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ATHEISTIC PROPAGANDA AMONG GORKY'S SCHOOLCHILDREN IN THE EARLY 1930s

Abstract: The paper examines the issues of atheistic education of Soviet schoolchildren, carried out by the League of Militant Atheists. A focus is placed on the history of the establishment of this organisation, its activities in general and among the children of Nizhny Novgorod in particular. The paper analyses the features of the organisation of children's godless movement in a Soviet city school, pioneers, as well as among preschool children. Attention is paid to the key features of atheistic propaganda, as well as its forms and methods. An emphasis is also placed on the influence of atheism on the consciousness of children.

Keywords: Atheism, propaganda, school, young atheists, anti-religious agitation, League of Militant Atheists.

In the USSR, the first public anti-religious organisations came to life in the early 1920s. The cause of the mass atheist movement were the political, socio-economic and cultural transformations that took place during socialist construction.¹ However, all these leagues, societies and circles did not have centralised administration. The editors of the newspaper "Bezbozhnik", Glavpolitprosvet, and the Central Committee of the Party received requests for assistance to anti-religious propagandists.²

On 27 August 1924, at the editorial office of the newspaper "Bezbozhnik", a constituent meeting was held among its correspondents and active atheists, bringing

¹ Коновалов, Б. Н. *Союзу воинствующих безбожников – 60 лет*, 1975, С. 19–20.

² Коновалов Б. Н. *Драгоценный опыт ветеранов. 50 лет со времени образования Союза воинствующих безбожников*, 1985, С. 34.

together 48 persons, primarily from Moscow, as well as from the Volga region and some other areas. They considered a number of reports on the state of atheistic propaganda in the USSR³. At the meeting, a decision was made to create the Society of Friends of the newspaper "Bezbozhnik" (ODGB), the statute of the society was defined and a temporary Central Council and the Executive Bureau of the ODGB Central Council were elected, chaired by Yem. Yaroslavsky.

According to the statute, the society was a voluntary league of opponents of religion and each member of the society was obliged to actively fight for the complete emancipation of the working people from spiritual slavery under the banner of militant atheism. It was stipulated that members of the society were not to use in their work those forms of agitation and propaganda that would offend the feelings of believers.⁴

In 1925, the First All-League Congress of members of the Society of Friends of the newspaper "Bezbozhnik" and correspondents of this newspaper took place. About 50 delegates from 100 thousand members of the ODGB were present at the congress.⁵

The congress summed up the results of the anti-religious movement and outlined milestones for the further development of the anti-religious movement. It defined the requirements for the moral character of a member of the ODGB: honesty, integrity, hard work. In addition, an atheist had to show by personal example his attitude to religion.⁶

On 5 June 1925, at the presidium of the Executive Bureau of the Central Council of the ODGB, a decision was made to rename the organisation into the "League of Atheists of the USSR".⁷

The structure of the League of Atheists was regulated by its statute. The first was adopted in 1925 at the First Congress, which defined the League of Atheists as "a voluntary league of opponents of all religions", which "under the banner of militant atheism is waging an active struggle for the complete emancipation of the working people from religious intoxication, revealing the social roots of religion".⁸

The governing documents adopted by the congress defined the goals and objectives of the established society, the principles of its activities, and the content and forms of anti-religious propaganda. Much attention was paid to the training of propagandists, the publication of atheistic literature, especially for national minorities, and the development of programmes for circles and seminars. It was emphasised that in atheistic education one should use the press, radio, cinema, theatre, clubs, and wall newspapers. It was recommended to attract teachers,

³ Коновалов Б. Н. *Драгоценный опыт ветеранов...* 1985, С. 34.

⁴ Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР: организация и деятельность: 1925–1947*, Москва, 2007, С. 27–28.

⁵ Ярославский Ем. *Против религии и церкви. Т. 3. Пролетарская революция в борьбе с религией*. Москва, 1935, С. 535.

⁶ Коновалов Б. Н. *Драгоценный опыт ветеранов...* 1985, С. 34.

⁷ Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 34.

⁸ Ibid, С. 112.

agronomists, doctors, and demobilised Red Army soldiers to work in villages. It was especially noted that the propagandist must take into account local conditions. Much attention was given to the issues of restructuring everyday life, in particular to the propaganda and creation of new, Soviet holidays and rituals.⁹

The highest governing body of the League was the All-League Congress, which considered and approved reports from the central institutions of the League of Atheists, revised and amended the statute, determined the main line of all activities of the League, elected central bodies and an audit commission. Between congresses, the highest governing body was the Central Council of the League of Atheists of the USSR.¹⁰ It included the Plenum, the Executive Bureau.¹¹

League of Atheists organisations on the outskirts and in autonomous regions and federal republics formed district, regional or central councils for a given national republic, whose number of members was determined taking into account local conditions.¹²

To achieve its goals, the League opened cells at factories, in villages, in Red Army units, and the construction was based mainly on the production principle. But in accordance with local conditions, it was allowed – with the permission of the higher bodies of the League of Atheists – to organise cells on a territorial basis: in housing associations, communal houses with a proletarian composition. Where necessary, cells were also built along national lines, including individuals of the same nationality fighting directly against their religion.¹³

The cells directly carried out all the work of the League of Atheists, attracted new members, sought funds, etc., and were guided in their work by all the resolutions of congresses, conferences and councils of the League of Atheists.¹⁴

In the period between the two congresses (1926–1929), the League of Atheists developed successfully and intensively: in 1926 the League of Atheists had 87 thousand members and 2,500 cells,¹⁵ while on 1 January 1928 it had 123 thousand members and around four thousand cells.¹⁶ In 1929, it had 500 thousand members and ten thousand cells.¹⁷

The Second Congress of the League of Atheists was held in Moscow on 11–15 June 1929, and 956 people attended. Opening speeches were held by: D. Bedny, writer M. Gorky, ethnographer V. G. Tan-Bogoraz, Yu. Larin, People's Commissar of Public Health N. A. Semashko, poet V. V. Mayakovsky.¹⁸ At the congress, it was decided to

⁹ Коновалов Б. Н. *Драгоценный опыт ветеранов...* 1985, С. 35.

¹⁰ Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 114–115.

¹¹ Ibid, С. 115.

¹² Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 112.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid, С. 113.

¹⁵ Коновалов Б. Н. *Драгоценный опыт ветеранов...* 1985, С. 35.

¹⁶ Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 124.

¹⁷ Ibid, С. 35.

¹⁸ Ibid, С. 49.

rename the League of Atheists into the League of Militant Atheists. Its motto was the slogan: "The fight against religion is the fight for socialism".¹⁹

Of course, the new statute of the society was also adopted. Let us look at it in more detail.

The statute defined the League of Militant Atheists (SVB) as a voluntary proletarian public organisation whose task was to unite the broad masses of the working people of the USSR into an active, systematic and consistent struggle against religion in all its types and forms as a hindrance to socialist construction and the cultural revolution.²⁰

The highest governing bodies of the League were the All-League Congress of the SVB and, in the period between congresses, the Central Council of the SVB. All-League congresses met every two years. Extraordinary congresses were convened at the request of one third of the SVB members. To recognise the congress as valid, the presence of representatives of local organisations of the League, uniting at least one third of all members of the League, was required. The norm for the representation of local organisations was established by the Central Council of the SVB on the principle of proportional representation from the number of members of the SVB of a particular organisation, as well as taking into account the characteristics of individual national regions and republics.²¹

The Central Council of the SVB was elected by the congress, and it also determined the number of members and candidates for membership of the Central Council of the SVB. It conducted steering work between congresses on the basis of decisions adopted and established by the congress on all general issues, monitored the implementation of these decisions and all resolutions of the congresses, issued relevant instructions to all its bodies, and considered the reports of the republican, regional and district councils and the Executive Bureau of the Central Council of the SVB. The plenum of the Central Council of the SVB was convened at least once every six months and was considered valid if at least half of the composition of the Central Council of the SVB participated in it.²²

The work to implement the decisions of the Central Council of the SVB was carried out by the Executive Bureau of the Central Council, elected from among its members. The Executive Bureau was headed by the Chairman of the Central Council of the SVB. It resolved all current affairs and issues, managed the internal activities of the League, its departments, sections and local organisations, conducted financial reporting and general office work, entered into relations with various organisations on behalf of the Central Council of the SVB and the entire League, and enjoyed all rights of the Central Council of the SVB as a whole, being directly accountable to it.²³

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 3.

²¹ *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 14–15.

²² Ibid, С. 15–16.

²³ Ibid, С. 16–18.

To audit the affairs of the League, the congress elected for a period until the next congress an audit commission and determined the number of its members and candidates; the commission monitored the activities of the Central Council of the SVB and other bodies of the League, monitored the accuracy of reporting and the condition of the property of the League, organised an audit of the affairs of the League, and supervised the activities of republican and local audit commissions of the League and reported to the next congress.²⁴

The primary organisation of the SVB, as before, remained a cell, built mainly on a production principle at factories, plants, institutions, military units, clubs, reading rooms, state farms, collective farms, educational institutions, villages, hamlets, farmsteads, housing lease cooperative societies etc.²⁵

A SVB cell could be organised if there were three persons (previously, a minimum of five people were required to create it) who wanted and had the right to become members of the SVB (in schools that included youth under 14 years of age, groups of young atheists were created with members at least eight years old who contributed to the work of local cells and local organisations of the SVB).²⁶

The cell could be organised on the initiative of party, Komsomol, professional and public organisations and individual members of these organisations, as well as on the initiative of individual members of the SVB and individual workers, peasants, and employees who left religion. The cell and group of young atheists were registered, and their membership was approved by the higher body of the SVB.²⁷ In a cell of less than ten people, only the executive secretary stood out. In large enterprises and institutions, cells were created in workshops and departments with secretaries or presidiums at their head; on a plant-wide scale, the work was led by the SVB Bureau.²⁸

To control the expenditure of the cell's funds, conduct reporting and do office work, as well as to monitor the implementation of the directives of higher-level organisations of the SVB, an audit commission of three persons was elected at the general meeting of the cell.²⁹

To manage the work of the cell, a bureau consisting of three–seven people was elected at the general meeting. It was re-elected once a year.³⁰ The general meeting of the cell was convened at least once a month. If there were guild cells, a factory-wide meeting of atheists was held at least once every two months.³¹

In all federal republics, republican sections of the League were created, which were part of the USSR SVB and carried out the directives of the Central Council (CC), taking into account local conditions and work characteristics.³²

²⁴ Ibid, C. 18.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid, C. 11.

²⁷ *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 11–12.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid. C. 12–13.

³⁰ Ibid, C. 12.

³¹ Ibid, C. 13.

³² Ibid, C. 5–6.

The highest body of the SVB in each federal republic was the republican congress of the League, convening at least once every two years, at which the Republican Council of the SVB, active until the next congress, and the republican audit commission were elected. All republican councils of the SVB reported directly to the All-League Council of the SVB.³³

On a regional (territorial) scale, regional (territorial) congresses were held at least once every two years, at which regional (territorial) councils of the SVB and their corresponding audit commissions, subordinate directly to the relevant republican councils of the SVB, were elected.³⁴

Extraordinary republican, regional and district congresses could be convened at the request of the Central Council of the SVB or one third of the members of the republican, district or regional organisation. The norm of representation at republican and regional congresses was established by the relevant councils of the SVB. Plenums of republican and regional councils were convened at least once every six months.³⁵

County conferences of the SVB were convened annually and elected county councils of the SVB and relevant audit commissions. The bodies of the SVB elected at the county conferences were directly subordinate to the higher regional (regional or republican) councils of the SVB (the norm of representation at the conference was established by the organising council of the SVB). Plenums of organisational councils with representatives of district councils were convened at least once every four months.³⁶

The grassroots councils of the SVB, elected at the relevant conferences of the SVB members, were district councils in the city and village. In large urban centres, with adequate leadership, city councils were created. County councils of the SVB in villages were established only if there were at least three cells in the area. Otherwise, the district cell was in charge of organising cells in the county and preparing for the convening of a county conference.³⁷

All congresses and councils of the SVB, from the republican to the county ones, were completely autonomous in resolving local issues of anti-religious work, extending their decisions and leadership to all grassroots organisations of the SVB located in the territory of activity of the given council of the SVB. All SVB councils followed the directives and instructions of the superior bodies of the SVB, and submitted a report on their activities to the higher SVB council within the deadlines specified by them.³⁸

The tasks of the local councils were the direct management and organisation of anti-religious work, taking into account local conditions on the basis of plans and instructions from higher councils, recruitment of members of the SVB, the creation

³³ Ibid, C. 19.

³⁴ Ibid, C. 19–20.

³⁵ *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, C. 20.

³⁶ Ibid, C. 20–21.

³⁷ Ibid., C. 21–22.

³⁸ Ibid, C. 22–23.

of cells and anti-religious circles and the implementation of directives from higher bodies of the SVB.³⁹

Every worker living in the USSR could be a member of the League of Militant Atheists, as well as working citizens of the USSR who reached 14 years of age, lived abroad, left religion and paid membership and international fees.⁴⁰ Persons who did not reach the specified age and were not dependents of those deprived of voting rights, but were not younger than eight years old, could join the League without the right to a decisive vote, and constituted groups of young atheists.⁴¹

Each member of the SVB was obliged to actively work in one of the organisations of the League, take care of their political literacy and be an active assistant to the Communist Party and the Soviet government in the activities they carried out.⁴² All SVB cells enjoyed the right to admit members; admission was carried out by open voting when candidates were discussed at the general meeting of the cell. In exceptional cases, admission was allowed directly by the cell bureau, but with subsequent approval at the general meeting.⁴³

The League's funds consisted of entrance and membership fees, income from publishing activities, property income, income from lectures, evenings, performances, and voluntary donations.⁴⁴

The unemployed, students of first- and second-level schools, and Red Army soldiers were exempt from membership fees. No one was exempt from the entrance fee. International contributions were sent in their entirety to the Central Council of the SVB.⁴⁵ In addition, the statute of the SVB contains a number of provisions on international cooperation within the framework of "the internationale of proletarian freethinkers".⁴⁶

This statute was in force until the society ceased to exist.

In the early 1930s, the SVB continued to expand.

³⁹ Ibid, C. 23.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid, C. 8.

⁴² *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 8.

⁴³ Ibid, C. 8–9.

⁴⁴ The entrance fee for members was set at ten kopecks for members of city cells and five kopecks for members of village cells, as well as for the unemployed, students and Red Army soldiers. The membership fee for members of urban cells was set at 15 kopecks per quarter, and for rural ones at six kopecks per quarter (*Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 23–24).

⁴⁵ Membership and entry fees were distributed between organisations as follows: each grassroots organisation, starting with a cell, sent 50% of the received membership and entry fees to the higher one. Other amounts remained at the disposal of those councils and cells by which they were collected. The funds were spent by the League according to the resolution of the League councils (*Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 23–24).

⁴⁶ *Устав Союза воинствующих безбожников*. Москва, 1930, С. 26–31.

Thus, in January 1930, the First Plenum of the Central Council of the SVB was held, dedicated to the first godless five-year plan.⁴⁷ The Second Plenum was held in March 1930, at which the Deborin group, i.e. “leftist turns”, was criticised.⁴⁸ In January 1930, Em. Yaroslavsky announced two million members of the SVB; by the spring of 1931 there were already four million.⁴⁹

The third (also known as the Third Plenum) congress took place on 3–8 June 1931, and was attended by 62 members of the Central Council of the SVB and 141 specially invited “representatives from the field” – from national regions, collective farmers, and employees of local organisations of the SVB. It was reported that the total number of members was five million people, and that there were 32 thousand godless shock brigades, 61 godless guilds, seven godless factories and up to 300 godless collective farms.⁵⁰

Since 1934, as S. V. Pokrovskaya notes, “a landslide decline in the number and activity of the SVB began, and the collapse of grassroots organisations was initiated.”⁵¹ In 1933–1935, the receipt of membership fees fell ten times. After it was decided in early 1935 to exchange tickets for SVB members by 1 September, by the end of this period only 253 thousand new forms were requested from the Central Council of the SVB by local organisations”.⁵² In 1938, F. N. Oleshchuk estimated the number of SVB members at two million, while in 1939–1941 there were 3–3.5 million people.⁵³

Since 1925, organisations of the League of Atheists were established throughout the country. The Nizhny Novgorod region was no exception. Here the SB, and later the SVB, began its work in 1925, and in different periods of its activity the organisation both expanded and shrank.

The anti-religious movement in the Nizhny Novgorod region dates back to 1923, when a circle of atheists was organised at the Pedagogical Institute.⁵⁴

Subsequently, it became the basis for the formation of an activist group of anti-religious propagandists. In October 1924, members of the circle began to hold anti-religious seminars at which issues of anti-religious propaganda were discussed. Classes were held twice a week. During the work of the circle, a group of more than 50 people was formed. Of these, 20 activists were identified.⁵⁵ It was planned to make the listeners and participants of the seminar the leaders of lower-type anti-religious circles in clubs and workers’ enterprises. The purpose of the seminar was not only to give them the experience of systematic, in-depth anti-religious propaganda on a mass

⁴⁷ Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 66.

⁴⁸ Ibid, С. 73.

⁴⁹ Ibid, С. 124–125.

⁵⁰ Ibid, С. 74.

⁵¹ Ibid, С. 80.

⁵² Покровская С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР...* Москва, 2007, С. 125.

⁵³ Ibid, С. 125–126.

⁵⁴ Эмпе. *Учащиеся укрепляют безбожие*, 1925, С. 6.

⁵⁵ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 4170. Л. 10.

scale, but also to consolidate the acquired knowledge among the listeners.⁵⁶ Owing to the seminar participants, an ODGB cell of 50 people was created in 1924.⁵⁷

To disseminate the acquired knowledge, in 1925, atheist activists were instructed to organise anti-religious circles in workers' clubs and enterprises. A representative of the movement was appointed as the responsible administrator, and he was assisted by two–three students who had completed the seminar. A special seminar was held for the leaders of the circles for the purpose of preliminary instructive preparation and elaboration of the main topics planned for study in the working circles. The general educational leadership, approval of candidates for circle leaders, accounting, and control of nominated activists were entrusted to the educational part of the Governorate Party School and the head of the seminar. All circles were provided with propaganda literature. The following topics were studied in the circle classes: "Faith and Knowledge", "Religion and Morality", "Origin and Development of Religion", "Origin of the Universe and Man", "Origin of Christianity", "Origin and Meaning of Easter", "Church and State".⁵⁸

In late 1925 and early 1926 there were 23 SB cells with 468 people in the Nizhny Novgorod region.⁵⁹

By the early 1930s, the Nizhny Novgorod organisation of the SVB grew to 85 thousand people (including the main organisations: Sverdlovsk city – 12 thousand people, Kanavinskaya – 4.5 thousand, Sormovskaya – 5 thousand, Dzerzhinskaya – 3 thousand).⁶⁰

Now let us turn to the state of the city organisation of the SB (later SVB), using the example of Nizhny Novgorod (Gorky).

In July 1925, in Nizhny Novgorod, on the initiative of the city district committee of the Party, a temporary regional branch of the bureau of atheists was organised.⁶¹ Comrade Lebedev was elected Chairman of the SB Bureau (1925), Soloviev was deputy comrade, and Pruss was secretary comrade.⁶²

In the autumn of 1925, the Bureau planned to open from 30 to 50 community cells in enterprises and institutions in Nizhny Novgorod. Already in July 1925, the Bureau began to organise community cells in ten enterprises in the city. In August, a collective of anti-religious propagandists was organised. The Bureau was located on the premises of the Sverdlov Inter-League Workers' Club. A corner for atheists and an office for anti-religionists were set up.⁶³ The first city conference of the SB took place on 17 December 1925, and there were 56 representatives from three SB cells, five anti-religious circles and several initiative groups.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Эмпе. *Учащиеся укрепляют безбожие*, 1925, С. 6.

⁵⁸ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 4170. Л. 10 Об.

⁵⁹ И. С. *Дела религиозные и антирелигиозные*, 1927, С. 3.

⁶⁰ Розанов П. А. *Антирелигиозная политика и деятельность власти*, Москва, 2005, С. 979.

⁶¹ Прусс Н. *Общество безбожников в Н. Новгороде*, 1925. С. 3.

⁶² ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 5546. Л. 2.

⁶³ Прусс Н. *Общество безбожников в Н. Новгороде...* С. 3.

⁶⁴ Малиновкин С. Н. *От религии к атеизму...* С. 45.

At the meeting, the first Nizhny Novgorod District Council of the SB of the USSR was elected, consisting of 11 persons: Rachkov (city district committee of the Party (b)), Soloviev (Governorate Party School), Malinovkin (Pedagogical Institute), Ilyasov (Tatpedtechnicum), Lakhin (Cultural Department of the Governorate Council of Professional Unions (GSPS)), Uvarov (Political Department of the 17th Division), Muravyov, Chernyaev, Osinovsky (Governorate Party School), Mokshanov, Lakhin (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (VLKSM)). Presidium – Soloviev – Chairman of the City Council (Gorsoviet) and head of Agitprop, Rachkov – member of the presidium and head of the organisational department, Malinovkin – secretary of the City Council.⁶⁵ Along with the City District Council of the SB, the Sormovo District Council of the SB and the Beregovoy District Council of the SB were set up.⁶⁶

In 1925, in the Sormovsky district there were 300–400 members of the SB, united in 23 cells headed by the district council.⁶⁷ In 1926, the inter-district council of the League of Atheists was created, which was engaged in the development of practical measures to form the inter-district organisations of the SB.⁶⁸

An anti-religious information bureau was formed at the Sverdlovsk Club, where one of the members of the City Council was on duty.⁶⁹

In 1927, the city council united eight SB cells in which there were 300 members of the League: at the Governorate Party School, Nizhny Novgorod State University, Nizhpoligraf, Neftesindicat, League of Builders, Gortramway, Narpit, Tatpedtechnikum. Though each cell had an anti-religious circle, there were six more circles: at Gostorg, Gosspirt, Factory School, Medical College, Utilities Club and Club named after Sverdlova – a total of eight SB cells and 14 anti-religious circles, led by the SB City Council consisting of nine persons: Malinovkin (student of Nizhny Novgorod State University), Kirsanov (GSPSh teacher), Tumakov (GSPSh teacher), Shelgunov (Nizhkommuna), Osipov (Nizhpoligraf), Levashkina (GSPSh), Ilyasov (Tatpedtech), Kotelnikov (Red Army), representative from the Gorcom All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (VLKSM).⁷⁰

In 1929, the Nizhny Novgorod City Council of the SVB comprised 62 cells, with over three thousand members of the SVB. There were 50 anti-religious circles in the city, with around one thousand attendees.⁷¹ The Kanavinsky district council of the SVB united 45 industrial and 12 school cells of the SVB, with three thousand members; an anti-religious university was created in the region, in the 1st year with 38 students.⁷² The Sormovo district organisation had 66 SVB cells, in which there were 1,624

⁶⁵ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 5546. Л. 20–21.

⁶⁶ Ibid. Л. 22.

⁶⁷ Ibid. Л. 18.

⁶⁸ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 5033. Л. 150.

⁶⁹ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 5546. Л. 22.

⁷⁰ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 1. Оп. 1. Д. 5546. Л. 19.

⁷¹ Малиновкин С. Н. *От религии к атеизму...* С. 53; С.Н.М. *Профсоюзы в стороне*, 1929. С. 5.

⁷² Ibid.

members, among them 1,045 members were factory workers.⁷³ In 1931, there were 85 godless shock brigades in Nizhny Novgorod. Of this number, in 60 godless shock brigades, where there were also two completely godless shock guilds.⁷⁴

In Nizhny Novgorod, on 1 January 1932, there were 402 cells with 41,600 members of the SVB, which accounted for 75% of the total number of members of the regional organisation. The SVB cells were united by four district councils: Kanavinsky, Sormovsky, Sverdlovsky, Avtozavodsky, in which, in addition to Sverdlovsky, there were two paid employees.⁷⁵ In total, the regional organisation of the SVB numbered 200 thousand people.⁷⁶ In 1932 the city council was reorganised. This was dictated by the following considerations: the city had a huge organisation that had to increase in size and strengthen qualitatively. The centre of all godless work was transferred to grassroots cells (factory guilds, brigades, shifts). The reason for its reorganisation was also the strengthening of godless work among the working people of the city and the improvement of the operational and differentiated leadership of district councils and grassroots cells and the conduct of citywide events.⁷⁷

The City Council was organised according to the structure of the party organisation, covering and subordinating four districts to the City Council. The City Council, in turn, was subordinate to the Regional Council. Kanavino was established as the place of subordination of the council.⁷⁸

The structure of the City Council was as follows: the Plenum consisted of three persons, the Presidium – 11 persons, the Audit Commission – three persons, the Chairman – one person, the Executive Secretary – one person. Departments were: Orgmass and AMO. Sectors included those for work in housing and industrial cooperatives, military, transport, manufacturing, research and university. In addition, commissions of national minorities, youth and women worked in the city council. The payroll apparatus consisted of three people: the executive secretary instructor and clerk.⁷⁹

This structure existed until the late 1930s.

Several areas can be distinguished in the work of the SVB: conducting mass anti-religious campaigns, agitation and propaganda work, participation in the closure of churches, and work with foreign freethinkers.⁸⁰

⁷³ Малиновкин С. Н. *От религии к атеизму...* С. 53.

⁷⁴ Ibid. С. 60.

⁷⁵ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 30. Оп. 1. Д. 127. Л. 15.

⁷⁶ Малиновкин С. Н. *От религии к атеизму...* С. 75.

⁷⁷ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 30. Оп. 1. Д. 127. Л. 15.

⁷⁸ ГКУ ГОПАНО. Ф. 30. Оп. 1. Д. 127. Л. 15.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Варакин, С. А. *Антирелигиозная деятельность Союза воинствующих безбожников (СВБ) в Соцгороде Автозавода в 1930-е годы* / С. А. Варакин, А. А. Гордин, А. А. Абаимова // *Современные проблемы науки и образования*. – 2013. – № 6; www.science-education.ru/113-10881-2.06.2013; Варакин, С. А. *Антипасхальная кампания 1931 года (на материалах Автостроя)* / С. А. Варакин, А. А. Гордин, Е. Д. Гордина // *Приволжский научный журнал*. – 2013. – № 1. – С. 183 – 186; Варакин, С. А. *Антирелигиозная деятельность*

The most important place in the atheistic activities of the SVB was work with children, because it was much easier to influence them mentally and emotionally.

Now let us move on directly to the work of atheists with the children's activists of Nizhny Novgorod.

The Nizhny Novgorod atheists were led by I. N. Uzkov.⁸¹ Groups of young militant atheists worked alongside adult atheists. Their activities were controlled by the school-pioneer section under the Central Council of the SVB. In July 1931, the number of members of the organisation of Young Militant Atheists of the Nizhny Novgorod territory was more than 10 thousand people.⁸²

The children's godless movement came in several forms:

The first of these were groups of young atheists aged 8 to 14 (as a rule, at 1st level schools).⁸³

Groups of young atheists, depending on age, were divided into two: from 8 to 10–11 years old and the older group from 11 to 13–14 years old. When working with the younger group, practical issues were resolved: they had to attend school on religious holidays, refuse to attend church services, perform various religious rituals, etc.⁸⁴

Anti-religious work at school involved classroom (studying programme material) and extracurricular activities. The classroom was held in anti-religious school clubs for children aged 13–14 years.⁸⁵ Their task was to improve the qualifications of Young Militant Atheists and train new personnel.

It is worth noting that the programme included many topics on natural sciences, history of religion and political issues. Classes in the circle were not limited to the established programme and were accompanied with practical work: assigned tasks were completed, independent examinations and conversations were conducted, and members of the circle gave reports at evenings.

The work of the circle focused on the emotional impact on children. To do this, the leader of the circle conducted expressive readings of anti-religious works of art, staged them, and held conversations based on what they read so that the children could draw appropriate conclusions. In addition, the excursion method was used. The children were taken to excursions to the anti-religious museum, the natural science museum, and former monasteries.⁸⁶

СВБ в 1930-е годы на материалах Соцгорода Горьковского автозавода / С. А. Варакин. – III Всероссийский фестиваль науки: сборник докладов / Нижегород. гос. архитектур.-строит. ун-т; редкол. : С. В. Соболев, Н. Д. Жилина. – Нижний Новгород : ННГАСУ, 2013. – С. 16–17.

⁸¹ Олещук, Ф. Н. *Под знаком третьего, решающего*, 1931, С. 3.

⁸² Голубев, Л. *Лицом к пятилетке*, 1931, С. 3.

⁸³ Амосов, Н. *На детском антирелигиозном фронте (материалы 1-й всесоюзной конференции юных воинствующих безбожников)*, Москва, 1930, С. 45.

⁸⁴ *Клубно-кружковая работа в школах 2-й ступени*, 1930, С. 6.

⁸⁵ *Клубно-кружковая работа в школах 2-й ступени*, 1930, С. 6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

After the training, the best prepared members of the Young Militant Atheists could carry out independent educational work. As a rule, the work plan was drawn up at the beginning of the new academic year, at a meeting of members of the Young Militant Atheists, where a new bureau was also elected. Then the tasks were distributed among the children. The work was based on key events of the Soviet calendar: harvest and collectivisation day, October Revolution Day, the days of V. I. Lenin, the anti-Christmas campaign, International Women's Day, the anti-Easter campaign, etc. In their work, the young militant atheists adhered to the principle of shock work.⁸⁷

In particular, as part of the implementation of universal education, members of the Young Militant Atheists involved schoolchildren, illiterate and semi-literate adults in health centres, where they gave anti-religious readings. In addition, they were involved in shaping the public opinion on the issue of transferring church buildings to a school, through campaigning in the family, speaking at public meetings, and collecting signatures. Young Militant Atheists organised and renovated atheist corners in reading rooms, collective farms, and clubs; they also distributed the newspaper "Bezbozhnik" and other atheist publications.

The anti-religious work of Young Militant Atheists was accompanied by socialist competition.

Thus, children were immersed in the anti-religious movement directed by the SVB.⁸⁸

Children over 14 years old joined the school cells of the SVB. The work of the SVB school cell was supervised by a special commission consisting of teachers and representatives of the Pioneers and Komsomol.⁸⁹ The SVB school cell, through a special commission, supervised the entire work of young atheists. It is worth noting that the forms and methods of work of such cells corresponded to the activities of adult SVB cells: the creation of anti-religious circles, holding seminars, lectures, mass campaigns, dissemination of anti-religious literature, etc.⁹⁰

A lot of work was carried out by pioneer organisations, which included members of the Young Militant Atheists. The task of the pioneers was to lead atheistic propaganda among children. For this purpose, godless squads were created under the advice of the detachment. They were recruiting children into organisations of militant atheists. The squad under the pioneer detachment carried out internal educational work both in the entire detachment and in individual units, organised anti-religious work among future pioneers and preschool children and provided assistance to SVB cells, clubs, reading huts, being active in SVB school cells or groups of Young Militant Atheists.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Школьно-пионерский сектор ЦС СВБ СССР *Что надо сделать юным безбожникам в течение года*, 1930, С. 4.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Амосов, Н. *На детском антирелигиозном фронте (материалы 1-й всесоюзной конференции юных воинствующих безбожников)*, Москва, 1930, С. 45–46.

⁹⁰ Покровская, С. В. *Союз воинствующих безбожников СССР: организация и деятельность: 1925–1947*, Москва, 2007, С. 113.

⁹¹ Амосов, Н. *На детском антирелигиозном фронте (материалы 1-й всесоюзной конференции юных воинствующих безбожников)*, Москва, 1930, С. 46.

Despite the active work of the godless children's movement, there were a number of problems: insufficient help from teachers, lack of in-depth anti-religious education, weak support from the pioneers, and lack of atheistic benefits for working with children.⁹² It is worth noting a number of organisational problems that young atheists faced: the lack of registration in local councils of the SVB, lack of membership cards, in some places there was confusion regarding the organisation of school cells of the SVB and groups of young atheists, and the issue of connecting the SVB cells with groups of young atheists was resolved differently. Preschoolers and unorganised children remained uncovered by anti-religious work.⁹³ Another important problem was the lack of living artistic forms of work and children's godless games.⁹⁴

Often, young atheists, instead of in-depth explanatory work among believers, i.e. instead of patiently and thoughtfully persuading them, reduced their work exclusively to demands for the closure of churches, mosques, synagogues, etc., the forcible removal of icons, and sometimes showed unacceptably rude and mocking behaviour towards believers. At the same time, among some of the children there was a conciliatory attitude towards religious rituals and traditions in their families.⁹⁵

In order to remedy the current situation, the First All-League Exhibition and Conference of Young Militant Atheists was convened in Moscow from 29 April to 5 May 1930.⁹⁶ It summed up the first years of the children's godless movement.

There were also delegates from the Nizhny Novgorod region at the conference.

Rzhavin, a member of the League of Militant Atheists, reported on the state of affairs in the city: "Our SVB work is going on in three directions. One job is on the Pechersk collective farm, the second is with parents and the third is at a sponsored plant named after Ulyanov. A lot of work was done by the cell at the Pechersk collective farm – conversations and lectures were held daily. When the lecturer came for the first time to give a talk, and this lecturer came with a long beard, the women shouted: "Pluck his beard, what does he want to do here". Only then was it possible to calm them down, when the lecturer (chemistry teacher) began experiments and showed how milk is made from water and how milk turns into blood – a turning point occurred in the mood of the public. The audience no longer shouted: "Drag the lecturer by the hair", but thanked him, shook his hands, and the lecturer was taken on a cart to the city and was invited to give a wonderful lecture. Then in April the Pechersk collective farm carried out the 'First furrow'. Our SVB cell took an active part in this; during the break, when the collective farmers were resting, the young atheists stood in a circle, and in this circle our 'zivaya gazeta' demonstrated its work."⁹⁷

⁹² Ibid. C. 60.

⁹³ Ibid. C. 60–61.

⁹⁴ Ibid. C. 61.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Амосов, Н. *На детском антирелигиозном фронте (материалы 1-й всесоюзной конференции юных воинствующих безбожников)*, Москва, 1930, С. 3.

⁹⁷ Ibid. C. 25.

At the plant named after Ulyanov, every lunch break, our lecturers held wonderful conversations. The workers were grateful for this. Work was carried out with women – cells of atheists were set up in housing lease cooperative societies, atheist work was also carried out on children's playgrounds and in nurseries. In addition, five school groups declared themselves atheists and joined the SVB."⁹⁸

The congress had a positive impact on the work of the League of Militant Atheists.

To solve existing problems, anti-religious inspectors in all departments of public education were relieved of additional workload that distracted them from their main work. In addition, a review of school curricula and textbooks began, and the necessary anti-religious material and textbooks were supplied. Preparations began for the publication of manuals based on local material and a number of methodological letters. When recruiting teachers, attention was paid to their anti-religious attitude; religious teachers were not allowed to work with children.⁹⁹

The training of such teachers was carried out through short-term anti-religious courses and long-term seminars, through which teachers of social studies, natural sciences and literature were primarily trained. Through the Institute for Advanced Training of Teachers, correspondence anti-religious courses for teachers were created. The training of anti-religious teachers was carried out at the stage of training them in pedagogical colleges and pedagogical universities. Their textbooks covered the issues of anti-religious education in school, as well as questions on the history and criticism of religion. In all other educational institutions, the programmes were filled with anti-religious content.¹⁰⁰

The following work was carried out directly with schoolchildren. SVB cells took over patronage of nearby housing lease cooperative societies and preschool institutions. To guide the children's anti-religious movement, school pioneer sections were organised under the councils of the SVB, which collaborated with the commissions on anti-religious work at the regional and district methodological councils of the department of people's education and sciences (ONO). The Regional Council of the SVB, together with the regional department of people's education and OGIZ, published anti-religious companions for educators and an anti-religious manual for pupils based on local material, and also took part in the production of children's anti-religious literature of a local nature, visual anti-religious aids, notes, plays, etc.¹⁰¹

In the area of extracurricular work among children, the Regional Council of the SVB, together with the anti-religious commission under the regional department of people's education, began work on a textbook for anti-religious circles organised at schools, pioneer detachments, orphanages and playgrounds. It was planned to establish work with unorganised children through children's libraries. Local museums

⁹⁸ Ibid. C. 26.

⁹⁹ *Что решил краевой съезд безбожников*, 1931, С. 3.

¹⁰⁰ *Что решил краевой съезд безбожников*, 1931, С. 3.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

and excursions were actively used. Anti-religious segments were written in pioneer and children's literature, pioneer newspapers and magazines.¹⁰²

Mass work among children began: together with radio broadcasting stations, systematic transmission of speeches, stories, ditties, and songs of an anti-religious nature was organised; anti-religious performances were staged for children in children's theatres, and excursions were conducted.¹⁰³

At the same time, it is also worth considering the fact that a child, a schoolboy, who was immersed in anti-religious education at school, was often torn between believing parents and anti-religious teachers when supporting SVB cells. This state of affairs, as noted by researcher V. A. Shevchenko, led to "...a split consciousness of many schoolchildren (when the student did not know who to believe: the school or believing parents), i.e. a conflict between the Soviet educational system and the religious family. This situation led to a moral drama, which sometimes ended tragically or did not find its resolution throughout the life of an adult..."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Шевченко, В. А. *Юные безбожники против родителей* [Электронный ресурс]. – Режим доступа: http://ruskline.ru/analitika/2014/01/24/yunye_bezbozhniki_protiv_roditelej.

Сергей А. Варкин

**ПРОПАГАНДА АТЕИЗМА СРЕДИ ШКОЛЬНИКОВ ГОРОДА ГОРЬКИЙ
В НАЧАЛЕ 30-х ГОДОВ XX ВЕКА**

Резюме

В конце 1920-х – начале 1930-х гг. в СССР проводились глобальные преобразования, связанные с коллективизацией, индустриализацией и культурной революцией. СБВ являлся частью этого масштабного процесса. В этот период проходила ломка мировоззрения людей, смена менталитета: с традиционного (аграрного, деревенского) и религиозного на новый советский, атеистический (городской). Важную роль в этом процессе сыграл СБВ, именно он способствовал формированию нового типа человека, свободного от религиозного мировоззрения, тормозившего создание нового советского общества. Структура СБВ первоначально была жестко централизованна, с непосредственным контролем ЦС СБВ за делами региональных отделений (1925 г.), затем общество было превращено в «союз федераций безбожников», где вся ответственность перешла местным советам (1926 г.), затем общество снова подверглось жесткой централизации с возвращением главенствующей роли ЦС СБВ (1929 г.).

В своей работе безбожники столкнулись с многочисленными трудностями, в том числе и с неприятием их со стороны старшего поколения, основывавшегося на религиозных представлениях. Тем не менее, атеистическая агитация находила живой отклик среди молодежи. Важнейшее значение для безбожников имела работа с детьми, как в школе, так и вне ее стен. Стоит отметить, что антирелигиозное воспитание оказывало двойственное влияние на ребенка – с одной стороны благодаря активному участию в культурном и хозяйственном строительстве ребята социализировались в обществе, с другой стороны эта политика негативно сказывалась на их сознании и взаимоотношениях внутри семьи.

Сергей А. Варкин

**АТЕИСТИЧКА ПРОПАГАНДА МЕЃУ ШКОЛСКОМ ДЕЦОМ ГРАДА ГОРКИ
ПОЧЕТКОМ 30-ТИХ ГОДИНА 20. ВЕКА**

Резиме

Крајем 1920-их и почетком 1930-их година у СССР-у су се одвијале глобалне промене повезане са колективизацијом, индустријализацијом и културном револуцијом. Савез милитантних безбожника је био део овог великог процеса. У том периоду мењан је светоназор људи, менталитет: од традиционалног

(аграрног, сеоског) и религиозног ка новом совјетском, атеистичком (градском). Значајну улогу у овом процесу имао је Савез милитантних безбожника. Управо он је допринео формирању новог типа људи без религиозног светоназора, који је спречавао стварање новог совјетског друштва. Савез милитантних безбожника првобитно је био потпуно централизован, с директном контролом Централног совјета над регионалним одељењима (1925. године), потом је друштво трансформисано у „Савез федерација безбожника“, а сва одговорност прешла је на локалне совјете (1926. године), да би затим друштво поново било стриктно централизовано с поновним формирањем Централног совјета Савеза милитантних безбожника (1929. године).

У свом раду безбожници су се сусрели са бројним тешкоћама, укључујући и неприхватање од стране старијих генерација, које су се ослањале на религиозна уверења. Ипак, атеистичка агитација налазила је жив одјек међу младима. За безбожнике је назначајнији био рад с децом, како у школи, тако и изван ње. Важно је напоменути да је антирелигиозно васпитање имало двојаки утицај на дете – с једне стране, захваљујући активном учешћу у културној и економској изградњи, деца су се социјализовала у друштву, а с друге стране, ова политика је утицала негативно на њихове односе унутар породице и свест.