anti-religious propaganda have been discussed. Local Komsomol members advocated the formation of natural science circles. A report of the comrade Paul' from the Kukuskiy canton noted a positive shift in the Komsomol propaganda using this methodology. At the same time Paul' drew attention to the particularly difficult working conditions, which powerfully influenced on young people's attitude to religion.

In the mid-1920s national periodicals did not maintain aloofness from the anti-religious propaganda. In December 1925, under the authorship of Karklin was released a critical review of the monthly journal of the Latvian section Central Bureau of the LYCLR Central Committee "Yauny Tseli" ("New Paths"). The review covered the first seven issues of 1925. The journal was published in Moscow, its first circulation was 2500 copies

and the cost 30 kopecks. According to Karklin, the Editors did not establish accurately the nature and objectives of the journal, also there was no firmly established headings. Only one popular scientific article "How is the world made" (No. 7) has been published in the journal for more than half a year. The paper considered the development of the views on the universe. Critic's opinion was resolved to recommendations on the need to publish more Marxist-based articles, "with less lyrics". Only one article has also been published in the anti-religious category ("Is Christ Risen ", No. 3-4). Reviews to the article were positive: "It is written clearly and understandably, quite convincing". Summary to anti-religious category consisted in wishing to enlighten issues of anti-religious propaganda techniques under Latvian colonies, publication of conclusive scientific and popular articles on the origin and development of religion.

In addition to periodicals a publishing working plan of the Latvian section of the of the LYCLR Central Committee from February 1 to August 1, 1925 also included other types of printed publications, including anti-religious content. For example, preparing to issuance a collection "Komsomolskaya Easter", "Anti-religious essays" of R. Makstys. A

plan of the press of the German section of the Central Publisher for 1925/1926 also contained a list of anti-religious literature: "Religion and the RCP" of E. Yaroslavsky, "Anti-religious propaganda in the countryside" of Fedorov; "Against god and capital", "On the Immaculate Conception" of P. Lafargue, "The Origin of our God" of Stepanov Kunov. All books are supposed to be published in German translation.

With increasing use of scientific foundations of the struggle against religion increased the need for more though not anti-religious, but at least scientifically trained personnel. The shortage in the Komsomol led to the development of the cultural potential use in the village (young teachers, doctors, agronomists, students). Only the best were able to join the ranks of the Union, i.e. representatives of the rural intelligentsia, those who were "pressing upon and proved their qualification to Soviet power and the party". At the same time the origins of applicants have been strictly monitored. Intelligentsia youth from families of priests, wealthier peasants, merchants was not accepted into the Komsomol. Part of intelligentsia being loyal and participating in study circles and seminars, with a "suitable" worker-peasant origin, was valuable for the Komsomol. A stand-

ing of the "learned man" was indispensable to the village and used extensively in natural science propaganda.

In 1925 the Youth Union was imputed to study the anti-Soviet groups among national minorities, sectarian and nationalist schools. This knowledge was necessary for appropriate use in propagandistic activities. The results have not been in for a long time. In 1925 the Central Committee began to receive reports generalized tabulation of census data concerning the activities among national minorities, containing mandatory information on all religious-nationalist organizations alternative to Komsomol and party. Information has been gathered both from large and small organizations, located in cities, industrial areas and provinces. Gathered material contained mostly "damning" information. For instance, the report on the survey of the Molchansky area of the Berdyansk district under Ekaterinoslav recognized it as the most powerful (obviously in relation to Ekaterinoslav) in religious-nationalist terms, as it was inhabited by Germans-Mennonites (descendants of immigrants from Holland). The union of "Holland immigrants" was legally working in this area. According to the principle "he that is not with us is against us" the Komsomol recognized it as kulaks henotic. An-

ti-Soviet activities have been unmasked in support at the expense of immigrants of the Baptist Union of Youth in the same area. Gathering information about the religious-nationalist organizations became a new stage of the Komsomol participation to promote atheism.

Baptism generally was very common among "western" national minorities (Germans, Estonians and especially Latvians). After instructive trip to Leningrad – Novgorod – Pskov, Mushpert, the Secretary of the Latvian section of the LYCLR Central Committee was forced to admit that there has been no work carried out with colonists. There were reports that in the capital Leningrad Baptist sections were almost as common as in the Novgorod – the area with traditionally strong sectarian movement. German youth growing activity, a participation in the creation of cultural and educational circle and religious organizations "Bab-somol", "Marienkinder" and others – partly were attributed to the improvement of economic situation by the Komsomol. A side effect of a NEP market basis kept Soviet ideologists on the hop. It would not have been so frightfully, if the competition for the influence upon young people have not won the Komsomol. Despite the constant strengthening of propaganda, there was a slight hankering

of Western youth to the Union. Leading position in this respect occupied Ukraine and Crimea. In the Komsomol study of sects in regard to information materials not only the state of the anti-religious activities was important to demonstrate, but also the attitude of the colonists and Komsomol members themselves. With this kind of information it was found that in places where the influence of the Komsomol was more or less comparable with sectarian, young Germans attended meetings of the Komsomol and Bapsomol on a single occasion.

The proliferation of different sects greatly hampered the work of the Komsomol. A defining attribute of the colonists was their isolation, even more dramatically it was manifested among sectarian colonists. To incept into the life of the colony was not difficult only to Komsomol member, but even to representatives of any non-party "free from religious prejudices" organizations. Cold reception and disregard of any propaganda made it impossible for the presence of non-believing strangers in the settlement. The Komsomol itself supposedly masking weakness stated that LYCLR units were not engaged in activities of German-Mennonite youth, believing that it is "entirely religious-possessively configured". Anti-religious work of the

Komsomol practically was missing in areas with almost 100% population of national minorities. A foggy notion of life in colonies, as well as general political orientation often led religious colonies to enrollment to backward villages in all respects.

In addition to misfortunes derecognition on growing "fruits of NEP" the CC RCP(b) relentlessly analyzed the activities of its youth offspring. Accordingly, the analysis of the failures causes occurred at regional level as well. In July 1925 the LYCLR Committee Plenum of the Republic of the Volga Germans in the causes of a large number of anti-communist organizations saw the shortcomings of the Komsomol activities in the village. A wrong conduct of anti-religious propaganda was not the hindmost in this list. In addition the Plenum noted in some cantons mistakes made while youth agitating at non-party conferences. Poor preparation of conferences and participants, unfulfilled promises and the emphasis on anti-religious propaganda did not promote youth involvement to the Union.

In addition to organizational and methodological errors there was a problem of enumeration of smaller or more kindred nations. The differences of national cultures, being indistinguishable to the uninitiated, often omitted by

propagandists, rested on a more substantial obstacle – the language barrier. For instance, in the Leningrad province 4000 of 6000 Latvian colonists were the Latgalians², who did not understand spoken Latvian and could neither read nor write in Latvian. There was no possibility to undertake anything to the Latvian section, as there were no Latgalians-activists. However, there was an acute shortage of activists among "indigenous" Latvians as well. There were only few hundred of Komsomol members at about 10000 Latvians living in Leningrad, Pskov and Novgorod provinces. Such statistics the party authorities explained as an inept approach and flat activities of the Komsomol. At that time it was widely believed that if there was enough good employees (Komsomol activists), then the work was to be nice.

The Komsomol activity was decreased in whole with the creation of a special anti-religious organization – the Union of Atheists, and official interdiction on the conduct of independent anti-religious propaganda by the Komsomol.

2 Latgalians – ethnic group of Latvians, the indigenous population of Latgale (historical and cultural region in the eastern part of present-day Latvia. They speak Upper Latvian dialect of the Latvian language. Descendants of Latgalians are of an ancient Latvian nationality. They gave ethnic name to all Latvian people.

However, the Union of Atheists tried to reverse the situation, increasingly involving the Komsomol in its work. In order to resolve the issue of acute shortage of propagandists from the number of national staff, in 1925 special seminars have been created with the Catholic and Lutheran sections of the society "Atheist", which were to allocate the Komsomol front line of "western" national minorities. Activists' training was also carried out in the traditional circles "Atheist".

New direction in promoting "atheism" shaped a course for the introduction of scientific methods of propaganda. In this regard increased the role of the educated part of society and the Komsomol, antireligious specialists among the representatives of Western nations. The approach to the class essence of religion increased in its importance. A situation in the council elections, demonstrating low credibility of communist organizations, demanded maximum attention to this issue. In this light, the association on the grounds of religious and national unity propagated by Western clergy and sects (in the government it was called the union of poor and middle peasants with wealthier peasants) was very uncomfortable for the authorities.

The transition of antireligious propaganda in the competence of the Union

of Atheists did not have rapid material impact on the real state of affairs. Thus, at the plenary meeting of the Central Bureau of the German section of the Political Department of the LYCLR Central Committee a discussion have appeared once again when considering prospects for 1926. Someone Mr. Luft said: "Everywhere are growing religious organizations. The growth of the Komsomol is taking off. How we can get influence on German youth? By means of cultural and educational institutions". Previously announced expansion of the club and circle activities at the beginning of 1926 was y insufficient. As before religious organizations abounded in this area.

The population continued to be mostly a deeply religious. Stability of convictions of adult community members subjugated the youth as well. For 1926 typical were messages like: "There were 60 families of sectarian Estonians in Lus-Logsk (Leningrad province). They have a very strong influence on young people and even on the Komsomol. Thereon the Komsomol unit does not conduct any work and is called "unsteady".

In contrast to the Komsomol members, which ideological beliefs were at odds with the moral and ethical views of the population, the clergy in its work continued to enjoy the respect and sup-

port. A striking example is an incident that occurred in the Latvian settlement of the Tarinskiy District of the Severodvinsk province. In the spring of 1926 in this area came Latvian pastor, which was given an unusually warm welcome from the local Latvians, youth and even the Komsomol. The Central Committee of the Latvian section was informed that Latvian Komsomol members kissed pastor's hands, tore and trampled their membership cards in the presence of the population.

Conclusion

Consequently, by the mid-1920s the Komsomol progress to eliminate the influence of religions of Western colonists was not in evidence. The cultural level and high level of organization of the population were superior in many respects to the Komsomol. Hasty conclusions about the possibility of success in the struggle against religion faced actual total rejection of the godless foundations of life. Such an attitude of immigrants in many cases originated from firmness of the authority of their national religious leaders. Broad missionary experience of the Western church allowed being its servitors, that is called "fully armed". This became an unpleasant fact for the

Komsomol, in which response the Youth Union nothing could oppose at that time.

Germans, Latvians, Poles and Estonians, observing attempts to impose new questionable ethics, pondered: "Why do we need it? We have our own lives not worse than anything else. We'd better leave, but remain unconvinced". Possibility of migration as a last resort largely determined a moral stability of "Western" national minorities when distributing anti-religious propaganda.

Many of those who favored migration were the members of sectarian movement, particularly widespread among Western nations. Activism of sectarians, their impact on young people forced the LYCLR Central Committee in 1925 to impute the Komsomol responsibility of gathering information on the activities of sectarian organizations. In

fact it determined the transition of the Komsomol to the next stage of participation in the fight against religion. Among Russian population it began to develop a little later, about 1926.

In general, the inception of atheism in the public life of "Western" nations was held by "backward" scheme (in comparison with the work of the Russian population). Europeans and servitors of their religious cults have always been one step ahead of the Komsomol "godless" members. Western clergy had more or less decent reply for any method of propaganda. The most that achieved the Komsomol among "Western youth" was a simultaneous visit of Komsomol and national-religious circles. "Yet we have overstayed here. Kick off with that your own" – guest mentality of migrants urged them to be more for the emigration than for the adoption of new rules.

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Комсомол первой половины 1920-х годов в борьбе с религиозным влиянием среди западных колонистов

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Аннотация

Статья раскрывает особенности противодействия в 1921–1925 гг. коммунистического союза молодежи религиозному влиянию в общинах и колониях переселенцев из Европы. Авторы приходят к выводу, что внедрение атеизма в общественную жизнь «западных» народов проходило по «отстающей» схеме (в сравнении с работой среди русского населения).

Ключевые слова

Комсомол, молодежь, религия, католичество, протестантизм, сектантство.

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