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REGIMENTING THE KIDS

The serious decline in the political reliability of Soviet youth which followed the 20th Party Congress, becoming particularly conspicuous in the winter of 1956-57, has resulted in a major overhaul of the Pioneer organization, the breeding ground for future Komsomol members. A lengthy and detailed resolution<sup>+</sup> passed by the 8th Plenum of the Central Committee of the Komsomol (28th-29th November 1957) refers to existing "serious defects" in the work of the Pioneers, and suggests ways to overcome them.

The primary difficulty, apparently is that "Pioneer work is not always permeated with the spirit of revolutionary romanticism." Pioneers have insufficient knowledge of political events both at home and abroad, nor is enough being done to instill in them the "lofty moral qualities of communist society". A proportion of them are slack at work, and ill-disciplined in addition; some even display "unwillingness to work for themselves or for society."

After these sweeping accusations against the Pioneers as individuals, the resolution examines the defects in the work of the organization as such. For example there has not been sufficient differentiation in the approach to various age-groups, and the senior members have sometimes been treated like the 9-10 year olds (W.W. Kulski, The Soviet Regime, Syracuse University Press, 1956, p. 323 gives 9-13 as the permissible age-limits for the Pioneers). But it seems that the Kremlin wishes to upgrade the whole organization, for it is now laid down that the age-limits in the future will be from 10-15. However that does not imply that the younger children are to be left unorganized. Far from it. The "Octobrists" are to be revived.<sup>++</sup>

The case of the Octobrists is a good example of the large gaps in Western knowledge of the USSR. Few experts in the free world seem to have been aware that the organization had ever become defunct, for Kulski, writing in 1956, states that "children between the ages of 8 and 11 may become members." Eight years of age is no longer considered early enough to begin the production of the Soviet "organization man", because henceforth recruitment is to be open to children in the first class (i.e., aged 7). Their uniform is to consist of a small red star worn on the left breast, and one of the new rules states firmly that they are "future

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<sup>+</sup>Komsomolskaya Pravda, 30 November 1957.

<sup>++</sup>The Large Soviet Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition, Moscow, sent to press 3 December 1954, makes no mention of the "Octobrists."

pioneers", so that there will apparently be no opportunity for a child to opt out if a few years of experience do not give him a taste for continued membership of mass organizations.

Another gap in the Pioneer organization has been that in the past it has existed only in the schools. Hence the children have had some free time while at home, if they have not been occupied with homework or chores. The resolution aims at correcting such an untidy state of affairs by recommending that Pioneer detachments be formed by house administrations, clubs and other extra-mural institutions in the cities. The danger that this might lead to confusion - one forms a mental picture of a ten-year old accused by his Pioneer leader at home of being subject to alien influences while his school leader maintains the opposite - is eliminated by subordinating the home detachments to the school organization. The work of the former is to be controlled by the senior Pioneer leader at the school, who will therefore be able to decide on such questions as the suitability of any particular child for the Komsomol.

In the past the basic unit of each Pioneer detachment was the link, and children who sat at neighboring desks in school were allotted en bloc to the same link. This procedure is not unreasonably criticized by the resolution as "mechanical", and in future a more intelligent approach is to be adopted. Children will either join links studying subjects which interest them, or they will enter ad hoc links formed for a particular task (such as scrap-metal collection, maize-growing, etc.).

The house administration Pioneer detachments will concentrate on sports, aircraft modelling, and the study of the internal combustion engine. They will also form command posts and staffs in each block, like their elder prototypes in the Komsomol, to supervise and observe everything of interest to their superiors. Small Brother, 1957, is to be another step forward on the road to 1984.

It is also a sign of the times that in future the Pioneers are to be more fully documented than ever before. The resolution announces the introduction of a "personal book" for each Pioneer, a small-scale equivalent of the notorious labor-book carried by the Soviet worker. The "personal book" will record the Pioneer's skills and abilities, his awards (if any) and notes on his fulfillment of work carried out on orders from the organization. The Pioneers had 18,000,000 members in 1953 (Large Soviet Encyclopedia, 2nd Edition, Moscow, 1954), and the issue and upkeep of these documents will therefore be a task of considerable magnitude, scarcely in conformity with the anti-bureaucracy campaign, of which little has been heard for some months past.

The ideological training program laid down by the resolution for the Pioneers is of interest. As might have been expected, primary emphasis is to be placed on "proletarian internationalism," and friendship between the peoples of the USSR. "Collective" correspondence, not individual letter-writing, is to be developed between Pioneer organizations and their equivalents in China and the "people's democracies". Perhaps the restriction of the mail operation to "collectives" is wise, as the Chinese Pioneers



have about 30,000,000 members (Komsomolskaya Pravda, 29 May, 1957). The strain on the Soviet and Chinese censorships, were individual letter-writing to be encouraged, would presumably inundate those already overworked organizations to an intolerable degree.

Every Pioneer detachment in future is to have its own song. It seems probable that this will prove to be a march, because the next clause in the resolution goes on to state:

"The underestimation of physical training and sports is to cease. It is essential that the Pioneers spend considerably more time on games and other measures in the open; sports festivals and contests are to be held..."

"In cooperation with the trade unions, physical training organizations and educational bodies, local tourism for children is to be developed, routes for cross-country walks are to be planned, cadres trained, and the most unpretentious tourist bases are to be developed."

Finally, although it was recently fashionable in the USSR to display concern at the physical and mental strain imposed on school-children by the excessive work-load arising out of the academic curriculum, the Pioneers are henceforth to have a system of promotion examinations. Within the organization, two or three "age-brackets" are to be established, but members will not move from one to the other automatically. The Ministry of Education of the RSFSR, the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of the RSFSR, the AUCCTU, the Physical Training and Sports Committee of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, the Ministry of Health of the USSR and the Central Committee of the Komsomol are jointly instructed to draw up "within three months" a list of qualifications for each "age-bracket", and a system for the transfer of children from one to another. Small Brother is going to be busy.

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