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“The Orphanage Was Maintained at the Expense of Peasants.” Documents on the Fates of Children during the German Occupation of the Western Districts of the Kalinin Region: 1941–44

Abstract

In recent decades, Russian historians have shown considerable interest in studying the everyday life of Soviet citizens who found themselves in the territories temporarily occupied by the enemy during the Great Patriotic War. However, there are few scientific works on the daily

life of children and adolescents in the zone of occupation. The development of this theme comes hand in hand with addressing new sources. The publication is to introduce into scientific use some archival documents containing information on the lives of orphans in the occupied Western districts of the Kalinin region (now part of the Pskov region). The sources published here highlight the methods used by the Nazis and their accomplices to solve the problem of homeless children. The article includes the text of the report by the head of the NKVD directorate for the Kalinin region, V. P. Pavlov, and that of the reference drafted by the deputy head of the Kalinin region department of public education, N. M. Kolmakov. Both documents are kept at the Tver Center for Documentation on the Contemporary History. Their authors describe the state of the orphanage in the village of Mikhailov Pogost of the Loknya district at the time of its liberation by the Red Army in late February 1944. The orphanage survived on voluntary donations from the local population. The children's living conditions were difficult: they were in dire need of underwear, clothing, and shoes. Their diet was limited to whatever the locals could collect. Most children were sick, but received little if any medical care. The arrival of the Red Army was their rescue. After the expulsion of the invaders, the Soviet authorities undertook a series of measures to improve the situation of children. The third document is a contract for foster care of a homeless child. Texts of such contracts have been found in the fonds of the Velikie Luki branch of the State Archive of the Pskov Region. The documents were compiled in 1942. The contracts were signed by members of the Krasnogorodsk District Administration, a collaborationist administrative body under the control of German military structures, which was created by the Nazis during the occupation, and by citizens who took the children. Each document listed child's name, obligations of the caregiver and their family members to the child, as well as benefits to the foster family. The contracts were signed for a year. The comparative textual analysis of the documents finds few differences in the form and content of the contracts.

Keywords

Archival documents, Great Patriotic War of 1941–45, Nazi occupation children's everyday life, orphanage, historical sources, Kalinin region, collaboration.

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