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Pioneer “Light Horsemen”

Abstract

“Light horsemen,” a Komsomol initiative for performing functions of social control over the work of state machinery, played an important part in the life of Soviet society in late 1920s–1950s. It encompassed various social spheres and strata. The article draws on the documents from the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History to offer a first inquiry into the “light horsemen.” Pioneer “horsemen” helped to prevent train accidents and tampering on the national railways. At postal enterprises, they checked the quality and promptness of letters and newspapers delivery to the addressees, hanged mailboxes, protected telegraph and telephone wires from damage. “Horsemen” helped the half-educated to write their letters. 1933-1935 saw

the high point of the young “horsemen” movement; rural pioneers were the most active. Pioneer units took an active part in inspection and repair of agricultural machinery, protection of horses and young animals, grain sorting, inspection of mineral fertilizers storage, protection of crops from birds. When involving pioneers and schoolchildren in the movement, the authorities tried to cultivate their sense of inviolable socialist property. The idea was ever enforced that only enemies can convert a part of the kolkhoz harvest. The cult of pioneer heroes included idealization of pioneers’ delations. Pioneers protecting the harvest were virtually a part of punitive institution. They were actively drawn into searching for “class enemies.” The author explains the decrease of pioneers’ interest in the tasks of the “light horsemen” by condescending and even neglectful attitude to their work on the ground. Pioneers’ tutors from party and Komsomol felt that their active participation in economic and political campaigns distracts them from their studies, which were more important at their age; children’s emotional reaction to what was going on went hand in hand with incompetence and inability to deal with elementary problems.

Keywords

Archive, historical source, children, pioneers, Komsomol, “light horsemen,” social control, kolkhozes, railways.

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