

AT THE VANGUARD OF THE “NEW ORDER”: THE KOMSOMOL AND GERMAN YOUTH (1918-1930)

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Abstract. In 1918, the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (RCP(b)) founded the Communist Union of Youth (RKSM), also known as the Komsomol. The Bolsheviks pursued two main objectives: the consolidation of class struggle among the younger generation and winning the youth over to their side. The article demonstrates which forms the Moscow Center used in working with communist youth organizations of Western national minorities, including Russian Germans, in order to influence the younger generation and divide youth along class lines.

The author of the article seeks to answer the question of what other means, apart from discipline and repression, the Bolsheviks possessed for educating the “new man” and integrating the younger generation into “socialist” forms of labor and life.

It is concluded that the creation of special national sections within the RKSM was a temporary and forced phenomenon; they were merely a transitional form, a tool for conducting agitational, propagandistic, and political-educational work among a part of the national youth who, due to their lack of knowledge of the Russian language, were separated from participation in the general organization of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (VLKSM).

The communist youth organizations made a decisive contribution to the destruction of the traditional patriarchal way of life in national regions and settlements, actively participating in anti-religious and internationalist propaganda and agitation. It was precisely from among the young communists that, subsequently, leadership cadres of all levels emerged to work in party and Soviet bodies. The policy of the Central Committee (CC) of the RKSM toward German youth can be regarded as a model on the basis of which the Komsomol leadership built its political line with respect to other national minorities of the West.

Keywords: Soviet Union, national policy, class struggle, RCP(b), RKSM, Komsomol, Western national minorities, Russian Germans.

Introduction

Having seized power in a multiethnic and multiconfessional state, the Bolsheviks soon realized that the “human material” with which they were to engage was highly heterogeneous and resistant to ideological “processing.” At the same time, the Bolsheviks believed that in establishing the “new order” they could rely on one particular group within the post-revolutionary society to a far greater extent than on all the others. This group was the youth. The dramatic demographic shifts caused by the First World War and the Civil War had resulted in the “rejuvenation” of the country and a sharp increase in the role of young people in society. According to the 1926 All-Union Census, approximately 40 percent of the entire population of Soviet Russia belonged to the age group from 10 to 29 years (Corinna Kuhr-Korolev, 2001: 10). The “Children of October” were “destined” to live under communism, and the younger generation was expected to grow up unreservedly devoted to revolutionary and communist ideals.

The principal conduit of communist policy and ideology into the youth milieu—one of the key “transmission belts” in the system of proletarian dictatorship – became the All-Russian, later All-Union Communist Youth Organization: the Russian Leninist Young Communist League, later the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League (RKSM-VLKSM). Built, like the Communist Party itself, on the rigid organizational principle of “democratic centralism,” the Komsomol brought together the most active and ideologically committed young people. Alongside the Communist Party, the army, and the trade unions, the Komsomol functioned as one of the principal mechanisms of social

mobility in Soviet society, often propelling the holders of its membership card to the upper echelons of power. More democratic and flexible than the Communist Party, the Komsomol also admitted individuals from “socially alien” backgrounds, thus enabling opportunities for career advancement not only for the children of workers and peasants, but also for those from families of former “exploiters.”

The unification of the “toiling” youth of town and countryside under the aegis of the Komsomol ensured the upbringing of the younger generation in the spirit of communist ideals, while simultaneously transforming the organization into a powerful reserve force for the Communist Party (Corinna Kuhr-Korolev, 2004: 35-49). A considerable portion of young people, imbued with the romanticism and rejection of injustice typical of their age, themselves sought to take the lead in building the “new order” (Kuhr-Korolev, 56-77; S. N. Andreenkov, 2008: 11-12). The Program and Statute of the Komsomol clearly defined the Union’s objectives: broad dissemination of communist ideas among the youth, their active participation in constructing the new society, the promotion of proletarian worldviews and culture, and the upbringing of steadfast, conscious fighters for proletarian ideals. While organizationally autonomous, the Komsomol was in practice an integral part of the Communist Party, bound to it in an inseparable symbiosis (Andreenkov, 2018: 17-18).

The unified, rigid political structure of the RCP(b) and the RKSM (from the village or factory cell to the Central Committee), permeating the entire framework of the RSFSR-USSR, made it possible to rapidly restructure the vast country along “Soviet lines,” including its national enclaves. Communist youth formations contributed to the dismantling of traditional patriarchal orders in national villages, conducted anti-religious and internationalist propaganda, and served as a training ground for cadres at all levels of the party and Soviet apparatus – without which the “new order” could not function. It should be emphasized that by “order” we mean not only the Bolshevik regime in the broader sense, but also the “internal order” of the party itself, i.e., the rules governing the life and activities of the Soviet political-administrative elites. Importantly, the establishment of the “new order” entailed the Bolshevik appropriation and reconfiguration of social and cultural landscapes utterly alien to them (Aneignung). Above all, this applied to the village – the “idiocy of rural life” so despised by the Bolsheviks – where the transformation of the traditional way of life into a modern one, albeit in its specifically Soviet form, took place (Plaggenborg, 2006: 23-40; Beyrau, 2001: 197-207). The present article seeks to examine these phenomena through the example of German youth, the most numerous among the so-called “Western national minorities.”

Materials and Methods

The problem of youth mobilization in the years 1918-1930 must be examined within the broad context of European and global transformations in the postwar period. In this regard, it is essential to draw not only upon domestic studies devoted to the history of the Komsomol and socialist education (German; Kuznetsov; Plokhotnyuk), but also upon the works of foreign scholars analyzing the phenomenon of youth politicization in Germany and Europe as a whole (Corinna Kuhr-Korolev, Plaggenborg, Terry Martin). The use of a wide range of scholarly contributions makes it possible to identify both the distinctive features of national models of youth policy and the general tendencies underlying the formation of the “new order.”

The methodological foundation of this study rests upon fundamental scholarly principles: historicism, objectivity, a systemic-structural approach, and social analysis. The principle of historicism has enabled the examination of Soviet and German youth movements within their specific national contexts and their integration into the broader framework of the crises of the 1920s. The principle of objectivity requires consideration not only of the positive outcomes of mobilization policies, but also of their inherent contradictions, limitations, and failures. The systemic-structural approach has made it possible to reveal the causal linkages between political ideology, processes of modernization, and youth culture. Finally, the principle of social analysis has provided a means to explore the mechanisms of generational identity formation and political loyalty, while also identifying parallels and differences between the Komsomol and German youth organizations.

Discussion

The historiography devoted to the Komsomol and the involvement of German youth in the Soviet project of the 1920s is quite extensive; however, comparative studies linking the process of Sovietization of national minorities with the formation of the “new order” remain relatively scarce. Soviet historians traditionally examined the activities of the Komsomol within the framework of official ideology, emphasizing its “vanguard” role in the education of youth while paying insufficient attention to the specific features of national sections and the resistance of traditional environments.

Since the late twentieth century, both Russian and international historiography has witnessed a shift toward a more critical interpretation of the role of youth organizations. Important contributions have been made by the works of Corinna Kuhr-Korolev and Plaggenborg, in which the Komsomol is considered part of the broader processes of modernization and social control. These authors underscore that, in the USSR, the Bolsheviks regarded youth as a key resource for restructuring the village and dismantling the traditional order, including within national minority communities.

Among the studies specifically devoted to Germans in the USSR, the works of Corinna Kuhr-Korolev and Plaggenborg are particularly noteworthy. They highlight the dual position of German youth, situated between traditional religious and family norms on the one hand and the demands of Soviet ideology on the other. Scholars note that the creation of German sections represented a forced compromise, necessitated by the language barrier and the need to take account of the specificities of the national milieu. By the late 1920s, however, these sections were gradually dismantled, reflecting the transition toward a standardized model of youth policy in the Soviet Union.

Thus, the analysis demonstrates that the participation of German youth in the Komsomol was not merely a reflection of party directives, but rather a component of the broader process of transforming traditional ways of life in the context of the emerging Soviet state. Turning to both domestic and international scholarship makes it possible to discern the contradictory nature of this policy: ranging from the expansion of opportunities for young people, particularly women, to the imposition of coercive modernization, whose boundaries were firmly delineated by the system of party control.

Results

The Bolshevik victory in October 1917 fundamentally expanded the social base of the communist youth movement. Alongside urban working-class youth, increasing numbers of representatives of the rural poor (primarily landless laborers) as well as students from the cities began to join the ranks of the Komsomol. The creation of the All-Russian Communist Youth League was dictated not only by the logic of class struggle, but also by the need to prevent “competing” socialist parties – the Socialist Revolutionaries, Mensheviks, and anarchists – from subordinating the youth movement to their own influence. The establishment of the communist youth union was likewise conditioned by the circumstances of the Civil War, during which the majority of conscripts mobilized into the Red Army were young people.

The First All-Russian Congress of Workers’ and Peasants’ Youth Unions marked the beginning of the widespread formation of Komsomol organizations. Within the very first year, the membership of the RKSM (Russian Communist Youth League) increased more than threefold. Komsomol cells were established in many national districts of the RSFSR, as well as in national regions and republics (Ukraine, Belarus, Turkestan, etc.), as constituent parts of the Russian Communist Youth League (Kuznetsov, 1992: 22). By the time of the establishment of the Soviet Union in December 1922, Komsomol organizations had already been formed in all national republics. Mirroring the structure of the RCP(b), the RKSM rejected the federative principle of organization, and republican branches were incorporated into it as parts of a unified whole.

The activities of the League in the republics and national regions possessed their own distinctive characteristics. Komsomol cells conducted campaigns against “nationalist and religious prejudices,” against the political “passivity” of young men and women, and intensified the struggle against “class-alien elements.” In a number of regions where sizable groups of non-indigenous youth resided, the institution of full-time secretaries of Komsomol cells was introduced, with rights equal to those of district committee secretaries. In early December 1924, a national All-Union conference was

convened in Moscow, which addressed the question of Komsomol participation in cultural and economic construction in the national republics and regions of the USSR, as well as the practical implementation of the resolutions of the Third All-Russian Conference of the RKSM on the national question.

“Who is not with us is against us”: The dynamics of Komsomol membership among representatives of the Western national minorities.

One of the most significant indicators of the politicization of youth in the USSR was the membership of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth League (VLKSM). At the same time, the leadership of the RKSM maintained that the Komsomol should encompass not only politically conscious youth but also work to “re-educate” those deemed misguided or insufficiently politically literate – i.e., to “retain within the Union all elements susceptible to re-education.”

A major surge in Komsomol membership occurred in early 1924, when, following Lenin’s death and in emulation of the RCP(b), the Komsomol initiated its own “Lenin enrollment.” During this campaign, approximately 400,000 individuals – primarily of working-class background—were admitted into the RKSM. In just three years (1923-1925), the membership of the RLKSM in the USSR increased nearly sixfold, reaching 1.77 million. In 1925 alone, about 770,000 young men and women joined the Komsomol. This sustained growth in membership was explained by youth’s greater receptivity to communist propaganda, as well as by less stringent “purges” of the Komsomol ranks compared with those of the Party. Whereas at the beginning of 1925 the total membership of the Komsomol in the USSR stood at just over 1 million (1,020,456), by early 1930 it had surpassed 2.4 million (2,409,864) (Natsional’naya politika, 1992: 159).

However, exponential growth of the Komsomol ranks did not occur uniformly across the USSR. One of the most problematic groups was youth from national minorities, including representatives of the western nationalities. By the end of 1923, Komsomol membership in Ukraine numbered approximately 43,000, of which only 433 were Poles (1.0%), 130 were Germans (0.3%), 43 were Latvians (0.1%), and 40 were Estonians (0.1%). This was largely due to linguistic difficulties that hampered political propaganda and agitation among these groups. In many cases, the bulk of Komsomol members in the national republics and regions of the USSR were recruited from among Russian youth, even in cases where Russians themselves constituted a minority population (Natsional’naya politika, 1992: 161-164). For example, in the German Autonomous Commune (Nemkommuna) as of January 1, 1924, there were only 54 RKSM members for every 10,000 German youths (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), F. 1-MO, Op. 23, D. 225, L. 127). At the same time, Russians – who represented a “national minority” (about 22% of the total population of the German Autonomous Region) – accounted for the overwhelming majority of RKSM members, at 48.5%.

The dissolution of the national Komsomol sections in early 1930 and the transfer of all youth work among national minorities into the general territorial organizations of the VLKSM led to a sharp decline in membership among a number of Western minority groups. By the end of 1935, the number of Estonian VLKSM members had decreased by 33.6%, Latvians by 26.4%, and Finns by 9%. The only upward trend was observed among Germans, whose Komsomol membership increased by a factor of 3.7. This phenomenon can be explained both by the continued existence of a national Komsomol organization in the Volga German ASSR (where all VLKSM divisions and structures operated in the German language), and by the massive outflow of German rural youth-driven by the famine of the early 1930s, particularly in Ukraine and the Lower Volga region – into industrial centers and large cities, where Komsomol organizations possessed far greater capacity to “process raw material” than in the rural hinterland.

During the years of the “Great Terror,” despite mass repressions on the basis of ethnicity, the number of Komsomol members from among the Western national minorities not only failed to decline but, on the contrary, increased. This phenomenon, most evident among Germans, was due not only to comparatively lenient admission requirements, a broader social base, and less rigorous “purges” than in the VKP(b), but also to the partial success of the Sovietization of the German minority. By the mid-1930s, the ranks of the VLKSM had been entirely renewed through a “new wave” of youth

– the “contemporaries of October” – who proved more receptive to communist ideology and anti-religious propaganda than the first generation of Komsomol members, many of whom had been born under the “tsarist regime.” A crucial role in this process was played by the school system, which by this time had been thoroughly “Sovietized,” as had the majority of its teaching staff.

To the kitchen, to the church, or to communism?

The Second Congress of the RKSM, held in October 1919, required all local committees to broaden the involvement of young women – both workers and peasants – in Komsomol activities. The congress categorically opposed the creation of separate women’s sections within the Youth League. In order to attract girls into the Komsomol, cells were advised to organize special literacy circles, handicraft groups, medical and sanitary courses, to explain Soviet legislation on social insurance, and to involve young women more actively in the work of Soviet institutions (Slavnyi put’, 1978: The leadership of the Central Committee of the RKSM repeatedly noted that the more “peasant” the composition of the population in a given province, the smaller the percentage of young women among Komsomol members. This phenomenon was particularly evident in the national regions and territories of the USSR. “To strengthen the involvement of national youth in the League, to expand its coverage by the Komsomol, to draw young women from among the nationalities into Union work – this means conducting the broadest possible campaign among the peasantry...,” observed a 1924 review of the activities of the Central Committee of the RKSM in the national republics and regions of the USSR (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op. 23. D. 225. L. 124).

This was explained not only by the general weakness of propaganda work in the German countryside and the absence of specific forms of engagement designed for German girls, but also by the historically entrenched patriarchal character of German colonies, where women were deeply religious, tied entirely to household duties, and financially dependent upon their families (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.570. L.11). A further significant factor was the prejudiced attitude of male colonists toward women in general and toward their social role within both family and community. According to the CC of the RLKSM, only by actively involving young women in the economic and social life of the German village on equal footing with men could they be made reliable allies of the Komsomol (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D. 850. L.27).

Table 1. Number of Women and Girls in the USSR (by National Composition) Who Were Members of the RCP(b) and RKSM (1922, 1923)
(Source: RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op. 23. D. 225. L.136)

Nationality	Total number of RCP(b) members (1922)	Total number of RKSM members (1923)
	in %	in %
Russians	7,3	17,1
Ukrainians	4,7	10,8
Belarusians	3,3	14,1
Jews	24,1	24,7
Poles	11,4	20,2
Germans	10,5	no data available
Lithuanians	8,6	no data available
Latvians	18,7	18,6
Estonians	14,6	33,5

By the end of 1923, the overall proportion of young women from the national republics and territories engaged in the Communist Youth League stood at 15.7% (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op. 23. D. 225. L. 135). For comparison, the share of women within the RCP(b) across 28 nationalities of the USSR was approximately half that figure, amounting to only 7.9% (1922) of the total Party

membership. A similar trend was observed among women from the Western national minorities, with the exception of Latvians (see Table 1).

Undoubtedly, one of the additional factors contributing to the growth of German Komsomol membership was the involvement of young women in the organization (RGASPI, F. 1-MO, Op. 23, D. 569, L. 36). However, due to the political backwardness of the German village and the weakness of local Komsomol cells, the Central Bureau of German Sections under the CC of the RLKSM carried out virtually no special work among young women until the mid-1920s. By the beginning of autumn 1925, in Ukraine, out of 590 Germans who were members of the Komsomol, only 95 were girls (16%) (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.570. L.6). Despite the sharp overall increase in the number of German Komsomol members in Ukraine by the end of 1925, the proportion of female members stood at only 5% (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.366. L.86), and by April 1926 it had risen to just 9% (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.570. L.60). A similar situation could be observed across the USSR as a whole (Brühl, 1999: 435).

In one report of the Crimean regional committee (OK) of the Komsomol, submitted to the CC of the RKSM (September 2, 1925), the condition of female colonists was vividly characterized: "But perhaps the most downtrodden and passive part of the population of the German colonies are the women and girls. They, especially the latter, are in such a state of passivity that they can be compared to an Oriental girl. With great difficulty can the German girl be drawn into attending meetings or performances... Moreover, she is as cruelly exploited as the German child. The German girl performs the same fieldwork as the man and, in addition, must still manage to keep the household kitchen in cleanliness and order." (RGASPI. F. 1-MO. Op.23. D. 570. L.108).

Given these circumstances, the leadership of the Central Bureau of German Sections concluded that all work among girls should assume "a more cultural than political character" (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.569. L.41). Recognizing the overall difficulties of involving German girls in the Komsomol, it was decided initially to engage them in social-educational and cultural-enlightenment activities within the colony, and only as they achieved political "maturity" to admit them into the ranks of the Komsomol itself (RGASPI. F. 1-MO. Op.23. D. 569, L.36).

Throughout the existence of the German sections, this category of the German population was consistently regarded as the most politically passive and requiring the closest attention. As noted in the resolution on work among the female population of the colonies, adopted by the delegates of the Fifth All-Union Conference of German Sections of the VKP(b) in late 1924: "The female colonist is the guardian of old traditions and religious cults. Therefore, work among colonist women aimed at involving them in Soviet, party, and cooperative construction will contribute to their revolutionization..." (RGASPI. F.549. Op.4. D. 82. L.18).

The spectrum of the gradual "politicization" of German women colonists was fairly broad, ranging from participation in various commissions of village soviets, mutual aid committees, and cooperatives, to representation on school councils and people's courts. Seeking to draw women out of the domestic sphere and involve them in socially useful labor, party and Komsomol bodies organized summer nurseries and kindergartens, "mother-and-child" departments within cooperatives, "colonist corners" in village reading rooms, and separate cooperatives of poor peasant women. A special women's quota was allocated for German colonist girls in educational institutions of different levels and profiles (RGASPI. F.549. Op.4. D.82. L.18).

Formally, party and Komsomol committees remained on the sidelines, leaving the initiative to the colonist women themselves. In practice, however, all work concerning the "politicization" of women in the colonies was under strict party control, including the establishment of "women's departments" (zhenotdely) and the selection of activists. The post of women's organizer was reserved for a candidate of German nationality with obligatory knowledge of Russian. This requirement was linked to the fact that the organizer was responsible for the political education of women, and the "women's literature" supplied to village reading rooms was, as a rule, in Russian. Around the women's organizer, a circle of activists was formed, consisting of so-called "delegatki" (delegates) elected at community meetings in their places of residence. These delegates were then distributed across numerous commissions attached to village soviets, district executive committees, and trade

unions: presidiums of village soviets, land commissions of district executive committees, reading rooms, and so forth.

Alongside their representative work in commissions, the women's departments were tasked with organizing educational activities for women: literacy campaigns, lectures on medicine and hygiene, and similar initiatives (Plokhotnyuk, 2001: 142-143). Yet, work among women often assumed a formal character. In most cases, the organization of women's departments was entrusted to schoolteachers, in addition to their primary teaching load. The programs and work plans of the women's departments, issued by district women's councils, were written in Russian, which significantly complicated the activities of organizers in German villages. The participation of German women colonists in commissions of various levels was, as a rule, nominal, owing to their lack of training, insufficient competence in many matters, and the language barrier (Plokhotnyuk, 2001: 133-144).

Table 2. Gender Distribution of German Members of the LKSMU in the Ukrainian SSR (1926)
(Source: RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.722. L.20-21)

Okrug/District	Total		Young men		Girls	
	abs.	in %	abs.	in %	abs.	B %
Luhansk	70	100,0	59	84,3	11	15,7
Izium	8	100,0	7	87,5	1	12,5
named after Petrovsky	19	100,0	18	94,7	1	5,3
named after Karl Liebkecht	31	100,0	21	67,7	10	32,3
named after Friedrich Engels	19	100,0	16	84,2	3	15,8
Molochansk	18	100,0	16	88,9	2	11,1
Pryshyb	62	100,0	51	82,2	11	17,8
Total	208	100,0	169	81,3	39	18,7

By the end of 1926, across the USSR, women accounted for only 9% of German members of the VLKSM (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.569. L.27). The activation of specifically female-oriented initiatives within the Komsomol – such as the creation of “special” choral groups, handicraft courses, and gardening and horticulture circles – gradually yielded results, though not to the extent anticipated by the Central Bureau of German Sections (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.570. L.43). Particular attention was devoted to organizing non-party conferences for German girls, at which, according to the words of the Komsomol leadership itself, they were simply “pushed” into the presidium (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.366. L.15). Similar efforts began in Siberia in mid-1926, but without significant success. According to reports from German Komsomol activists, work in women's circles proceeded rather “sluggishly,” and the number of participants left much to be desired. For example, throughout the Slavgorod district (November 1926), handicraft circles were attended by only 49 German girls (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.560. L.146). Thus, the number of potential candidates for Komsomol membership was growing only very slowly and remained far below the targets set by the Central Bureau of German Sections under the CC of the VLKSM (RGASPI. F.1-MO. Op.23. D.560. L.147).

A notable exception was the Komsomol organization of the Volga German ASSR, where the share of female members rose from 23% in 1924 to 27.5% in 1928, primarily owing to the admission of German girls (German, 1994: 64). By the end of 1929, the proportion of young women in the Volga German ASSR reached nearly one-third of the entire organization (31%), and the Komsomol organization of the Volga German Republic ranked among the highest in the USSR in terms of the proportion of female members (German, 1994: 153-158). Owing to this factor, the overall number of German girls in the VLKSM nationwide reached 1,164 by the end of 1929, or 24.0%.

It should be added that among other Western national minorities, the proportion of girls in the Komsomol was somewhat higher: Poles – 25%, Latvians – 30.2%, Estonians – 33.3%. The highest proportion of female members was recorded among the Finns, where they accounted for 41.5% (see Table 3).

Table 3. Number of Female Members of the VLKSM by Nationality in the USSR (1929)
(Source: *Natsional'naya politika*, p. 160)

Nationality	The total number of KSMU members	
	abs.	in %
Russians	403.404	28,1
Ukrainians	58.086	19,3
Jews	35.396	36,0
Poles	2.069	25,0
Germans	1.164	24,0
Finns	1.046	41,5
Estonians	1.027	33,3
Latvians	784	30,2
Total in the USSR	580.740	24,1

The dissolution of the national Komsomol sections in early 1930 and the transfer of all youth work among national minorities into the general territorial organizations of the VLKSM led to a sharp decline in membership among a number of Western minority groups. By the end of 1935, the number of Estonian VLKSM members had fallen by 33.6%, Latvians by 26.4%, and Finns by 9%. The only group that experienced steady growth was the Germans, whose membership increased 3.7-fold. This phenomenon can be explained both by the continued existence of a national Komsomol organization in the Volga German ASSR (where all VLKSM divisions and structures functioned in the German language) and by the massive outflow of German rural youth-driven by the famine of the early 1930s, particularly in Ukraine and the Lower Volga region - into industrial centers and large cities, where Komsomol organizations had far greater capacity to “process raw material” than in the rural hinterland.

During the years of the “Great Terror,” despite mass repressions carried out on the basis of ethnicity, the number of Komsomol members from among the Western national minorities not only did not decrease, but, on the contrary, increased (see Table 4). This trend, particularly evident among Germans, can be explained not only by the comparatively lenient conditions of admission into the VLKSM, the broader social base, and less rigorous “purges” in comparison with the VKP(b), but also by certain successes in the “Sovietization” of the German population.

Table 4. National Composition of VLKSM Members and Candidates (1936–1939)
(Source: RGASPI. F.1-M. Op.33. D.71. L.15-16)

Nationality	1.01.1936		1.01.1938		1.01.1939	
	abs.	in %	abs.	in %	abs.	in %
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Russians	1.801.525	49,7	2.306.800	52,7	3.847.318	52,7
Ukrainians	622.855	17,2	893.093	20,4	1.192.302	16,3
Germans	18.123	0,5	25.059	0,5	35.285	0,4

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Latvians	1.910	0,05	2.477	0,05	3.575	0,06
Estonians	2.047	0,06	2.345	0,05	3.894	0,07
Finns	2292	0,06	2492	0,05	2863	0,04
Lithuanians	—	—	—	—	569	0,01

By the mid-1930s, the ranks of the VLKSM had been entirely renewed by a “new wave” of youth – the “contemporaries of October” – who were more receptive to communist ideology and anti-religious propaganda than the generation of the first Komsomol members, many of whom had been born under the “tsarist regime.” A crucial role in this process was played by the school system, which by this time had been fully “Sovietized,” as had the majority of its teaching staff.

Conclusion

The Bolsheviks’ rise to power was marked by a radical rupture of continuity and a total rejection of the “Ancien Régime” in all its manifestations. This sharply negative attitude extended to the elites of the Russian Empire. After the end of the Civil War, the “former people” were not only removed from positions of power but also subjected to widespread discrimination and repression. Even those segments of the “old” elites whom the Bolsheviks accepted into service – technical and military specialists, professors and teachers, and others – operated under conditions of strict surveillance and intense pressure.

This made the question of creating new, communist elites – the bearers of political authority – all the more urgent for the Bolsheviks. In Soviet Russia – USSR there were two principal institutions responsible for training such elites: the Communist Party and the Communist Youth League. These political institutions simultaneously functioned as powerful vehicles of social mobility, often propelling holders of party cards and Komsomol badges to the uppermost levels of the Soviet power hierarchy. At the “entry” to these elevators, various “filters” and “barriers” were installed to exclude potential careerists in favor of the “orthodox” representatives of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry. Within the institutions themselves, the practice of regular “purges” served to protect the ranks of the Party and the Komsomol from “opportunists,” individuals who concealed their social origins, or those exposed for ties to the “former people,” and so forth.

This model of political elite formation functioned throughout the Soviet period, though at different stages of Soviet Russia – USSR it assumed distinctive characteristics. The 1920s entered Soviet history not only as a period of forced consensus between communist power and society but also as a time when the Soviet regime operated in the mode of an “affirmative action empire” (Terry Martin, 2001: 1-28). It was precisely the Bolsheviks’ “ethnophilic” policies of the 1920s, aimed at supporting and preserving ethnic particularity, that led some historians to describe the USSR as a successor to the Habsburg Empire (Mark Mazower; see Siehe, 2000). And although the Bolsheviks’ “ethnophilia” was grounded in entirely pragmatic aims – namely, the desire to Sovietize national minorities through the use of national “instruments” – it nevertheless carried numerous advantages for diasporic communities.

As this study demonstrates, one of these advantages was the intensified recruitment of new political elites from among ethnic groups. In the case of the Russian Germans, the Bolsheviks were also prepared to minimize the “filters” and barriers to entry into the Communist Party and the Komsomol, making allowances for the non-proletarian social background of German youth in order to ensure their broadest possible integration into party and Komsomol ranks.

As the above statistics on the growth of German Komsomol organizations demonstrate, by the late 1920s this policy had begun to bear its first fruits, despite resistance from traditional ethnic and confessional environments. In German villages, an entire “stratum” of Komsomol youth emerged,

acquiring vital experience in multifaceted socio-political activity – ranging from the ability to “speak Bolshevik” (Stephen Kotkin, 2001: 250–328) and mastering the rules of the Soviet political system to exercising leadership in grassroots soviet, cooperative, and cultural-educational institutions, as well as participating in political campaigns. Another crucial aspect of this experience for young Germans was the struggle against the conservative religious peasant milieu. Although this experience remained modest compared to the Stalinist mobilizations and terror of the 1930s, already in the 1920s German youth successfully assimilated the worldview of “fighters of the vanguard detachment” of the Communist Party, learning to identify “enemies” and to act ruthlessly against them. Under the NEP, the circle of “enemies” was comparatively narrow, yet the struggle against “kulak” and “clerical” influence became a necessary element of the future transformation of the German village in the 1930s under collectivization. Political skills were acquired not only by young men but also by young women, who by the late 1920s were increasingly participating in the socio-political life of the colonies.

The activities of the national Komsomol cells represented one of the key factors in the establishment of the new order in the national village and in the Bolsheviks’ appropriation of rural landscapes that were profoundly alien to them. Yet the pace of this “appropriation” was deemed clearly insufficient by the party-state leadership during collectivization, leading in the 1930s to the abandonment of Sovietization of ethnic groups through national instruments and the curtailment of the policy of “affirmative action.”

Proponents of the totalitarian theory have interpreted the communist organization of Soviet youth above all as an institutional and functional component of the Bolshevik dictatorship. By contrast, the “revisionist” approach – with its attention to the “weak spots” of the Bolshevik regime, to “spaces of freedom,” social deviance, and arenas of both resistance to and cooperation with the regime – has significantly differentiated our understanding of popular, including youth, attitudes toward the Soviet system. The present study demonstrates that the positioning of young Germans ranged from outright rejection of Soviet power to active participation in the establishment of the new order. A significant segment of German youth clearly expressed their desire to become “truly Soviet” people, particularly since Bolshevism did indeed modernize traditional ethno-confessional landscapes, producing a symbiosis of the Soviet and the national. This modernization especially affected German girls, who, thanks to Komsomol membership, for the first time gained an opportunity to move beyond the confines of family and church, acquiring a modern mentality. Yet the degree of modernity achieved by the new order in the German village should not be overestimated – its boundaries were defined by a system of authoritarian dictate with its utopian pretension to total control and obedience, and the processes of modernization were coercive in character.

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«ЖАҢА ТӘРТІПТІҢ» АВАНГАРДЫНДА: КОМСОМОЛ ЖӘНЕ НЕМІС ЖАСТАРЫ (1918–1930 ЖЖ.)

Аңдатпа. Кеңес мемлекетінің аграрлық саясаты, әсіресе Кеңес өкіметінің алғашқы онжылдығында тарихшылардың назарын үнемі аударып отырды. Дәстүрлі экономикалық жүйелер мен ауылдық өмір салтын өзгертуге байланысты бұл кезең елеулі өзгерістерге толы болды. Кеңес өкіметі кезіндегі колхоздық шаруалардың тарихы, шығарылған әдебиеттің көптігі жағынан да, ғылыми еңбегі жағынан да жақсы сақталған. Алайда 1920-шы жылдардағы большевиктердің аграрлық саясатының көптеген аспектілері әлі де даулы күйінде қалып отыр. Ең көп талқыланған мәселелердің бірі – Кеңес мемлекетінің шалғай аудандардағы, оның ішінде Қазақстандағы аграрлық саясатының ерекше сипаты мен осы кезеңдегі әлеуметтік-экономикалық жағдайы. Бұл мақалада 1920 жылдардағы Кеңес үкіметінің, отарлаудың ерекше үлгілерімен қалыптасқан көпұлтты аймақ Қазақстанға жүргізген аграрлық реформалары қарастырылады. Кеңес үкіметінің Қазақстандағы аграрлық саясаты бірнеше ерекше белгілермен ерекшеленді. Мақалада 1920 жылдардың екінші жартысындағы саяси көзқарастардың алуандығына байланысты мәселелер, оның ішінде қатаң орталықтандыруды жақтаушылар мен «ұлттық коммунизмді» жақтаған қазақ партиясының мүшелері арасындағы қайшылықтар көрсетілген. Бұл қақтығыстардың басым көпшілігі жерді басқарудағы этникалық артықшылықтардың сақталуына және қазақ емес шаруаларды қоныстандыруға тыйым салуды сақтау жөніндегі күрестерге байланысты болды. Автор мұрағат материалдарын пайдалана отырып, қазақ коммунистерінің өздерінің ұлттық ұмтылыстарын социалистік идеалдармен үйлестіру әрекеттерінің сәтсіздікпен аяқталғанын, нәтижесінде «ұлттық жалтару» деген айыптауларға, сондай-ақ партиялық және мемлекеттік институттардағы тазартуларға әкелгенін көрсетеді. Сондай-ақ мақалада аграрлық реформаларды жүзеге асыру кезінде ұлтаралық қатынастарды нашарлатқан факторлар қарастырылып, жерге орналастыру тәжірибесінің ерекшеліктеріне және оның Қазақстандағы басқарудың этноцентристік моделінің қалыптасуына қалай әсер еткеніне назар аударылады.

Кілт сөздер: аграрлық саясат, жер-су реформасы, ұлттық-территориялық автономиялар, жаңғырту, Қазақ АССР-і, қоныс аудару саясаты, большевиктер, Кеңес өкіметі, жерге орналастыру.

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В АВАНГАРДЕ «НОВОГО ПОРЯДКА»: КОМСОМОЛ И НЕМЕЦКАЯ МОЛОДЕЖЬ (1918-1930 гг.)

Аннотация. В 1918 году Российская коммунистическая партия большевиков (РКП(б)) основала Коммунистический союз молодёжи (РКСМ), также известный как комсомол. Большевики преследовали две основные цели: консолидация классовой борьбы среди молодого поколения и привлечение молодёжи на свою сторону. В статье показано, какие формы использовал московский Центр для работы в коммунистических молодёжных организациях нацменьшинств Запада, включая российских немцев, для влияния на молодое поколение и разделения молодёжи по классовой принадлежности.

Автор статьи пытается ответить на вопрос, какими другими средствами, помимо дисциплины и репрессий, располагали большевики для воспитания «нового человека» и интеграции молодого поколения в «социалистические» формы труда и жизни.

Делается вывод, что создание особых национальных секций при РКСМ было явлением временным и вынужденным, они являлись всего лишь переходной формой, инструментом

ведения агитационно-пропагандистской и политико-просветительной работы среди части национальной молодежи, отделенной от деятельности в общей организации Всесоюзный Ленинский Коммунистический Союз молодежи (ВЛКСМ) незнанием русского языка.

Коммунистические молодёжные организации внесли решающий вклад в разрушение традиционного патриархального уклада в национальных регионах и поселениях, активно участвуя в антирелигиозной и интернационалистской пропаганде и агитации. Именно из среды молодых коммунистов впоследствии вышли руководящие кадры всех уровней для работы в партийных и советских органах. Политику Центрального Комитета (ЦК) РКСМ по отношению к немецкой молодежи можно расценивать как модель, следуя которой руководство комсомола выстраивало свою политическую линию в отношении других национальных меньшинств Запада.

Ключевые слова: Советский Союз, национальная политика, классовая борьба, РКП(б), РКСМ, комсомол, национальные меньшинства Запада, Российские немцы

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