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Little Leninists: symbols and the political socialisation of Soviet children

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Abstract

Political socialisation is the process through which citizens acquire a sense of national identity and learn the basic political values of their society. The foundations of national identity develop in early childhood and are acquired differently in each country or culture. In the Soviet Union, the primary venues for political socialisation were the schools and the official youth organisations of the Communist Party. As part of the socialisation process, Soviet children learned the primary symbols of the USSR. These symbols were key elements in their daily activities and served to give them a direct connection to the Communist Party and the Soviet state. What flags and symbols were used to socialise Soviet children? How did symbols help children learn the principles of Marxism and Leninism, the goals of Communism, and how to work as a collective? In what ways did children use flags and symbols to demonstrate their Soviet identity? This paper will examine how Soviet children were introduced to the symbols of the Soviet Union, will discuss symbols created exclusively for use by children, and will describe how children interacted with flags and other symbols throughout their childhood.

Theoretical framework

Civil religion

The study of flags and symbols is a multidisciplinary subject. While many studies focus on the description and documentation of the designs and origins of flags and symbols, they often fail to analyse the broader role of these symbols in societies. The socio-political aspect of symbols has the most potential to explain how people interact with flags and more importantly, how that interaction influences and, is sometimes influenced by, members of a society. In order to conduct such a study, it is first necessary to establish a framework within which to examine this phenomenon. When looking at the role that national symbols play in the lives of a country's citizens, the concept of 'civil religion' can be useful as a means to understanding the socio-political role of symbols within a country's national culture. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines civil religion as 'religion, or a secular tradition likened to a religion, which serves (officially or unofficially) as a basis for national identity and civic life'.¹

While this dictionary definition is a good start, in terms of a study of symbols in national culture there is a need for a more expansive definition such as that proposed by Ellis M. West in 1980: 'A civil religion is a set of beliefs and attitudes that explain the meaning and purpose of any given political society in terms of its relationship to a transcendent, spiritual reality, that are held by the people generally of that society, and that are expressed in public rituals, myths,

¹ Ellis M. West, 'A Proposed Neutral Definition of Civil Religion', *Journal of Church and State*, 22, no. 1 (Winter 1980), pp. 23–40.



and symbols.' Furthermore, West suggested that, 'As such, civil religion is both a type or aspect of political culture and "a special case of the religious symbol system, designed to perform a differentiated function which is the unique province of neither church nor state".' For scholars of civil religion, this more detailed definition provides a valuable template for the study of similar phenomena in different countries. It is also quite useful for the study of political symbols, as it examines the relationship between political symbols, national myths, and patriotic rituals as they relate to a country's culture of patriotism.²

While much of the literature on civil religion has discussed the culture of patriotism in the United States, there has been prior discussion about civil religion in the Soviet Union. For example, Mary-Barbara Zeldin demonstrated that the Soviet practice of Marxism exhibited many of the expected aspects of religion including a belief in the philosophical relationship of man to the ideal, the existence of a body of believers and a prescribed set of beliefs, and elements of ritual and even worship. Christel Lane examined the roles of rites and rituals in Soviet civil religion, while Nina Tumarkin concentrated on tracing the development of the 'Lenin Cult'. In his work, James Thrower clearly demonstrated that what existed in the atheistic Soviet Union was, indeed, a civil religion. These and other existing works have typically focused on the culture of Lenin worship, the development of Soviet ritual practice, and the role of Marxist-Leninist rites in the daily life of Soviet citizens. Other than these studies, which primarily focus on the use of Lenin as a symbol, there has been little discussion on the use of symbols in Soviet civil religion or about how these symbols were used throughout the USSR to perpetuate the Soviet culture of patriotism.³

Symbols in civil religion

An excellent model for the study of symbols in civil religion is Peter Gardella's study of American civil religion. Gardella offers a compelling case on the power of symbols in modern civil religions.

The word 'religion' derives from the Latin *ligo*, which means 'I bind,' and religion has to do with what is binding and obligatory. Religions are not philosophies or sets of beliefs but systems of symbols, actions, and ideas that purport to bind together groups of people, or people and gods, or even the elements of nature. Religions may be explained or defended by reason, but they do not gain their power from reason any more than a piece of music or a work of visual art does.

He further explains that when people salute the flag or sing the national anthem, or when they participate in a rite such as a pilgrimage to a national shrine, 'the emotions they feel do not arise from a rational conclusion. If American civil religion works well for them, the emotions will lead to an

² Mary-Barbara Zeldin, 'The Religious Nature of Russian Marxism', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 8, no. 1 (Spring 1969), pp. 100–111; Christel Lane, 'Ritual and Ceremony in Contemporary Soviet Society', *Sociological Review*, New Series, 27, no. 2 (May 1979), pp. 253–78; Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers: Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!: The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); James Thrower, *Marxism-Leninism as the Civil Religion of Soviet Society: God's Commissar* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992).

³ Peter Gardella, *American Civil Religion: What Americans Hold Sacred* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 5-7.



affirmation of the values.¹ This emotional reaction to the symbolic stimulus works to bind the citizen to the nation and the shared emotional experience creates a sense of unity and collective identity among a diverse population.⁴

Gardella's book clearly illustrates the multiplicity of symbols that are inherent to a country's culture of patriotism. These symbols include official government symbols (the national flag, the state coat of arms or emblem, and the national anthem), as well as a variety of other symbols. Elements of a country's flag or emblem often become symbols in their own rights, widely distributed throughout the nation's symbol set. Examples of other national symbols include, but are not limited to: words or phrases; concepts or ideas; historical documents or artefacts valued as national relics; patriotic poems and songs; centres of government and other locations of national significance; historical events and national myths; national heroes and martyrs; monuments and memorials; as well as other concrete and abstract symbols that have become associated with patriotism in that society.⁵

Why are symbols so important in civil religion? Again, the answer lies in the very nature of human religion and belief. Whitney Smith, founder of vexillology – the study of flags – summarised the importance of symbols this way:

Symbols are directly involved in issues of power, authority, the political culture, group unity, political demands and responses by elite and masses, international intercourse, and social stability and change. In particular symbols serve the cause of nationalism by justifying the moral basis of the nation's claim to statehood, explaining its past and its objectives for the future, and defining the acceptable forms of political dialogue which all patriots must respect.⁶

The totemic nature of symbols to unite people and reinforce group identity makes them so important within this context. National symbols serve as shorthand to remind both citizens and non-citizens of the basic shared beliefs inherent to a country's political system. The most effective national symbols, such as national flags, can evoke an emotional response that immediately reminds the individual of their role in a larger collective.

Political socialisation and symbols

As with any religion, the precepts of civil religion as well as its associated symbols and rituals are taught to each new generation. While children are sometimes exposed to these elements in the home, in most cultures basic political socialisation is achieved through the country's system of formal education. Schoolchildren worldwide learn to read the symbols of their countries as they are instructed in the basic political values of their societies. In many countries, flags are displayed at educational venues – on flagpoles outside school buildings, in entryways, in gymnasiums, and in individual classrooms. Schools may also display photos of the head of state or national heroes within the buildings. In addition to national symbols, the students are typically introduced to the basic rites and rituals of their national culture of patriotism. These can include a formal recitation of values, such as saying the Pledge of

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Whitney Smith, 'National Symbols', in Alexander J. Motyl (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nationalism* (San Diego CA: Academic Press, 2001), p. 529.



Alliance in American schools, or the singing of the national anthem or other patriotic songs. Throughout a child's education, the basic elements of civil religion are continuously reinforced and acquire deeper meaning through formal history and civics lessons as the child matures.⁷

National symbols are so closely linked to the political socialisation process that psychologists and sociologists can use them as a way to gauge the development of national identity in children throughout the years of formal education. In an early study of American children conducted in 1940, Eugene Horowitz found that even as early as the first grade, children have already begun to acquire some attachment to their national flag, and that by the tenth grade the attachment is nearly universal. While the youngest children explained their flag choice of the US flag in simple terms ('because I like it'), the older children were able to verbalise their preference by explaining that they selected the flag because it was the flag of their country. Follow-up studies conducted on American children by Eugene Weinstein (1957) and Edwin Lawson (1962) confirmed Horowitz's findings that, as children progress through their education, their attachment to their nation's flag shows a steady progression in terms of the popularity of the flag and the children's sophistication in the explanation of their preferences.⁸

Based upon his results, Weinstein was able to chart out distinct stages in the child's development of the concept of flag and their sense of national identity (summarised below).

- Level 1 (5-6 years): The child has no knowledge of other countries or flags, and associates flags with various celebrations.
- Level 2 (5-6 years): The child has begun to develop the concept of countries, usually in terms of the dichotomy of 'good countries' and 'bad countries'; begins to understand that flags are used to identify with a country; still only knows their country's flag, but understands that other countries have different flags; and exhibits the initial stages of understanding symbols, but has not fully processed the flag as a symbol.
- Level 3 (7 years): The child has a better understanding of countries as a geographic area; understands that flags can show ownership, but interprets the relationship as the country 'possessing' the people, rather than people identifying with their country; recognises that people 'possessed' by a country will prefer that country's flag; and indicates that their country's flag is 'the best'.
- Level 4 (7 years): The child begins to display more knowledge about their nation's flag and flags in general; begins to acquire a basic understanding of the concept of government; and learns that people and flags are attributes, rather than possessions, of a country.
- Level 5 (8 years): The child now understands the notion of 'a multiplicity of flags;' begins to understand that countries are subdivided; dramatically changes their estimation of how many countries there are; and

⁷ A.F. Davies, 'The Child's Discovery of Nationality', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Sociology*, 4, no. 2 (1 September 1968), pp. 107–25.

⁸ Eugene L. Horowitz, 'Some Aspects of the Development of Patriotism in Children', *Sociometry*, 3, no. 4 (1940), pp. 329–41; Eugene A. Weinstein, 'Development of the Concept of Flag and the Sense of National Identity', *Child Development*, 28, no. 2 (June 1957), pp. 167–74; Edwin D. Lawson, 'Development of Patriotism in Children – a Second Look', *Journal of Psychology*, 55, no. 2 (1 April 1963), pp. 167-74; Davies, pp. 107–25.



now recognises that their country's flag is best because their country is best.

- Level 6 (8 years): The child begins to grasp the full extent of symbolism associated with their nation's flag; understands that a flag flying outside a public building indicates that the government is located there; and recognises that singing the national anthem is a way to honour the flag and that raising the flag to honour a past leader indicates that leader was one of the 'greatest leaders'.
- Level 7 (9 years): The child has a 'better notion of country' as not only a geographic unit, but also 'a group which has certain common purposes and allegiances;' understands flags as a conventional symbol that can represent not only countries, but also smaller entities and groups of people; and now understands national identity not in terms of 'being possessed by a country', but as 'identification with a group and the goals of that group'.
- Level 8 (10 years): The child fully comprehends that the national flag 'stands for loyalty to a set of goals and the group holding those goals'; and understands that people in other countries who agree with their own country's goals would prefer their own national flag.
- Levels 9 and 10 (11-12 years): The child fully understands the relationships between flag, people, and government; and progresses from one level to the next through an 'increased knowledge of rituals associated with the flag'.

Examining Weinstein's scale, it is obvious just how quickly the educational process helps children progress from the stage where they just 'like their national flag,' to developing a symbolic understanding of, and a personal relationship with, that flag as a symbol of their national identity. He concludes that 'the order in which the elements are acquired and the types of relationships perceived among them is fairly stable from child to child'. In addition, he draws a parallel between the child's development of self and his development of a sense of national identity. This sense of national identity, according to Weinstein, is 'predicated upon an awareness of other countries and the identification of people within those countries'.⁹

In their study of the political world of American children, David Easton and Robert D. Hess explained the need for political socialisation from the perspective of both the regime and of the individual child. From the regime's perspective, socialisation is one of the tools that is used to promote stability of the political system itself. They note that the procedures that are typically used by different regimes to attain this goal include 'coercion, perceived satisfaction of the needs and demands of the members, generation of positive motivation and identification through manipulation of symbols, verbal and otherwise, regulation of communications, and the like'. They also acknowledge the importance of the education system in the socialisation process for the youngest citizens, so that a sense of national identity will be instilled in such a way that it is greater than any tribal loyalties that might be at play. From the government's perspective, it is important that each new generation form an attachment to, and positive sentiments toward, the regime. As with previously-discussed studies, this work stresses the importance of the early years of formal education, as the authors contend that by the time a child reaches the age of 14, his or her political attitudes are already formed. In the early years, it is concrete symbols such as the flag or a leadership figure that are the most important at this stage of development. It is only as the child matures that they

⁹ Weinstein, pp. 167–74.



are able to relate to abstract and more impersonal political symbols. Easton and Hess also point out that, in the case of American children, many 'associate the sanctity and awe of religion with the political community' and that those in the 9-10 age group 'sometimes have considerable difficulty in disentangling God and country'. It is this aspect of the socialisation process that is key to the growth of civil religious feelings in the developing child. Finally, the authors point out that the process of political socialisation is beneficial not just for the state, but also for the individual child. They suggest that, faced with the authority of adults, children develop a sense of helplessness and vulnerability. 'By idealizing authority and by actually seeing it as benign, solicitous, and wise, the child is able to allay the fears and anxieties awakened by his own dependent state. A potentially threatening figure is conveniently transformed into a protector.' The result of political socialisation and the state's ability to provide this sense of protective authority to the child is the formation of a social bond that reinforces the child's national identity and produces the civil religious feelings associated with political symbols and rituals.¹⁰

Researchers in other countries have also conducted studies in which they used symbols to assess the development of a sense of national identity in schoolchildren. Cross-cultural studies between American and Canadian children have shown similar patterns of flag preference in both countries. Symbol studies conducted in Scotland have examined how Scottish children negotiate their dual identity of being both Scottish and British. Other studies in the United Kingdom have demonstrated how children relate to national flags, as well as to other political symbols such as the national anthem and the monarch. A study of Hungarian children conducted by Gyorgy Csepeli confirmed that this relationship between symbols and the development of national identity is not just an American or British phenomenon, but is probably present in every culture. Csepeli concluded that 'national attitude is developed in the early years of school life, reflecting both the influence of curriculum and of the teaching and school rituals'. In addition, each of these studies further validated the age progression in the development of national identity suggested by Weinstein and others.¹¹

Why are these psychological and sociological studies of children relevant to the studies of national symbols? Quite simply, it is because of the civil religious aspects of national identity and the role that symbols and national rituals play in

¹⁰ David Easton and Robert D. Hess, 'The Child's Political World', *Midwest Journal of Political Science*, 6, no. 3 (1962), pp. 229–46. For a more detailed sociological analysis of the nature of civil religion in American schools, see Adam Gamoran, 'Civil Religion in American Schools', *Sociological Analysis*, 51, no. 3 (1990), pp. 235–56.

¹¹ David Statt, 'Flag Choices of Elite American and Canadian Children', *Psychological Reports*, 32, no. 1 (February 1973), pp. 85–6; Gustav Jahoda, 'The Development of Children's Ideas about Country and Nationality: Part 1: the Conceptual Framework', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 33, no. 1 (1 February 1963), pp. 47–60; Gustav Jahoda, 'The Development of Children's Ideas about Country and Nationality: Part II: National Symbols and Themes', *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 33, no. 2 (1 June 1963), pp. 143–53; R. Jackson, 'The Development of Political Concepts in Young Children', *Educational Research*, 14, no. 1 (1 November 1971), pp. 51–5; Gyorgy Csepeli, 'Sense of National Belonging as a Result of Socialisation', *International Journal of Political Education*, 5, no. 4 (1982), pp. 377–87.



the process of political socialisation. Considering that children in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union lived in different types of societies and experienced political socialisation through different educational contexts, the basic psychological and sociological processes involved in the development of their sense of national identity were basically the same. While the methodology of political socialisation employed in a constitutional democracy, a constitutional monarchy, or a single-party communist state may at first seem quite different, in reality, the psychosocial educational process through which the culture of patriotism is taught and the sense of national identity is formed in different political systems is actually quite similar. Finally, as Adam Gamoran suggested in his study of civil religion in American schools, the role of civil religious education and the development of a strong sense of national identity in children is particularly important in societies where there is a wide range of ethnic, racial, and/or religious diversity. This is because a common sense of identity helps to integrate diverse populations into the broader society. In a country such as the Soviet Union, that included more than 100 distinct ethnicities resident within its territory, this aspect of civil religion is particularly relevant to the development of the detailed system of political symbols and rituals in the USSR.¹²

Soviet education and youth groups

With this understanding of the role of symbols in civil religion and how children develop an understanding of national symbols in the early years of formal education, it is now possible to examine these concepts within the context of the Soviet Union. The first step is an understanding of the basic institutions through which the socialisation of Soviet children was accomplished. In the USSR there was a well-developed, systematic, and universal mechanism through which children were taught the elements of Soviet civil religion and were given formal instruction in patriotism. Unlike civil religion in the United States, which developed organically among the population, Soviet civil religion was developed at the highest levels and was deliberately and strategically integrated into the national education system in order to develop a strong sense of national identity and a cohesive culture of patriotism among the population of the entire country.

One of the primary architects of the early Soviet education system was Nadezhda Krupskaya,¹³ the wife of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. In her writings on communist pedagogy, Krupskaya attempted to clarify the differences between bourgeois educational methods and those that should be employed in a communist society:

¹² For a more detailed discussion of political socialisation, see Richard E. Dawson, Kenneth Prewitt, and Karen S. Dawson, *Political Socialization: An Analytic Study*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); Gamoran, pp. 235–56.

¹³ There are multiple styles for transliterating Russian from Cyrillic into the Latin alphabet. In most cases, especially in the transliteration of bibliographic information, the author uses the Library of Congress (LC) transliteration system. The one exception is when a personal name or Russian word is typically spelled using a different transliteration in English-language texts. For example, using the Library of Congress system, Krupskaya's surname would be spelled 'Krupskaia'. In addition, the author has preserved non-LC spellings used in her sources.



The Soviet system of education aims at developing every child's ability, activity, consciousness, personality and individuality. That is why our educational methods differ from those in bourgeois public schools, and they are radically different from the methods employed in the education of bourgeois children. The bourgeoisie tries to bring up its children as individualists who set their ego above all else, who oppose the masses. Communist education employs other methods. We are for the all-round development of our children – we want to make them strong physically and morally, teach them to be collectivists and not individuals, bring them up not to oppose the collective but on the contrary to constitute its force and raise it to a new level. We believe that a child's personality can be best and most fully developed only in a collective. For the collective does not destroy a child's personality, and it improves the quality and content of education.¹⁴

The emphasis on collectivism and instilling a sense of communist morality was just as important to the goals of Soviet education as the teaching of basic skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and other traditional academic subjects. Every aspect of the educational system was designed with the teachings of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin in mind. This was key to the socialisation process through which children were prepared to help build the communist society.¹⁵

Soviet schools and formal education

Children of preschool age in the Soviet Union had a diverse range of experiences. During the workday some children remained home in the care of grandparents, while others were taken to day care centres or kindergartens. Those who remained at home may have had little formal introduction to Soviet civil religion, but those enrolled in state childcare and kindergartens certainly did. In the day care system, the primary goal of socialisation was to help children adjust to life as a member of a collective. This was accomplished through group activities and positive reinforcement where children were praised for playing together and sharing with their comrades.¹⁶

Soviet kindergartens were designed for ages three through seven. A Soviet book published in English for an international audience in 1957 clearly defined the goal of Soviet kindergarten education:

¹⁴ Nadezhda Konstaninovna Krupskaya, 'The Young Pioneer Movement as a Pedagogical Problem', in *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, trans. G. P. Ivanov-Mumjiev (Moscow: Foreign Languages Pub. House, 1957), pp. 119–20.

¹⁵ Albert Hughes, *Political Socialization of Soviet Youth* (Lewiston NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 27-40; Krupskaya, 'The Young Pioneer Movement as a Pedagogical Problem', pp. 118-22.

¹⁶ Miriam Morton, *Growing Up in the Soviet Union: From the Cradle to Coming of Age* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), pp. 15-25; Aleksandr Andreevich Didusenko, *Soviet Children* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), pp. 17-36; Urie Bronfenbrenner and John C. Condry, *Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R.* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1970), pp. 17-25; Robert W. Clawson, 'Political Socialization of Children in the USSR', *Political Science Quarterly*, 88, no. 4 (1973), pp. 703–9; Jean MacIntyre, 'Political Socialization of Youth in the Soviet Union: Its Theory, Use, and Results', Master's thesis (Naval Postgraduate School, 1993), pp. 11-15.



The aim of the educational work and care of the children in the kindergartens is to instil in them a collective spirit, to teach them to play together, to do things together and help one another to perform simple tasks. Thus the children's 'collective' becomes a social environment in which their abilities and inclinations are developed.¹⁷

In addition to learning about how to be a good group member, the children in kindergarten would have had a good introduction to a few of the basic symbols of the Soviet State. For example, in addition to the usual colourful decorations usually found in kindergartens in any country, photographs of Soviet kindergartens frequently show that these institutions had portraits of Lenin on the walls. Kitty D. Weaver described seeing a family portrait from Lenin's childhood displayed on a table with flowers in one preschool, as well as a patriotic celebration of the October Revolution that she witnessed in one kindergarten.

We took seats in the front row of chairs, and the musical director sat down at the piano and started to play *Moya Rodina* ['My Motherland'] as the children marched in, carrying red flags.

Through the performance, the children created their own version of the celebrations of the October Revolution held in cities across the Soviet Union. One group of children portrayed the bus carrying the demonstrators to the celebration, while others played the roles of the passengers.

The passengers sang:
*One, two; left, right. We march with a song.
No other holiday October has been as wonderful as this.*

The seated group of children sang back:
*Holiday, holiday, holiday October!
The flags, the flags, the red flags are exciting
Faces are joyous, everyone is merry.
The red flags are exciting.*

All of these activities gave the kindergarten students an early start in their formal lives as Soviet citizens. In addition to learning the basic skills taught in kindergartens around the world, they also started on the Leninist path, along which they would become politically socialised in collectivism and Soviet patriotism.¹⁸

Formal education for all children in the Soviet Union began at the age of seven.¹⁹ On 1 September – the Holiday of the First School Bell – seven-year-old children were introduced to life in the collective of Soviet schoolchildren. On

¹⁷ Fedar Filippovich Korolev, *Education in the U.S.S.R.* (London: Soviet News, 1957), p. 12; MacIntyre, pp. 11-15.

¹⁸ Bronfenbrenner and Condry, pp. 17-25; Kitty D Weaver, *Lenin's Grandchildren: Preschool Education in the Soviet Union* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), pp. 24-42. See also Lisa A. Kirschenbaum's description of political education in the kindergartens. Lisa A Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917-1932* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2000), pp. 123-32.



their first day of school, children dressed in their new school uniforms carried flowers intended for presentation to their teachers. In the welcoming ceremony, the school faculty greeted the new students at the entrance to the school. Then the tenth-graders came forward, and each took a new student by the hand to lead them in a procession to their classroom. In the classroom, the second-graders presented each student with their own copy of the textbook and welcomed them into the collective of the student body. From this point forward, the children were not just individuals but also members of a group. Throughout every stage of their education, children were encouraged to put the group ahead of themselves and to help their comrades. By the 1950s, education was mandatory for all children for 10 years, with some students completing their secondary education in college-preparatory courses and others in polytechnic schools.²⁰



Young Pioneers escort Little Octobrists. N. Panova, Oktiabriata (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1959), p. 55

The Soviet campaign to expand educational opportunities for all children had multiple goals. First was the reversal of educational policies in the tsarist era that basically trapped children in the life-path of their parents. In pre-Revolutionary Russia children of the nobility, the wealthy, and the merchant class had access to formal education, while the children of peasants and workers received little or no formal education and often entered the work force at an early age. Soviet sources estimated that before the Revolution the illiteracy rate among men was 70 per cent, while for women it was nearly 90 per cent. In their lessons, Soviet children learned about the inequality of the educational system of the past, and received frequent reminders that it was because of communism that all children had an equal opportunity to get an education in the USSR. The national curriculum included the same basic goals of any educational system – to teach the student to read and write, to teach them mathematics and science, and to give them a good background in the humanities and social sciences. Children in each of the Soviet Republics received instruction in the language and literature of their own republic, but all children in the Soviet Union regardless of their nationality studied and were expected to achieve fluency in the Russian language, as it was the common

¹⁹ In the 'Guidelines for the Economic and Social Development of the USSR,' plans were made to transition to universal kindergarten preparation for all Soviet students by 1990. This transition was in process during the final years of the Soviet Union, when the combination of increased nationalism in the Republics and relaxation of control by the central authorities led to more variation in the curricula of schools in different parts of the country. N. Vishneva-Sarafanova, *The Privileged Generation: Children in the Soviet Union* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1984), pp. 178-80, 183-8.

²⁰ A description of the welcoming ceremony from the perspective of visiting kindergartners is found in Morton, p. 24. Bronfenbrenner and Lane also describe the celebrations related to the first day of school. Bronfenbrenner and Condry, pp. 17-25; Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 94-6.



language for all citizens of the USSR.²¹

It is the second goal of the Soviet educational system, political socialisation, that is of interest to the topic of this paper. Technically, the curriculum in each of the 15 Soviet Republics was directed by that Republic's Ministry of Education. In reality, though, the Communist Party and the national education authorities were involved in shaping the curriculum in every republic. The ideology of Marxism and Leninism was central to the entire curriculum and not just limited to instruction in history and civics. At every stage of their education students not only learned to be good communists, but also received instruction in other subjects that was presented within the framework of the Marxist-Leninist world view. Even more important in the immense multi-ethnic state that was the USSR, the political socialisation process was intended to teach the children to be patriotic citizens and, more importantly, to instil in them a sense of Soviet national identity that would be dominant over their ethnic identity. While the formal educational system was designed to teach Soviet political philosophy and communist morality, it is impossible to completely understand how Soviet children were politically socialised without a discussion of the role of the children's organisations. These organisations were directly linked to the formal educational system and embedded into the schools. Schoolteachers and leaders of the children's organisations shared the responsibility for teaching children to be good Leninists and patriotic citizens of the Soviet Union.²²

Children's organisations in the USSR

In the Soviet Union, there was only one organisation for children – the Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organisation – Всесоюзная Пионерская организация имени Владимира Ленина (*Vsesoiuznaia Pionerskaia organizatsiia imeni Vladimira Lenina*), better known as the Young Pioneers. This organisation was administered under the authority of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League, known by the Russian abbreviation Комсомол (*Komsomol*), an abbreviation of 'Communist Union of Youth'. Komsomol was an organisation open to individuals aged 15-28 who had proven themselves worthy through their participation in the Young Pioneers. Pioneers ranged in age from 10-15, but to become members of the organisation children first had to demonstrate their worthiness in the Little Octobrists – Октябрята (pronounced *Oktiabriata*), the Pioneer Organisation's group for children ages 7-10. Therefore, the ideal progression in the political life of a Soviet citizen would start at age 7 as a Little Octobrist, continue in the Young Pioneers when they reached age 10, advance in youth at age 15 as a member of Komsomol, and culminate in membership in the Communist Party as an adult.²³

²¹ Korolev, *Education in the U.S.S.R.*; Bronfenbrenner and Condry, pp. 28-69; MacIntyre, pp. 18-29; Ina Schlesinger, 'The Pioneer Organization: the Evolution of Citizenship Education in the Soviet Union', Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1967), pp. 67-99

²² Hermann Rajamaa, *The Moulding of Soviet Citizens: A Glance at Soviet Educational Theory and Practice* (London: Boreas Pub. Co., 1948); Bronfenbrenner and Condry, pp. 28-69; MacIntyre, pp. 18-29; Hughes, pp. 151-60.

²³ Alexander M. Chabe, 'Star Badges and Red Scarves', *Educational Forum*, 34, no. 4 (1 May 1970), pp. 485-93; Jim Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', in George Avis (ed.), *The Making of the Soviet Citizen: Character Formation and Civic*



This study focuses on the initial years of formal education from ages 7-15, as these years correspond not only to the age-span of the Little Octobrists and Young Pioneers, but also are the period when children acquire their sense of national identity and ability to recognise and understand the symbols of their country. Nadezhda Krupskaya, one of the architects of the Young Pioneer Organisation, understood the importance of political socialisation in preparing the next generation:

The Pioneer movement reaches the children at that age when the personality of the individual is still being formed, and it promotes the social instincts of the children, helping to develop in them civic habits and a social consciousness. It places before the children a wonderful goal, that goal which has been brought to the fore by the period through which they are living and for which the workman class of the whole world is fighting. The goal is the liberation of the toilers and the organization of a new order where there will be no division into classes, no oppression, and no exploitation, and where all people will live a full and happy life.²⁴

Krupskaya and others worked to build a coeducational organisation that would give children similar opportunities as those available through Scouting organisations in other countries, but would also prepare children to be good citizens of the Soviet Union. Through the Young Pioneer organisation children had access to a wide variety of extracurricular activities such as games, field trips, camping, handicrafts, theatre and the arts, and more. Activities were also designed to encourage teamwork and good social habits, with an emphasis on collective accomplishments and socially beneficial work. According to Krupskaya,

The Young Pioneer organization instils in its members collective instincts and accustoms them to share joy and grief, teaches them to make the interests of the collective their own, to regard themselves as members of the collective. It develops collective habits, i.e., the ability to work and act collectively and in an organized manner by subordinating their will to the will of the collective, displaying their initiative through the collective and teaching them to respect the opinion of the collective. Lastly, it enhances children's communist consciousness by helping them to realize that they are members of the working class which is fighting for mankind's happiness, members of the huge army of the international proletariat.²⁵

Political socialisation was both the responsibility of the school system and the children's organisations, so that it is impossible to really separate the two. Krupskaya contended that this connection between the school and the organisations was the main strength of the Young Pioneers and kept the group relevant to Soviet society. Deana Levin offers an excellent description of the

Training in Soviet Education (London: New York, 1987), pp. 136–60; MacIntyre, pp. 42-9.

²⁴ Samuel N. Harper, *Civic Training in Soviet Russia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1929), p. 61.

²⁵ Krupskaya, 'International Children's Week (*Pravda*, 1923),' in *On Education: Selected Articles and Speeches*, pp. 107–10.



relationship between the schoolteacher and the leader of the school's Pioneer group in her 1933 book, *Children in Soviet Russia*. Levin went to the Soviet Union to study their educational system and herself participated in the teacher-Pioneer partnership in her role as a third-grade teacher in a Moscow school. Probably the easiest way to clearly define what was expected of children in this area is to look at the laws and principles for each level of the children's organisations, which were frequently reiterated in literature and formal textbooks designed for each age group.²⁶

The Little Octobrists – Октябрята (Oktiabrata)

As the youngest age group of the Young Pioneer organisation, the Little Octobrists were considered to be an introductory group used to prepare children for membership in the Pioneers. The group was first introduced in 1924, and is named in honour of the heroes of the October Revolution using the diminutive form of the word 'Octobrist' (hence, 'Little Octobrist'). Nearly every child in the Soviet Union participated in the group when they were in grades 1-3. Octobrist groups were organised within each school or children's home. The Little Octobrist groups were usually led by schoolteachers with the assistance of Komsomol members and older Young Pioneers.²⁷

The rules of the organisation clearly defined the ideal child of this age group:

Rules of the Little Octobrists

Little Octobrists are future Pioneers.

Little Octobrists are diligent children, study well, love school, [and] respect their elders.

Only those who love work are called Little Octobrists.

Little Octobrists are honest and truthful children.

Little Octobrists are amicable children, they read and draw, play and sing, [and] live cheerfully.²⁸

Schoolbooks and recreational reading for Octobrist-aged children reinforced these ideals with illustrations of happy children, proudly wearing their Little Octobrist badges while working with a group of their peers or helping out at home. More discussion about Octobrist symbols and the imagery used to portray the ideal Little Octobrist will follow in the section on how symbols were used in the socialisation process.

²⁶ Deana Levin, *Children in Soviet Russia* (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), pp. 18-28; MacIntyre, pp. 42-9; Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 136-7; Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya, 'The School and the Pioneer Movement', in Helen B. Redl (ed.), *Soviet Educators on Soviet Education* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), pp. 225-8. See also further works by Krupskaya in *Soviet Educators on Soviet Education*, pp. 221-44.

²⁷ Chabe, p. 486; Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 138-42.

²⁸ Vsesoiuznaia pionerskaia organizatsiia imeni V.I. Lenina, Vsesoiuznyi leninskii kommunisticheskii soiuz molodezhi, Tsentral'nyi komitet, *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo TSK VLKSM Molodaia gvardiia, 1961), p. 124; Aleksandra S. Smirnova, *Oktiabriata – Budushchie Pionery: Rekomendatel'nyi Ukazatel' Literatury Dlia Vozhatykh Oktiabriatskikh Grupp i Zvezdochek*, 2nd ed., (Leningrad: Ministerstvo kul'tury RSFSR, 1960), p. 6; MacIntyre, pp. 42-9. Authors translations.



Young Pioneers – Молодые Пионеры (*Molodye Pionery*)

When a child advanced to membership in the Young Pioneers, they were expected to live up to a much higher ideal and to accept much more responsibility for themselves and their comrades. Promotion to the Young Pioneers was not automatic, but nearly every Little Octobrist aspired to achieve that goal and very few children were excluded from participation in the organisation. The promotion ceremony was a solemn affair, and usually was held in the Pioneer Room of their school or at a place of symbolic significance in their city, such as Red Square for children in Moscow. As part of the ceremony, an older Young Pioneer tied the coveted red neckerchief of the Pioneers around their neck, and they were given the badge of the organisation to wear on their chests. The newly initiated Pioneers swore the solemn promise of the Young Pioneer and agreed to live by the laws of the organisation, such as these examples from the 1961/2 school year.²⁹

Solemn Promise of the Young Pioneer of the Soviet Union (1961)

I, a Young Pioneer of the Soviet Union, before my comrades solemnly promise:

to passionately love my Soviet homeland,

to live, study, and fight as great Lenin bequeathed and as the Communist Party teaches.

Laws of the Young Pioneers of the Soviet Union (1961)

A pioneer loves the homeland, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. He prepares himself to become a member of the VLKSM [All-Union Leninist Young Communist League].

A pioneer reveres the memory of those who have given their life in the fight for the freedom and flourishing of the Soviet Homeland.

A pioneer is on friendly terms with children of all countries of the world.

A pioneer diligently studies, is disciplined, and polite.

A pioneer loves to work and protects the national good.

A pioneer is a good comrade, cares for the younger, [and] helps the elders.

A pioneer grows up courageous and is not afraid of difficulties.

A pioneer tells the truth, he values the honour of his detachment.

A pioneer toughens himself, does physical exercises every day.

A pioneer loves nature; he is a defender of green plants, beneficial birds, and animals.

A pioneer is an example to all children.³⁰

Throughout the history of the organisation, the oath and laws varied. For example, the laws used in the 1920s were simpler. During this time there were only five laws. The Pioneers were expected to be 'faithful to the cause of the workman class and in the precepts of Ilich'; to be 'the younger brother and helper of the Young Communist and the Communist'; to organise other children and join with them in their lives, as well as being an example for all children; to

²⁹ Chabe, pp. 486-93; MacIntyre, pp. 42-9; Karel Hulicka and Irene M. Hulicka, *Soviet Institutions, the Individual and Society* (Boston: Christopher Pub. House, 1967), pp. 113-18; Harper, pp. 61-85; Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 142-9

³⁰ *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*, pp. 74-5. Author's translation.



be 'a comrade to other Pioneers, and to the workman and peasant children of the whole world'; and to strive for knowledge, because 'Knowledge and understanding are the great forces in the struggle for the cause of the workman.' There were also five customs that described the personal habits of the ideal Young Pioneer. By the 1980s, the laws had been condensed so that there were eight. This was done by combining and simplifying several of the laws. While the laws and customs of the Young Pioneers varied throughout the history of the organisation, the basic principles guiding the lives of the organisation's members were all designed to help the children develop a sense of Soviet identity and to prepare themselves for their future role as a builder of communism. To achieve this, the programme incorporated the symbols, rituals, and pilgrimages that were inherent in the civil religion of the Soviet Union.³¹

National symbols of the Soviet Union

Before beginning an in-depth discussion of how flags and other symbols were used to socialise children, it is first necessary to have a general knowledge of Soviet symbolics. In Soviet descriptions of symbols, there was usually a distinction made between official state symbols – Государственная символика (*gosudarstvennaia simvolika*) and other symbols. Official state symbols of the Soviet Union, as defined in the constitution, comprised the national flag, the state arms/emblem, and the national anthem. Other symbols used in Soviet society included images of Communist and Soviet leaders (especially Lenin), thematic symbols that illustrated Soviet values, as well as a variety of slogans.³²

Official state symbols

The national flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics had a red field with official proportions of 1:2. At the upper hoist in gold (usually shown as yellow) was a crossed hammer and sickle. Above the hammer and sickle was a five-pointed red star, fimbriated with the same gold or yellow colour used in the other device. The flag was a conglomeration of three basic symbols that all gained popularity during the Russian Revolution. Each of these elements also stood as symbols in their own right, and were used in the national symbol set of the Soviet Union.³³

³¹ MacIntyre, pp. 42-9; Harper, pp. 61-85; Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 142-9; S. Furin, *The World of Young Pioneers* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), pp. 8, 31.

³² Sovetskii Soiuz, 'Gerb, Flag, Gimn i Stolitsa SSSR', in *Konstitutsiia (Osnovnoi Zakon) Soiuz Sovetskikh Sotsialisticheskikh Respublik: Priniata na vnecherednoi sed'moi sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR deviatogo sozyva 7 oktiabria 1977 goda*, chapter 21, article 8 (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo 'Iuridicheskia literatura,' 1979), pp. 44–5.

³³ Whitney Smith, *Flags through the Ages and across the World* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), pp. 130-31, 174-9,; W. G. Crampton, *Flags of the World: A Pictorial History* (New York: Dorset Press, 1990), pp. 99-100; Alfred Znamierowski, *The World Encyclopedia of Flags: The Definitive Guide to International Flags, Banners, Standards and Ensigns* (London: Lorenz, 1999), pp. 126-7, 242-3; Sovetskii Soiuz, 'Gerb, Flag, Gimn i Stolitsa SSSR', in *Konstitutsiia*, pp. 44-5; Konstantin Konstantinovich Mamaev, *Flagi rasskazyvaiut* (Leningrad: Avror, 1972), pp. 18-20; Konstantin A. Ivanov, trans. Whitney Smith, 'Soviet Russian Flags', *Flag Bulletin*, 6, no. 1-2 (Winter 1966-Winter 1967), pp. 42-51. Suggestions for Soviet teachers on how to

First was the Red Banner – Красное знамя (*krasnoe znamia*) of revolution. Red banners have long been a symbol of protest and were prevalent during the French Revolution of 1789-99. As such, many revolutionary movements in Tsarist Russia adopted this colour as a primary symbol used in their protests. The 'Red Banner of Revolution' has no set design specifications other than the colour of the field. Typically, within the context of the Russian Revolution and Soviet usage, they took the form of long multi-staffed banners bearing Revolutionary slogans, single-poled banners with a horizontal crossbar, or simple flags with writing. It is also important to note the importance of the colour red in Russian culture. The Russian word for red – красный (*krasnyi*) shares the same linguistic root with and is often synonymous with the word красивый (*krasivyi*), which means 'beautiful'. For this reason, the colour red has long been associated with the concept of beauty in Russian culture. While the name of Moscow's Red Square originally meant 'beautiful square,' it took on a unique double meaning during the Soviet era when red became the colour associated with communism and the Soviet state. In addition, it should be noted that the colour red has a strong psychological impact on the observer, making it an especially powerful colour in civil religious contexts.³⁴

In Russian, 'hammer and sickle' is always phrased 'Серп и молот' (*serp i molot*), which translates as 'sickle and hammer'. In Soviet symbology, the hammer and sickle represented the union of the workers and peasants who were often described in Marxism using the word 'Proletariat' (for the collective noun describing all members of this class) or 'Proletarian' (as an adjective or as a noun describing a single member of the proletariat). Originally, the symbol featured a crossed hammer and plough, based upon the hat badge worn by soldiers of the Red Army during the Russian Civil War. On the badge, the hammer and plough were centred on a red five-pointed star. Over time, the sickle replaced the plough, as it was much easier to depict graphically and made for a cleaner visual symbol.³⁵

teach about the Red Flag of the Motherland can be found in A. Murzin, 'Krasnyi Flag Otchizny', *Vospitanie shkol'nikov*, no. 1 (1978), pp. 14–15. For broader treatments on teaching the national symbols, see V. Karpenko, 'Nashi Slavnye Simvol'y', *Vospitanie Shkol'nikov*, no. 4 (1986), pp. 59–63; L. Mysova, 'Ispol'zovanie Gosudarstvennoi Simvolika v Vospitatel'noi Rabote', *Vospitanie Shkol'nikov*, no. 6 (1986), pp. 13–16.

³⁴ Orlando Figes and B. I. Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution: The Language and Symbols of 1917* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 41-3; Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 200-201; N. A. Soboleva, 'From the History of Soviet Political Symbolism', *Russian Studies in History*, 47, no. 2 (Autumn 2008), pp. 59–91; Ivanov, pp. 42-51; Iozef Kiblitiskii, 'Nemnogo o tsvete, o krasnom tsvete ...', in Evgeniia N Petrova (ed.), *Krasnyi tsvet v russkom iskusstve* (St Petersburg: Gosudarstvennyi russkii muzei, 1997), pp. 6–7; Alexander Pronin and Barbara Pronin, *Russian Folk Arts* (South Brunswick: Barnes, 1975), p. 153; N. M. Shanskii, *Russian Word Formation*, 1st ed. (Oxford, New York: Pergamon Press, 1968), p. 39; Havelock Ellis, 'Psychology of Red,' *Popular Science*, 57 (2 August 1900), pp. 365–75; Wolfgang G. Jilek, 'Nazi and Communist Flags: Semiotic Aspects and Psychophysiological Dynamics of Totalitarian Symbols', *Flag Bulletin*, 40/1, no. 197 (February 2001), pp. 1–40; Lev Vasil'evich Uspenskii, 'Krasá,' in *Pochemy Ne Inache?: Etimologicheskii Slovarik Shkol'nika* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Detskaia literatura, 1967), p. 150; Mamaev, pp. 8-21.

³⁵ Figes and Kolonitskii, pp. 61-2; A.V. Ivanchenko, *Soiuz serpa i molota* (Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1987); Soboleva, pp. 74-7, 83-6; Ivanov, pp. 45-51.



This hat badge was also the origin of the Red Star – Красная звезда (*krasnaia zvezda*) as a symbol of the Soviet Union in particular, and of international communism in general. The five points of the star represented the five populated continents – Eurasia (considered to be one continent in Soviet usage), Africa, North America, South America, and Australia. In Soviet Communism, the theory was that through the natural progression of social evolution all nations will eventually become Communist and the Proletariat of all nations will eventually be victorious in their struggle.³⁶



National flag of the Soviet Union.
<https://flagspot.net/images/s/su.gif>
[accessed 23 June 2017]

In Russian, the state emblem of the Soviet Union is usually described using the traditional word for 'coat of arms' – герб (*gerb*), even though the design intentionally deviated from the heraldic standards for coats of arms. The Soviet emblem signalled a new style of socialist heraldry that had evolved beyond the coats of arms traditionally used to represent the nobility and their domains. In place of an escutcheon (or shield), the Soviet arms used the globe of Earth depicted above the rising sun, symbolising the dawn of a new era. The globe tilted to show Eurasia, the location of the Soviet Union, with the African continent below. A gold (or yellow) crossed hammer and sickle emblem covered the landmasses of the globe. The red star served as a crest, in the position once reserved for the royal crown in the heraldic tradition of the Russian Empire. Instead of the traditional supporters on either side of the shield, the Soviet emblem used a wreath of grain, tightly wrapped in a red ribbon.



State Arms of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (1st version, 1923-36).
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_the_Soviet_Union_\(1923%E2%80%931936\).svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Coat_of_arms_of_the_Soviet_Union_(1923%E2%80%931936).svg)
[accessed 2 June 2017]

The appearance of the ribbon changed twice when additional Republics were added to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, as well as in 1956 when the Karelo-Finnish SSR was renamed the Karelian Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and became an autonomous republic within the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. On all versions of the emblem, the ribbon bore inscriptions with a quotation of the final sentence from *The Communist*

³⁶ Smith, *Flags through the Ages*, pp. 130-31, 174-9; Crampton, *Flags of the World*, pp. 99-100; Znamierowski, *World Encyclopedia of Flags*, pp. 126-7, 242-3; Sovetskii Soiuz, 'Gerb, Flag, Gimn i Stolitsa SSSR', in *Konstitutsiia*, pp. 44-5; Nikolai Dmitrievich Chernikov (ed.), *Nasha krasnaia zvezda* (Moskva: Detskaia literatura, 1987); Soboleva, pp. 74-7.



Manifesto in each of the titular languages of the Soviet Socialist Republics. On the versions used since 1923, the Russian-language inscription appeared at the base where heraldic mottos are traditionally displayed on a banderole (or speech scroll). The Russian-language version read 'Пролетарии всех стран, соединяйтесь!' ('*Proletarii vseh stran, soediniaytes'!*'), which literally translates as 'Proletarians of all countries, unite!' In English, this famous phrase is usually expressed as 'Working men of all countries, unite!' or 'Workers of the world, unite!' Emblems of the Soviet Republics and Autonomous Republics used the Soviet arms as a model, and many other communist nations adopted this new style of socialist heraldry as the basis for their own national emblems. In addition, many Soviet cities had arms that conformed to the socialist style of heraldry.³⁷

The third official state symbol of the Soviet Union was the national hymn – гимн (*gimn*). The *Internationale*, a revolutionary anthem originally written in French that had been popular during the Revolution and, in translation, adopted as the official hymn of the RSFSR in 1918, was the official hymn of the Soviet Union from 1922-45. On 15 March 1944, during the Great Patriotic War (the Soviet name for the Second World War) the USSR adopted a new anthem – Славься, Отечество наше свободное! (*Slav'sya, Otechestvo nashe svobodnoye!*), meaning 'Be glorious, our free Fatherland!'

The initial lyrics of the anthem contained a line in the second verse praising Joseph Stalin. Following the era of destalinisation that began in 1953, the anthem was performed without lyrics. New lyrics, from which the reference to Stalin had been purged, were adopted in 1977 and the anthem remained the official hymn of the Soviet Union until its breakup in 1991.³⁸

³⁷ Smith, *Flags through the Ages*, pp. 130-31, 174-9.; Crampton, *Flags of the World*, pp. 99-100; Znamierowski, *World Encyclopedia of Flags* pp. 126-7, 242-3; Stephen Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry: An International History of Heraldry and Its Contemporary Uses* (London: Lorenz Books, 2002), pp. 214-9; Ivanchenko, pp. 44-91; Soboleva, pp. 78-86; Karl Marks and Fridrikh Engel's, *Manifest Kommunisticheskoi partii* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo politicheskoi literatury, 1980), p. 61; Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (New York: International Publishers, 1948), p. 44; Sovetskii Soiuz, 'Gerb, Flag, Gimn i Stolitsa SSSR,' in *Konstitutsiia*, pp. 44-5. Suggestions for Soviet teachers on ways to teach about the Soviet Coat of Arms can be found in V. Stepanenko, 'Gerb Sovetskogo Soiuza', *Vospitanie Shkol'nikov*, no. 1 (1978), pp. 16-17. In 1946 the state emblem was altered to add languages of newly admitted republics – Karelo-Finnish, Moldavian, Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian. 'On Changing the Design of the State Arms of the USSR in Connection with the Increase of the Number of Union Republics, Edict of June 26, 1946, *Verdomosti SSSR* (1946), No. 25', in *Soviet State Symbolism: Flags and Arms of the USSR and Its Constituent Parts, 1917-1971* (Winchester, Mass.: Flag Research Center, 1972), p. 57. The final change to the state emblem was made in 1956. At this point, the languages on the ribbon were listed in order as Russian, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Uzbek, Kazakh, Georgian, Azerbaijani, Lithuanian, Moldavian, Latvian, Kirghiz, Tadzhik, Armenian, Turkmen, and Estonian. 'On Changing the Design of the State Arms of the USSR, Edict of September 12, 1956, *Verdomosti SSSR* (1956), no. 18, item 395', in *Soviet State Symbolism*, p. 61.

³⁸ Sovetskii Soiuz, 'Gerb, Flag, Gimn i Stolitsa SSSR', in *Konstitutsiia*, pp. 44-5; Caroline Brooke, 'Changing Identities: The Russian and Soviet National



*State Arms of the Union of
Soviet Socialist Republics
(4th version, 1956–91).*
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/
wiki/File:State_Emblem_of_the_
Soviet_Union.svg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:State_Emblem_of_the_Soviet_Union.svg)
[accessed 2 June 2017]

Other Soviet symbols

Without question, the most important symbol in the Soviet Union outside of the official state symbols was Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (born Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov, 1870-1924). Images of Lenin were, almost quite literally, everywhere in the Soviet Union. Lenin's role in the history of the communist state – as a political theorist, as a revolutionary, and as the first leader of the Soviet Union – ensured that he would become an important symbol of the USSR. Following his death in 1924, Soviet leaders decided not only to create an elaborate tomb for Lenin on Red Square at the centre of Moscow, but also to scientifically preserve his physical body and place it on display as an object of reverence and pilgrimage. Many have theorised that the decision to preserve and display Lenin's remains was linked directly to the popular belief in Russian Orthodoxy that a true saint was incorruptible, and therefore their physical remains would not decay. While the preservation was achieved through scientific means, the psychological connection to the older religious tradition of the country imbued Lenin with saint-like status in Soviet society. In addition, his glass coffin served as a reliquary and his mausoleum became the primary shrine of Marxism-Leninism, as well as the most important location for pilgrimage in Soviet civil religion.³⁹

In the Soviet Union, it became common practice to display portraits and sculptures of Lenin within both private and public contexts in every part of the country. From a civil religious perspective, it is especially interesting to note how Lenin corners (localised shrines to Lenin) replaced the traditional icon corners of Russian Orthodoxy. Again, the linguistic relationship between the Russian words for 'beautiful' and 'red' made this transition easier. In traditional Russian Orthodox homes, the standard practice was to have one corner in the house devoted to a personal Christian shrine. This corner was the location where the family displayed their icons and it served as the locus of the family's religious activities in the home. In Russian, the icon corner was known as the 'beautiful corner' or alternatively as the 'red corner'. After the Revolution, the

Anthems', *Slavonica*, 13, no. 1 (April 2007), pp. 27–38. See also Joseph Zikmund II, 'National Anthems as Political Symbols', *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 15, no. 3 (1 December 1969), pp. 73–80; Karen A. Cerulo, 'Sociopolitical Control and the Structure of National Symbols: an Empirical Analysis of National Anthems', *Social Forces*, 68, no. 1 (September 1989), pp. 76–99; Karen A. Cerulo, 'Symbols and the World System: National Anthems and Flags', *Sociological Forum*, 8, no. 2 (June 1993), pp. 243-71; Figes and Kolonitskii, pp. 62-8; 'Lyrics for Soviet Anthem Revised, So People No Longer Have to Hum', *New York Times* (1 September 1977), p. 2.

³⁹ Olga Velikanova, *Making of an Idol: On Uses of Lenin* (Göttingen: Muster-Schmidt, 1996); Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 210-20; Thrower, pp. 85-92; Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, entire book.

Communist Party began an anti-religious campaign, aimed at changing the culture to replace Orthodoxy with atheism in line with Marxist philosophy. With the death of Lenin and his 'canonisation' as a 'saint' of the communist cause, it seemed only natural that images of Lenin would replace the religious icons in the home. Eventually, 'red corners' became known as 'Lenin corners'. In addition to 'icons' of Lenin, it was quite common to display other Soviet symbols in this location. Lenin corners were also found outside the context of the family home. It was a common project for Young Pioneers to create their own Lenin corners or even miniature Lenin museums in their schools. Additionally, Lenin corners were located in the workplace and in public buildings. In communal living environments, Lenin corners became not just the centres of civil religious observance, but also the expanded social space shared by all the residents.⁴⁰

Other individuals were also elevated to the level of national symbol in the Soviet Union. Among the earliest were Karl Marx (1818-83), and to a lesser extent, Friedrich Engels (1820-95) – the authors of *The Communist Manifesto*. Soviet imagery frequently showed Marx and Lenin together in a manner to portray Lenin as the heir and successor to Marx's legacy. Lenin's successor, Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin (born Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili, 1878-1953), enjoyed equal symbolic status during his time as leader of the Soviet Union. However, after Stalin's death the next leader of the Soviet state, Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev (1894-1971), condemned Stalin's 'Cult of Personality' and initiated a campaign of destalinisation that eliminated his official status as a state symbol. While it was common to see portraits or sculptures of later Soviet leaders displayed in public places, none was ever elevated to the level of Lenin and Stalin. Finally, it is important to note that Khrushchev never intended for his condemnation of Stalin's 'Cult of Personality' to extend to Lenin's role as a state symbol. Lenin continued to be one of the most important symbols of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics until its dissolution in 1991.

One final personification of the Soviet state is worth noting in this discussion – national heroes of the Soviet Union. This broad category incorporated a variety of individuals, and not just recipients of the official 'Hero of the Soviet Union' citation. In the Soviet state, heroes served as examples of the Communist ideals to which all citizens should aspire. National heroes included military heroes, cosmonauts, athletes, chess players, scientists, and others deemed worthy to serve as role models for the citizenry. In addition, these national heroes could also take the generic form of an idealised Soviet sailor or soldier, a factory worker or communal farmer, a scientist or engineer, an athlete, or even a good student or member of the Soviet youth movement.⁴¹

Abstract (or conceptual) symbols and slogans were also included in the symbol set of the Soviet state. These symbols represented the ideals of socialism and communism, national goals and ambitions, as well as qualities of the Soviet Union that its leaders wanted to communicate to both internal and external audiences. One of the most important conceptual symbols was the portrayal of the Soviet Union as a multinational family of free peoples who were not only equals, but also united in their common goal to build communism. Soviet

⁴⁰ Tumarkin, *Lenin Lives!*, pp. 3-6, 126-7, 131, 217, 221-32, 239-45, 259; Figes and Kolonitskii, pp. 101-3; Thrower, pp. 77-92; E. Tiazhel'nikov, 'Bring Up Young Leninists', *Soviet Education*, 15, no. 3 (January 1973), pp. 23-46; Velikanova, pp. 123-6; Nina Tumarkin, 'Political Ritual and the Cult of Lenin,' *Human Rights Quarterly*, 5, no. 2 (May 1983), pp. 203-6.

⁴¹ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 204-20.



symbolism visually portrayed this concept in a number of ways. Examples include the use of the 15 Republic languages such as on the Soviet emblem, flag displays showing the national flag along with a full collection of Republic flags, images showing groups of people wearing national costumes of each republic, as well as other forms. This view of the Soviet Union as a permanent union of many nationalities was reinforced through the lyrics of the first verse of the national anthem:

Unbreakable Union of freeborn Republics
Great Russia has welded forever to stand!
Created in struggle by will of the peoples,
United and mighty our Soviet land!

While in retrospect it seems that the unity of the Soviet peoples was more an artificial union of territories held together by a central power, in the minds of the average Soviet citizen the thought that the USSR could ever be broken up would have been difficult to comprehend until it actually happened. The equality of all people in the Soviet Union, regardless of their ethnicity or social function, was demonstrated by addressing each other with the term 'comrade,' which in Russian is the word товарищ (*tovarishch*). This practice was found in every strata of society – workplaces, the military (where 'comrade' preceded a person's military rank), and even to how one referred to national leaders (Comrade Lenin, Comrade Stalin, etc).⁴²

In addition to being a Union of free Soviet peoples, the USSR also portrayed itself as a champion of the communist cause internationally, and as a nation committed to world peace. These concepts were portrayed using the quote from *The Communist Manifesto*, as well as visually through the portrayal of three people – one European, one Asian, and one African (the 'three-races theme'). Of course, the Soviet Union's portrayal of itself as a champion of world peace is contrary to the stereotype of the USSR perpetuated in the West. In Soviet political philosophy this is explained by the belief that the natural evolution of human society would eventually lead all peoples to join the communist cause. Violence and warfare, in the Soviet world view, were the result of Capitalist and Imperialist attempts to hinder this natural evolution in order to preserve the privileged position of the bourgeoisie and their ability to exploit the workers of the world. Examples of the peace theme typically employed the Russian slogan 'Миру мир' (*Miru mir*), which literally translates as 'To the world, peace' and could be considered the equivalent of the English phrase 'Peace on Earth'. Other visual representations could include the three-races theme or the use of traditional international symbols of peace such as white doves. The peace theme was common in the celebration of holidays with international significance such as May Day (1 May) and International Women's Day (8 March). This theme was also prevalent when the Soviet Union hosted international events and visitors.⁴³

⁴² Figes and Kolonitskii, pp. 60-61.

⁴³ The film *My Perestroika* offers an excellent glimpse of the 'peace' theme in action. In the film, documentary film clips show Soviet children mailing letters for peace, and explaining what they would say if they met American President Ronald Reagan. One of the interview subjects reflects that while now it seems silly, Soviet children took the 'peace' message very seriously. 'It all sounds like a joke now... but it was a fundamental part of my everyday life. I go to school, I eat my dinner, and I also sing songs for peace!' *My Perestroika* [film].

Soviet symbols and the socialisation of children

While clearly Soviet children initially were exposed to national symbols either in their home environments or in public places, formal introduction to and instruction about the symbols and their meanings began when they entered school. As Friedrich Kuebart noted, 'on a cognitive level, state symbols provide a starting point for explaining basic elements of state organisation and the ideological and constitutional foundations of the political system in a form suited to various age groups'. As the child matured and advanced through the educational system the connection between the symbols and the concepts they represented became more sophisticated.⁴⁴

Beginning readers

An examination of books designed for children who were at the early stages of learning to read highlights the importance of national symbols in every aspect of the educational process. For example, a basic alphabet book (*Азбука / Azbuka*, 1990) demonstrates this point very clearly. When the book was opened, on the first pages after the title page the child saw an image of a wise, but friendly looking, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. On the opposite page were three lines from a famous poem by Vladimir Vladimirovich Mayakovsky: 'Lenin lived, Lenin lives, Lenin will live'.⁴⁵ On the following pages was a two-page image of Red Square – the heart of the Soviet state. In this image are illustrated many of the key elements of Soviet civil religion. First and foremost, just to the left of centre, is the Lenin Mausoleum. A long line of Soviet citizens – men, women, and children together – winds its way from the mausoleum entrance back towards the Historical Museum, which is to the right out of the frame. Behind the mausoleum is the massive red wall of the Kremlin – the centre of the Soviet government. At far left in the image is the Saviour Tower – Спасская башня (*Spasskaia bashnia*) capped by an immense red star. During the Soviet era, this was the entrance through which high party officials entered the Kremlin complex. Behind the mausoleum and to the right is the Senate Tower – Сенатская башня (*Senatskaia bashnia*) and behind that the dome of the building which housed the Council of Ministers of the USSR – Совет Министров СССР (*Sovet Ministrov SSSR*), on the top of which waves the Red Banner of the Soviet Union. In this one image, the child was presented with many of the symbols that would be key to their understanding of what it meant to be a Soviet citizen. The flag is described much later in the book when the student is learning the letter 'я' (ia) – the final letter in the Russian alphabet as well as in the word for banner, знамя (*znamia*):

Красное знамя – знамя Октября. = The Red Banner is the banner of October.

На красном знамени – серп и молот. = On the Red Banner is the sickle and hammer.

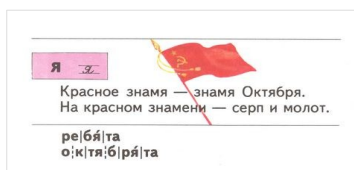
This text gave a basic introduction to the national flag. As with the image of Red Square, this simple text presents a visual introduction to four of the major

⁴⁴ Friedrich Kuebart, 'The Political Socialisation of Schoolchildren', in Jim Riordan (ed.), *Soviet Youth Culture*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp. 103–21; Scott E. Votey, 'Political Attitudes Reflected in Soviet Elementary Textbooks', *Social Education*, 42 (1978), pp. 228–30; MacIntyre, pp. 16–30.

⁴⁵ Vladimir Mayakovsky, '*Komsomol'skaia*', in *Sobranie sochinenii: v dvenadtsati tomakh*, vol. 3 (Moskva: Pravda, 1978), pp. 26–30.



symbols of the Soviet Union: the October Revolution, the Red Banner of Revolution, the sickle, and the hammer.⁴⁶



*The Red Banner explained
in a Soviet alphabet book.
Azbuka, p. 100*

With the alphabet now mastered, the student was then ready to read basic texts on a variety of topics. Among these were texts that gave them more information designed to help develop their Soviet identity. For example, a two-page section on Lenin shows an illustration of him as a child and identifies his place of birth – 'Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was born in the city of Simbirskie. This city is now called Ul'ianovsk. It is located on the bank of the great Russian river, Volga.' Next is a short text by Lenin's wife, Nedezhda Krupskaya, titled 'How Volodia Ul'ianov Read'. In this text the child learns how much Lenin loved to read, how much he valued learning, and how quickly he read because he had a remarkable ability to concentrate while reading. And which author did Lenin love most? The answer was Pushkin, one of the Russian poets most revered in the Soviet era. In a short story later in the book, the children read about a young boy who met Lenin. It is also important to note how children's books referred to the founder of the Soviet state. Of course, he was called 'Lenin' or 'Comrade Lenin', but many books used more familiar forms of his name. When talking about Lenin's childhood, a diminutive form of his given name, Volodia, was often used. The intent was to make him more relatable for the children. In other instances, he was called by his patronymic name – Ilyich. This usage related to a practice among the peasants where calling an elder by just his patronymic was considered to be both familiar and respectful. Geneva Gerhart explained that 'this use of the patronymic alone often appears in the Soviet press to invoke these feelings of folksiness, familiarity, and respect: Lenin is referred to as (наш) Ильич' – our Ilyich.⁴⁷

Finally, there were several places in the book where the child was introduced to some of the abstract symbols, themes, and rituals of Soviet civil religion. In a poem called 'May Song,' the student learns about one of the most important holidays on the Soviet calendar – May Day. On this holiday Soviet citizens participated in mass demonstrations to show their solidarity with the workers of the world. It was also a favourite holiday because it marked the end of the long Russian winter. The illustration next to the lyrics showed two children – a boy carrying a flag on a pole and a little girl who carries a toy flag in one hand and a couple of balloons in the other. Over their heads three white birds are flying – perhaps doves of peace. At the end of the book is a two-page spread that could also relate to May Day. A multi-ethnic group of children in the picture hold flowers, balloons, a large picture of Lenin, and two signs in Russian – one that says 'Peace' and the other that reads 'To the world, peace'. The text repeats the three lines about Lenin by Mayakovsky, while the text on the right is a poem

⁴⁶ MacIntyre, pp. 16-30; Vseslav Gavrilovich Goretskii, Viktor Andreevich Kiriushkin, and Anatolii Filippovich Shan'ko, *Azbuka* (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1991), pp. 2-5, 100. Author's translation.

⁴⁷ *Azbuka*, pp. 162-3, 186-7; MacIntyre, pp. 16-30; Geneva Gerhart, *The Russian's World: Life and Language* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1974), p. 21.



by L. D'iakonov about Soviet children singing about peace. On the last two pages of the book is a group of 15 children – each wearing a traditional costume of a different Soviet Republic. The Russian child, who appears to be the leader of the group, is waving a large Soviet national flag on a pole. His comrades hold hands with each other, and wave small toy flags and flowers. The text below the picture includes the first verse and the refrain of the national anthem, again stressing the idea of the 'Unbreakable Union of Freeborn Republics'.⁴⁸



Left, children march with flags.
Azbuka, p. 171

*Below, children celebrate the
'Unbreakable Union of Freeborn
Republics'. Azbuka, pp. 190-91*



Many of the themes from the alphabet book can be found in another early reading book by the same authors intended for children in the first grade, entitled 'We Read' – *Читаем сами (Chitaem sami, 1982)*. On the cover of the book are two children wearing school uniforms and Little Octobrist membership pins. They are working together to read a book. Texts in the book teach the children about the qualities of the Little Octobrists, who 'live cheerfully in friendship,' 'read stories and guess riddles,' 'draw with pencils and paints,' and 'know many amusing games'. There also is a story about 'Moscow – the Mother of All Cities':

... Moscow, the capital of the homeland, lives in the heart of everyone ... Shining over the land are the stars of the Kremlin. The whole world listens to the striking of the hours of Saviour's Tower. People from everywhere come to Red Square to visit the mausoleum of the great Lenin.⁴⁹

Other readings in the book include 'The Lenin Way,' and several other entries

⁴⁸ *Azbuka*, pp. 171, 188-91. For a further discussion of the political content in the readers designed for Soviet children, see Joseph Zajda, 'The Moral Curriculum in the Soviet School', *Comparative Education*, 24, no. 3 (1988), pp. 389–404; MacIntyre, pp. 16-30.

⁴⁹ Vseslav Gavrilovich Goretskii, V. A Kiriushkin, and A. F Shan'ko, *Chitaem sami: posobie dlia uchashchikhsia 1 klassa trekhletnei nachal'noi shkoly* (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1989), p. 69. Author's translation.



about the Communist Party and the Soviet homeland.⁵⁰

The examples from these books match the findings from Felicity O'Dell's study of the thematic content of three textbooks from the early 1970s – readers used for grades 1-3. She found Soviet patriotism to be the primary central theme of many of the lessons. Students learned about the political structure of Soviet government including local Soviet councils and the Communist Party. They were presented with the merits of socialism and the evils of capitalism – a simple dichotomy intended to portray the Soviet Union as the champion of all working people. Of course, Lenin was presented as the primary role model for all children for his love of learning, his revolutionary passion, and his brilliant leadership in the creation of the world's first declared socialist state. O'Dell also identified other themes mentioned in the above examples, such as peace, the military, collectivism and the family, labour and the merits of all types of professions, as well as discussions of the seasons and the broad geography of the Soviet Union. In addition, O'Dell recognised several trends in how content was presented in the textbooks. For example, heroes – both named and generalised – are used as a way to illustrate the ideals of Soviet morality and the virtues inherent to the best Soviet citizens. She notes how the lessons were linked to daily life, so that children could better relate to the material and see themselves as part of a greater collective than just their families and schools. Throughout the books there are simple contrasts between 'good', represented by the Soviet state, and 'bad', represented by capitalism and the tsarist regime. Most importantly, for the topic of this study, O'Dell stresses how important symbols are in the Soviet educational context: 'From his first years at school – as these readers plainly demonstrate – the Soviet child is instructed in the significance and mystique of his system's symbols.'⁵¹

These examples all illustrate several key trends in Soviet education. First, all subjects were taught in such a way that the students would learn the basic symbolic themes of Soviet civics. Lenin, in both his childhood and as an adult, is portrayed as a role model for all citizens. Symbols of the homeland feature prominently in the texts, in such a way that the student begins to recognise them, associate them with the state, and gain an initial understanding of their meaning. The Red Banner becomes a reminder of the Revolution and the national flag; the Red Star is connected to the Red Army, the flag, and the Kremlin; and the hammer and sickle become visual reminders of the union of workers and peasants, as well as symbolic of the value of labour in the Soviet Union.

As the Soviet child progressed through the educational system and participated in the children's organisations, these lessons were constantly reinforced and the young citizen developed direct personal connections with these symbols. To understand how this worked, it is useful to examine books written for Little Octobrists and Young Pioneers to see how national symbols were explained to the different age groups and how their organisational symbols were directly linked to the national symbol set.

⁵⁰ *Chitaem sami*, entire book, quote from p. 53.

⁵¹ Felicity Ann O'Dell, *Socialisation through Children's Literature: The Soviet Example* (Cambridge [Eng.]: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp. 75-121. See also Lev Abramovich Kassil', *Flazhok; kniga dlia chteniia vo vtorom klasse* (Moskva: Prosveshchenie, 1972).



Little Octobrists

Jim Riordan describes how children were prepared for membership in the Little Octobrists during their first months of school. They learned about Lenin, the Revolution, and the Soviet Union. Through games and group play, they formed their own collective with their classmates. While every child was welcomed into the organisation, the implication of their pre-initiation lessons gave the children the impression that membership in the Octobrists was a privilege that they had to earn. The induction ceremony was usually held on 7 November, the date on which the anniversary of the October Revolution fell in the Gregorian calendar. Once inducted into the Little Octobrists, children set out on the path that would lead them to membership in the Young Pioneers. As the youngest members of the Communist family, the Little Octobrists were often called 'Lenin's grandchildren'.⁵²

During the induction ceremony, the Young Pioneers pinned a membership badge on each of the new Little Octobrists. The badge was their own personal copy of the emblem of the Little Octobrists: a red star in the centre of which was a portrait of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin as a young child. The star symbolism was extended to how the children were organised ... a group of Octobrists was subdivided into patrols of 5-6 children that were called 'Little Stars' – *звездочки (zvezdochki)*. Each Little Star was guided by a Young Pioneer from the same school. The Little Octobrists in the school were also given their own little Red Banner with the Octobrist emblem to use in their activities. In a book written for the Little Octobrists, the explanation of the group's emblem and flag is symbolically linked to the glorious history of the Soviet Union:⁵³

Little Octobrists wear a little red star on their chests. Look at it. Isn't it really like the stars which shine over the Moscow Kremlin? And the entire world knows the Kremlin stars. Those are the stars of our mighty motherland.

The Soviet red star began to shine over the world in the year 1917, when the Great October Revolution took place in our country. On those glorious days Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and the Communist Party led the workers and the peasants, soldiers and sailors in the storming of the Winter Palace. There in that palace is where the government of the capitalists and the landowners met.

The people seized power in their own hands. They drove away the bourgeois, the landowners, the merchants – all those who did not work themselves but lived at the expense of the labour of others.

In honour of the famous victory of the October Revolution, you are called Little Octobrists. After all, you were born in a happy country, under the Soviet red star.

Therefore, you also wear upon your chest a little red star on which is represented the person who is most dear for all of us – Vladimir Ilyich Lenin.

⁵² Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 138-42.

⁵³ Ibid. See also 'Oktiabriatskaia Zvezdochka', *Vozhatyi*, 1958, p. 45; *Oktiabriata budushchie pionery*, p. 7; MacIntyre, pp. 42-6.



In each Little Octobrist group is their own little red flag. That little flag is a fragment of the renowned banner of the motherland. Under the Red Banner your grandfathers went to fight against poverty and lawlessness, and they won a better fate.

Right after the October Revolution the white generals attacked the young Soviet country from all directions. They wanted to suppress the world's first free state of workers and peasants.

In the grim civil war our people defended the Soviet people's power – they crushed all the White Guard gangs.

In 1941 the worst enemies of humanity, the fascists, deviously attacked our peaceful land. They destroyed and burned villages and cities, trampled down rich crops and fields. And then your fathers and brothers again stood up under the military red banners. In bloody battles they defended the freedom and happiness of the homeland. The heroic Soviet Army liberated from the fascists not only our land, but also many other countries.

And this is why all honest people of the world look upon the Red Banner with respect. They see in its flame-red colour the dawn of a new life of all humanity – the dawn of communism.

Here your Little Octobrist flag is a piece of that wonderful banner.⁵⁴



Little Octobrist badges and flag. Author's collection

Once the child joined the Little Octobrists they became part of the proud tradition of the Soviet fight for the victory of communism. They wore the red

⁵⁴ S. V Orleanskaia, *Nashe imia --oktiabriata: sbornik rasskazov, stikhov, stsenok, pesen, igr, zagadok, skorogovorok dlia oktiabriat* (Moskva: Detgiz, 1959), pp. 9-10. Author's translation.



star proudly on their chests and marched under their very own piece of the revolutionary Red Banner both at Pioneer assemblies and when their groups went on field trips outside of their schools. In their second-grade readers, they not only read stories about everyday life; they also learned more about Lenin, the October Revolution, Soviet holidays, and the behaviour that was expected from Little Octobrists.⁵⁵

During their time as Little Octobrists, children regularly interacted with the Young Pioneers and attended assemblies in which they witnessed Pioneers in full uniform performing their ceremonies. This connection between the younger and older children helped to build enthusiasm among the Octobrists to prepare themselves for membership in the Pioneers. They understood that achieving this goal would require them to study hard and live up to the ideals of the Little Octobrists. During their third Octobrist year, the children were expected to learn the rules of the Pioneers, to demonstrate an understanding of the symbols of the Soviet Union, and to exhibit a sincere desire to do their part in the building of communism. They would declare their intent to join the Young Pioneers and hope that their 'little star' would be one of the first selected for advancement near the end of their third year.⁵⁶

Young Pioneers

What were the new members of the Young Pioneers taught about the official symbols of their country? The answer is clearly illustrated in books written for the children, such as a Pioneer handbook entitled *Comrade* from 1961:

The official flag and arms are distinctive symbols (emblems) of the state. Flags flutter on buildings and ships, and they can be seen in halls and on tables where international meetings are taking place. The arms are depicted on banners, official seals and forms, and on banknotes.

The state flag of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics comprises a red field, in the upper corner at the hoist is depicted a gold sickle and hammer, above them is a red five-pointed star, framed with a gold border.

The red colour of the banner – the colour of blood, spilt by the best people in the fight for freedom and deliverance from all kinds of oppression – has become the international symbol of revolutionary struggle for liberation. After gaining power and the establishment of the Soviet system by our people in October 1917, the Red Banner became the symbol of the struggle for the complete victory of communism.

The sickle and hammer symbolise the labour that creates everything for the life and work of the people, and therefore [work] is highly respected in our country. People who selflessly give their labour for the people's benefit are the people who are most esteemed among us, the pride of the country, and her

⁵⁵ Vseslav Gavrilovich Goretskii, *Rodnoe slovo: uchebnik po chteniiu dlia uchashchikhsia 2 klassa chetyrekhletnei nachal'noi shkoly* (Mosvka: Prosveshchenie, 1989); MacIntyre, pp. 42-6.

⁵⁶ Riordan, 'The Role of Youth Organizations in Communist Upbringing in the Soviet School', pp. 136-42.



honour and glory.

The red five-pointed star is the symbol of the unity of workers of the entire world.⁵⁷ The Soviet Union is the hope and a stronghold of all honest people on Earth who think about peace, work, and happiness for our people and for the peoples of all countries.

The state arms of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics comprises a crossed sickle and hammer on a globe which is depicted in rays of the sun and framed with a gold wreath of wheat with an inscription in the languages of the Union Republics: 'Workers of all countries, unite!' On top of the coat of arms shines a red five-pointed star.

The mighty hammer and the sharp sickle on the background of the Earth shining in the rays of the sun symbolise the perpetual creation of labour. The sheaves heavy with heads full of grain – a symbol of the results of work – are tied with a red ribbon on which is inscribed in fifteen languages the inspiring words of the international proletariat. It is a symbol of the equality of all the peoples in our extensive multinational Soviet country.⁵⁸

Many of the symbolic elements of Soviet civil religion are present in this text. First, the child was taught how the official state symbols were linked to the government. From this point on, when the Young Pioneer saw these symbols in use, they were expected to make the connection with the Soviet government in particular, and the Soviet Union as a country in general. The history of the class struggle and the victory of the Soviet communists were reflected in the description of the flag. Red was clearly defined as the colour of revolution and the child was reminded that the struggle for the ultimate victory of communism was ongoing. This links directly to the Pioneer summons, which called upon the Young Pioneers to be ready to play a role in the fight. The importance of labour, whether it was industrial or agricultural, was stressed and they learned that those who worked hard for the benefit of all the people would be praised and honoured for their contributions to the country. This point is also important because, unlike in the capitalist countries where the class struggle often defined a person's value to society, in the Soviet Union all work was to be considered prestigious and all workers were to be valued for their contributions to society. In addition, the Young Pioneer was reminded that their country was a multinational union where all peoples were equal, and united by their common goals to build communism and to serve as the defender of all the workers of the world who were still struggling against their oppressors. The Soviet Union, they were told, served as an example and stronghold for 'all honest people on Earth who think about peace, work, and happiness'.

With their promotion to the Young Pioneers, the children traded in their little red star for the badge of the Pioneer Organisation. As with the oath and laws, there were different variants of the badge design during the history of the Soviet Union. The very first emblem of the Young Pioneers, used prior to April

⁵⁷ In Soviet symbolism, the five points of the star represent the five populated continents: Eurasia (considered one continent), Africa, Australia, North America, and South America.

⁵⁸ *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*: pp. 29-30. Author's translation.

1923, was a simple depiction of the Pioneer campfire with five logs representing the continents and three tongues of flame symbolising the connection between the three generations working to build socialism – Communists, Young Communists, and Pioneers.

While there were a variety of emblem designs, all subsequent designs incorporated elements from the national symbol set of the Soviet Union. An excellent example is the badge used during the 1920s, which was in the shape of the Red Banner of Revolution. In the centre of the banner was the three-tongued Pioneer campfire, overlapping a hammer and sickle. The arrangement of these last two symbols was quite different than that usually used in Soviet symbols. The sickle, with a much larger blade than normally used, was turned upside down from its usual alignment. The motto 'Будь готов' (*Bud' gotov*), meaning 'Be Prepared,' was inscribed on the blade. The hammer, with a much longer handle than in other symbols was angled behind the campfire with the handle at upper hoist and the head of the hammer at mid fly.

In an article describing the history of the Young Pioneer emblem, V. Nikolaev mentioned a contest held in July 1925 to design a new emblem for the organisation. He explained that a sketch of a new emblem was released in December of that year, but it is unclear if this emblem was ever actually used. The design showed the Red Banner, topped with a red-star finial. In the foreground was a saluting Young Pioneer standing in front of the Lenin Mausoleum.⁵⁹



*Young Pioneer badge:
Red Banner design (1923-7).
Furin, p. 176*

In 1927 a new emblem was issued in the form of a tie clip, comparable to the neckerchief slide or 'woggle' worn by many Scouts and Guides. In this version of the emblem, the orientation of the hammer and sickle have been flipped on the horizontal axis so that the head of the hammer is to the left and the handle of the sickle is on the right.

The most noticeable change beginning in 1929 was that the text on the clip read 'Всегда готов!' (*Vsegda gotov!*), meaning 'Always Prepared!' – the form that remained in use until the breakup of the Soviet Union.

Nikolaev explained that the motto change on the badge was a result of the first All-Union Rally of Young Pioneers during which every Pioneer detachment reported on their readiness to fight for the cause of the workers and the Communist Party. Because all Pioneers were always ready, Nikolaev suggested, this was the impetus for the alteration of the badge.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Furin, pp. 30-31, 176-7; V. Nikolaev, 'Tvoi Pionerskii Znachok', *IUnyi Tekhnik*, no. 5 (mai 1972), pp. 18–19, back cover.

⁶⁰ Furin, pp. 30-31, 176-7; Nikolaev, pp. 19, back cover.



*Young Pioneer badge:
tie-clip design (1929-c.1942).
Furin, p. 176*

The similarity of the Young Pioneer motto to the motto of the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides / Girl Scouts is not a coincidence. Boy Scouting had already been established in Russia prior to the Russian Revolution. However, after the Bolsheviks gained power they determined that bourgeois principles were so ingrained in Scouting that the existing organisation could not be sufficiently adapted to serve the Communist cause. Several experienced Scout leaders were recruited to assist in the creation of a new, distinctly Soviet, organisation for children. According to E. Tiazhel'nikov, 'Krupskaya advised the adoption and assimilation of the styles for external forms, the concreteness and comprehensibility of tasks, slogans, and rules of conduct from the previous experience of the children's movement, and the inculcation of children with various practical skills and the utilization of their tendencies toward romantic adventures, marches, and games.' However, in his history of the Pioneer Movement, S. Furin credits Lenin with the origin of the 'Be Prepared' motto, citing an account related by Krupskaya in one of her letters to the Pioneers:

'Be Ready!' Lenin said to the members of the Party, and Lenin's party ... was not afraid of even the most routine, depressing work. And when the time was ripe for revolution, Lenin's party 'was ready', and led forward the workers and peasants. Young Pioneers had not yet come into existence at the time Lenin called those who were fighting for the workers' cause to 'be ready', but the Young Pioneers made a firm decision to be faithful to Lenin's bidding ... they want to learn to build a new life, they want to continue Lenin's work ...⁶¹

While clearly the Boy Scout connection was the most likely origin of the motto, it makes sense that the credit was shifted to Lenin via Krupskaya. In her letter, Krupskaya cites Lenin's book, *What is to be Done?*, which was written in 1901-2. Lenin wrote: 'We must always conduct our everyday work and always be prepared for every situation, because very frequently it is almost impossible to foresee when a period of outbreak will give way to a period of calm.' By alluding to this work as the source of the motto, Krupskaya was not only able to credit Lenin, thus giving the motto a proper Communist lineage, but also succeeded in

⁶¹ Furin, pp. 30-31. Furin's account matches Krupskaya's letter to the Pioneers, 'Bud' gotov', which was published in the children's magazine *Pioneer* in 1924. For the Russian text, see Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya and Nikolai Ivanovich Monakhov, *O vozhatom i ego rabote s pionerami* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1961), pp. 173-5; Vladimir Il'ich Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?: Burning Questions of Our Movement* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), pp. 171-2.

backdating the origin of the motto to a date preceding its adoption by the Scouts in 1907. This rewriting of the origin story helped distance the Young Pioneer motto from the bourgeois baggage associated with the World Scouting Movement. It is also quite likely that the desire to disassociate the Pioneers from Scouting was the impetus for changing the motto on the badge from 'Be Prepared' to 'Always Prepared'. Interestingly, the full motto for the organisation included both versions. During meetings and assemblies the Pioneer leader would issue the call 'To fight for the cause of the Communist Party, Be Prepared!' and the assembled Young Pioneers would all respond with 'Always prepared!'⁶²

According to Nikolaev, the next emblem change was the result of the Great Patriotic War. This badge design was a red star with the Pioneer campfire in the centre. The words of the motto were centred top and bottom over the flames. Nikolaev explains that the red star was a symbol of the military valour and bravery of the Soviet people. During the war, the country's metal and manufacturing capability was devoted to the manufacture of weaponry and ammunition for the war effort. For this reason, on 15 September 1942 new Pioneer regulations were issued that called upon each Pioneer to make their own badge, either using paint and scrap tin or by embroidering the emblem on scraps of red cloth.⁶³



*Young Pioneer badge:
Second World War Red Star
design (c.1942-c.1946).
Furin, p. 176*

After the war, a new Pioneer emblem was introduced, which Nikolaev described as reflecting 'the return of the Soviet people to peaceful constructive labour'. For nearly two decades, the symbol of the Young Pioneers met the description in the handbook from 1961:

It is a five-pointed star with the sickle and hammer shown on it. That is the emblem of our beloved homeland – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Above the star rise up 3 tongues of flame, a reminder of the connections of the three generations: Communists, Young Communists, and Pioneers. In the lower part of the star is a ribbon with the inscription 'Always Prepared!' The badge is worn on the left side of the chest.⁶⁴

⁶² Tiazhel'nikov, pp. 27-8; Krupskaya and Monakhov, pp. 173-5; Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*, pp. 171-2; Jim Riordan, "'Be Prepared': Russian Boy Scouts and Soviet Pioneers", *Stadion: Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte des Sports / International Journal of the History of Sports*, 11, no. 1 (January 1985), pp. 93–106; Jim Riordan, 'The Russian Boy Scouts', *History Today*, 38, no. 10 (1 October 1988), pp. 48–52; Kuebart, pp. 110–113; Harper, pp. 61-85.

⁶³ Furin, pp. 30-31, 176-7; Nikolaev, pp. 19, 76, back cover.

⁶⁴ Nikolaev, p. 76, back cover; *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*, p. 79. Author's translation.



*Young Pioneer badge:
hammer and sickle
design (c.1946-62).
Author's collection*

In the year 1962 the All-Union Young Pioneer Organisation was awarded the Order of Lenin. In recognition, the emblem was redesigned. In the place of the hammer and sickle, the badge featured a portrait of the organisation's namesake, Vladimir Ilyich Lenin. The motto size was reduced and moved down to accommodate the portrait. This was the final version of the design in use until the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.⁶⁵



*Young Pioneer badge:
Lenin design (1962-91).
Author's collection*

Banners and flags of the Young Pioneers all reflected the Red Banner of Revolution emblazoned with the badge of the organisation. Young Pioneer groups (or troops) representing an entire school were issued a banner that included not only the Pioneer badge, but also the full motto including both the summons and the response. Detachments, which comprised all the Pioneers from one grade in the same school, were issued flags with simple designs showing just the Pioneer emblem on the red field. Pioneer banners were also typically fringed, while the flags usually were not. Troop banners and detachment flags were kept in the school's Pioneer room, along with the bugles and drums used during Pioneer ceremonies and assemblies. In addition, Furin describes a 'main' Pioneer flag that was kept at the headquarters of the organisation in Moscow. What distinguished the main banner from those used by troops was the addition of two ribbons for the Order of Lenin, which had

⁶⁵ Nikolaev, pp. 76, back cover; Furin, pp. 30-31, 176-7. At this time, this author has been unable to determine the exact usage dates for each of these designs. Furin's book from 1982 states that the Lenin-portrait design had been in use since 1962, but in the Young Pioneer leader's manual published in 1965 the illustrations and text all describe the earlier version with the hammer and the sickle. This discrepancy could have occurred because the transition of the emblem was a gradual process and took several years to implement across the country. See Furin, pp. 30-31; Vasilii Golyskhin and V. Taborko, *Kniga vozhatogo* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1965), various pages.



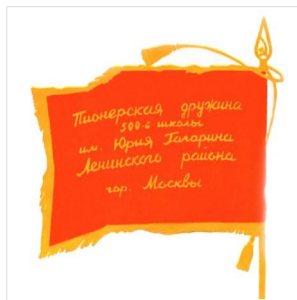
been awarded to the organisation in 1962 and 1972. This very special banner was used at All-Union Pioneer rallies and was carried at the head of the flag group when the Young Pioneers paraded on Red Square.⁶⁶



*Young Pioneer group:
banner (1962-91).
Author's collection*



*Young Pioneer detachment:
flag (1962-91).
Author's collection*



*Pioneer banner (reverse):
with the detachment's honorary name.
Kniga vozhatogo (1965), facing p. 64
(author's modification)*

The reverse of the flag bore the honorary name for detachments or troops that had earned the privilege. According to Furin, the regional or town Pioneer council could confer the honour on a troop, and the troop council could confer it on a detachment, as a reward for 'good achievements in study and work, and for loyalty to the Pioneer flag'. Appropriate namesakes included war heroes, cosmonauts, writers, or other luminaries of Soviet society. The Pioneers in the honoured detachment or troop were encouraged to learn as much as they could about their namesake and to endeavour to be like him or her.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most coveted token of membership in the Young Pioneers, though, was the red neckerchief (usually called a 'tie' in Russian). In images of the initiation ceremony, Little Octobrists are shown standing at attention with their brand-new neckerchiefs draped over one arm. As each child was inducted into the organisation, they would say the solemn promise of the Pioneers and an

⁶⁶ Furin, pp. 26-8, 33; *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*, p. 78; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), pp. 17-18; A. A. Derkach, G. Chubarova, and L. I. Ashunina, *Kniga vozhatogo* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1982), pp. 14-17, plate [8] following p. 64.

⁶⁷ Furin, p. 40; *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*, p. 78; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), facing p. 64.



older member of the organisation tied the neckerchief around their neck. The meaning of the neckerchief is explained in the following way:

Every Young Pioneer, as a sign of membership in the Pioneer Organisation, wears the red neckerchief and the Pioneer badge 'Always Prepared' on their breast pocket.

Why is the pioneer neckerchief that you wear on your chest red? It is red because it is a fragment of the Red Banner, saturated with the blood of hundreds and thousands of brave fighters for the cause of Communism.

The three ends of the Pioneer neckerchief – that is a symbol of the indestructible friendship of three generations: Communists, Young Communists, Pioneers.

Value your scarlet Pioneer neckerchief. Wear it every day and always act such that no one can reproach you as unworthy to wear it.⁶⁸



Young Pioneer induction ceremony.

http://ic.pics.livejournal.com/voxpath_66/31653360/5080190/5080190_900.jpg [accessed 29 May 2017]

In this ceremony, the newly commissioned Young Pioneer was symbolically wrapped in their own piece of the revolutionary Red Banner. They were entrusted with this relic and reminded that the knot with which it was tied bound them to the three generations that were working together to build a communist society in the Soviet Union. More importantly, they were told that, as a wearer of the red neckerchief, they must conduct themselves according to the highest communist ethics. The implication was that bad behaviour would not only reflect badly upon themselves, but would also disgrace their Pioneer group and would dishonour the memory of all those who had given their lives fighting under the Red Banner. For a ten-year-old child, this level of responsibility was deemed quite prestigious and most Soviet Pioneers took it quite seriously.⁶⁹

For the Young Pioneer, the sacredness of the Red Banner and their neckerchief – a piece of that banner personally entrusted to them by the State – was accepted without question. In fact, as illustrated by a story purported to be

⁶⁸ *Tovarishch: zapisnaia knizhka pionera na 1961/62 uchebnyi god*, p. 79. Author's translation.

⁶⁹ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 91-2.



from the Great Patriotic War, they were expected to protect this relic above all else.

The following story took place in a Ukrainian village in the fall of 1941. A German soldier broke into the house of Galia Dotsenko, a Pioneer. He began rummaging through the things on the shelves, in drawers, closets and trunks:

Galia was holding her school bookbag.

The German approached her... and began taking everything out.... Suddenly, it was as if the German was scorched by a flame. A new Pioneer tie fell out of the bag.

'*Klein Kommunist!*' yelled the infuriated German, grabbing the tie. He threw it on the floor and trampled it with his feet.

Galia sprang on the fascist.

'Why are you trampling my Pioneer tie?' she screamed, and she pushed the German as hard as she could.... She snatched her tie from under the German's feet, ran out of the house, and headed for the forest. She heard shouts and assault rifles behind her, but she managed to hide from the pursuers in the woods.

Galia spent the next two years with a guerrilla unit. In October 1943, the Red Army liberated her village from the German invaders. Now Galia goes to school again, and a Pioneer tie glows red on her neck – the same tie that she tore away from a German bandit's hands in the fall of 1941.⁷⁰

Evaluation of this story leads to some interesting historical questions. Was Galia Dotsenko a real child and did this incident really occur? That is difficult to determine, and not particularly important from the point of view of the Soviet authorities. Does it even matter if the story is historically accurate, or if it was simply meant as a fable used to teach societal values? Even if young Galia was just an idealised representation of a Young Pioneer used to illustrate the importance of protecting the Red Banner, the message to the child receiving the account was still clear – it was the duty of every Soviet citizen, no matter how young, to defend the homeland in whatever way they could. Without thinking about her own safety, or the safety of her family, Galia acted instinctively as any good citizen of the Soviet Union should, to defend the sacred relic of the Revolution. While in other countries children her age were going to school, Galia's fate was inextricably linked to that of the continuous struggle of Communism as she fought alongside other partisans to help drive the foreign invaders from the Soviet homeland. The final line of the story is key ... with peace restored, thanks to the intervention of the Red Army, Galia was once again able to live the life of a schoolgirl and Young Pioneer of the Soviet Union. To the Soviet schoolchild, the authority of the State was portrayed as the

⁷⁰ For an English version of Galia Dotsenko's story, see Julie K. deGraffenried, *Sacrificing Childhood: Children and the Soviet State in the Great Patriotic War*, (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2014), pp. 96-7; for a similar account in Russian, see A. Stroev and T. Matveeva, *Kniga vozhatogo* (Moskva: Molodaia gvardiia, 1954), pp. 32-3. The *Kniga vozhatogo* is the Young Pioneers leaders' handbook.



ultimate protector that ensured that all citizens were free to live their lives in peace.

The story of Galia Dotsenko was just one example of the type of mythic stories told about Pioneer heroes who, each in their own way, fought to protect the Soviet way of life. The 1954 edition of the Young Pioneer *Book of the Leader* included numerous accounts of young heroes who all shared the lineage of the Young Pioneers. Each vignette was labelled 'He [or she] was a pioneer' and illustrated with a drawing of the person, typically wearing their Pioneer neckerchief or military dress. One of the earliest Pioneer heroes was Pavlik Morozov, a young boy from a rural village who informed Soviet authorities that his father was a *kulak* – a peasant farmer who refused to share their crops with the collective. As most versions of the story go, after his father's arrest Pavlik was murdered by his family – martyred for living by Communist morals and attempting to look out for the good of the community. While it is generally accepted that Pavlik was a real child who may have actually informed upon his own father, it is doubtful if he was ever actually a member of the Young Pioneers because at the time of his death in 1932 the organisation was not yet established in the more rural parts of the country. Nevertheless, Pavlik was always portrayed wearing the red neckerchief of a Young Pioneer and the story was considered part of Pioneer history by leaders and children alike. Along with Pavlik Morozov, there were other Pioneer martyrs, most from the time of the Great Patriotic War, who were known by every Young Pioneer. In fact, four Young Pioneers were awarded the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union' for their actions in the Great Patriotic War and honoured with a monument in Moscow.⁷¹ It is highly significant that the symbols of the Little Octobrists and the Young

⁷¹ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1954), pp. 9-23; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), pp. 48-54; deGraffenried, entire book; Svetlana Maslinskaya, 'A Child Hero: Heroic Biographies in Children's Literature', lecture delivered at the University of California, Santa Barbara, (27 April 2017); Svetlana G. Leont'eva, 'Zhizneopisanie pionera-geroia: tekstovaia traditsiia i ritual'nyi kontekst', in M. V. Akhmetova (ed.), *Sovremennaia rossiiskaia mifologiiia* (Moskva: Rossiiskii gosudartsvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2005), pp. 89–123; Svetlana G. Leont'eva, 'Pioner: vsem primer', *Otechest'vennye zapiski*, no. 3 (18) (2004), pp. 249–59; Kirill A. Maslinsky, personal communication (27 April 2017); deGraffenried, entire book; Furin, pp. 64-9, 164-5; Tiazhel'nikov, pp. 30-31. For an excellent historical assessment of the story of Pavlik Morozov, see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero* (London: Granta Books, 2005).

In his article written for the 50th anniversary of the Young Pioneers, Tiazhel'nikov provides a good summary list of Pioneer heroes:

- those noted for their 'fight against the kulaks, against the enemies of collectivisation and the Soviet system' – Pavlik Morozov, Kolya Miagotin, Kychan Dzhakypov, Kolya Iakovlev, and more;
- those recognised for their dedications to labour – exemplified by Mamlakat Nakhangova who 'was such a good worker in the cotton fields that even experienced adult cotton-pickers were unable to keep up with her';
- and those who 'received the highest government awards for their active participation in the building of socialism and for courage and daring displayed in the fight against the fascist invaders' – namely, Lenya Golikov, Marat Kazei, Valya Kotik, and Zina Portnova – the four Young Pioneers who were posthumously awarded the title 'Hero of the Soviet Union'.



Pioneers incorporated elements from the national symbol set of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. That linkage was used as a way not only to teach children about the symbols of their country, but also to give them their own symbolic connection to the Communist Party and the Soviet state. As part of their formal education and through their participation in the children's organisations, each young Soviet citizen acquired a practical knowledge of the symbols that quite literally would surround them throughout their lives. They were provided with numerous role models – child heroes and adults – who illustrated the attributes of the ideal Soviet citizen. In addition, they participated in civil religious rituals designed to convey symbolic meaning and reinforce the values of Soviet patriotism they had learned through their formal education and the traditions of the children's organisations.

Soviet children and civil religious rituals

At this point in the discussion, it is important to again review West's neutral definition of civil religion: 'A civil religion is a set of beliefs and attitudes that explain the meaning and purpose of any given political society in terms of its relationship to a transcendent, spiritual reality, that are held by the people generally of that society, and that are expressed in public rituals, myths, and symbols.' Rituals, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, are quite simply the 'prescribed form or order of religious or ceremonial rites'. In his book, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics*, Murray Edelman offered more insights into the value of ritual in the realm of politics.

Ritual is the motor activity that involves its participants symbolically in a common enterprise, calling their attention to their relatedness and joint interests in a compelling way. It thereby both promotes conformity and evokes satisfaction and joy in conformity.⁷²

With these definitions in mind, it is imperative to look beyond the symbols and their meanings to the types of rituals through which the sacredness of these symbols were reinforced. In civil religion, rituals help form an emotional connection between the participants and the symbols of their nation. Each time the citizen participates in a ritual, the lessons of national socialisation are reinforced through their emotional experience. It is the combination of symbols and rituals that help children develop their sense of national identity and a personal connection to the values of their society.⁷³

The two previously described rituals – those associated with the first day of school and with induction into the Young Pioneers – were just two of the rituals associated with Soviet childhood. Children participated in Soviet civil religious rituals in many different contexts. As with the patriotic culture of other countries, children in the Soviet Union experienced these rituals with their families, with their classmates, and through participation in the youth

Tiazhel'nikov also notes that, 'more than 15,000 children and adolescents were awarded the medal "For the Defense of Leningrad" alone, and approximately 20,000 young patriots received the medal "For the Defense of Moscow."' The stories of these four martyred Young Pioneers are told in more detail as well as in English translation in Furin's book. His book is a translation of a Russian book and was meant for international distribution.

⁷² Murray J. Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964), p. 16.

⁷³ 'Ritual, Adj. and N.,' *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/166369> [accessed 18 June 2017]; Edelman, pp. 16-18; Kuebart, pp. 103-21.

organisations.

Children and Soviet rituals

In her study of Soviet textbooks, O'Dell comments on how children were taught about the ceremonies inherent to Soviet civil religion and how those rituals related to the symbols of the country. 'Ceremony is but an extended form of a symbol with the same inherent social advantages (providing foci for the individual's identification with the group) and, for the individual, if not always for the authorities, the same snags (discouraging realistic thought).' Discussions of Soviet ceremonies illustrating the use of symbols were part of the general methodology of character training that was meant to prepare the children for their roles in those rites. Traditional holidays were described to the children as colourful and festive, showing the joy inherent to life in a communist society.⁷⁴

The Soviet calendar was filled with many different official holidays, each offering the citizenry an opportunity to acknowledge a different element of Soviet society. In many ways, Soviet holidays were designed to replace the elaborate calendar of Orthodox religious holidays that existed in tsarist Russia. In some cases, traditions associated with a religious holiday were directly transferred to a secular holiday with Soviet elements added. For example, several of the traditions from Christmas (celebrated on the 7 January on the Orthodox calendar) were transferred to New Year's Day. These included gift giving, visits by Grandfather Frost and the Snow Maiden, and the *elka* – the Russian version of the Christmas tree. In the Soviet era, the *elka* was topped with a red star and decorated with miniature Red Banners and decorations having symbolic connections to the Soviet state. As the school year progressed, children learned about the various Soviet holidays because the textbooks were arranged in such a way that the texts would be read at the appropriate time of year.⁷⁵

One of the first national rituals that even the youngest child might have witnessed was a mass demonstration associated with May Day, or International Worker's Day, celebrated on 1 May. The youngest children would have attended these parades with their parents or grandparents, while older children often participated with their Pioneer detachments. A children's book about Soviet holidays offered three short readings related to this highly important Soviet holiday:

1 May – May Day

1 May is the blossoming of Spring and the biggest holiday of the workers; joyous, terrible 1 May.

It is joyous for the people of labour. Terrible for capitalists. On that day the workers go out for demonstrations in all countries.

⁷⁴ O'Dell, pp. 114-18.

⁷⁵ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, pp. 130-88; Throver, pp. 61-3; Kuebart, pp. 110-113; John Dunstan, 'Atheistic Education in the USSR', in George Avis (ed.), *The Making of the Soviet Citizen: Character Formation and Civic Training in Soviet Education* (London ; New York: Croom Helm, 1987), pp. 50-79; IU I. Bokan', V. V. Zaikin, and V. G. Sinitsyn (eds), *Nashi Prazdniki (Sovetskie Obshchegosudarstvennye, Trudovye, Voinskie, Molodezhnye I Semeino-Bytovye Prazdniki, Obriady, Ritualy)* (Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Politicheskoi literatury, 1977).



They carry banners on which are written:

'We won't allow the capitalists to start a war!'

'Long live the friendship of the peoples!'

'He who works is the owner of the land!'

Red Banners

People even in ancient times thought up banners. They were different colours. They were hoisted in battle on tall staves, so that soldiers could see where were their own and where were the foreigners.

Now we also distinguish friends from the enemies by the colours of their banners.

Workers of all countries have red banners. Workers of all countries are friends.

And You Go Out

If on May Day you were to look at the Earth from space, it would appear as a red sphere. The workers raise so many of our banners.

And you should go outside with your little flag. Let the Earth be even more red.⁷⁶



'4 Little Octobrists':
May Day postcard; E. Ioffe, artist
(Moskva: Sovetskii khudozhnik, 1968).
Author's collection



'2 Little Octobrists':
May Day postcard; V.I. Zarubin and
S.K. Rusakov, artists (Moscow:
Ministerstvo sviazi SSSR, 1964).
Author's collection

These readings are similar to those found in textbooks, and clearly illustrate the major themes of the May Day holiday – it is a celebration for all the workers of the world (not just the people of the Soviet Union) and it is a holiday focused on peace. It is also clear to the child that on this day all citizens should participate either as official marchers in the mass demonstrations that were held in every Soviet city or as part of the large crowds that gathered to watch the parades.

This motif of public participation was key to the imagery associated with May Day demonstrations. Postcards and greeting cards celebrating 1 May often showed children emulating the behaviour of the demonstrators by marching with their own little red flags or participating with the Young Pioneers.

⁷⁶ Anatolii Vasil'evich Mitiaev and Iurii Kopeiko, *Segodnia prazdnik: rassказы* (Moskva: Detskaia literatura, 1981), p. 29.



'Young Pioneers': May Day postcard;
A.A. Gorpenko, artist (Moscow:
Ministerstvo sviazi SSSR, 1958).
Author's collection



'Red Square demonstration': May
Day postcard; A. Kalashnikov, artist
(Moscow: Ministerstvo sviazi SSSR,
1968). Author's collection

Other holidays on which there would have been large parades or public demonstrations were Victory Day (9 May), which celebrated the end of the Great Patriotic War, and 7 November. Other patriotic holidays that would have been observed, either in the school or with the Octobrists and Pioneers, would have included the Day of the Soviet Army and Military Fleet (23 February), the Day of Cosmonautics (12 April), the Day of Remembrance of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin (22 April), the Day of the USSR Constitution (7 October), and the Day of the Friendship of the Peoples (30 December). In addition, there were holidays that celebrated different professions and even a day celebrating the anniversary of the founding of the Young Pioneer Organisation.⁷⁷

Little holiday flags

One interesting aspect of Soviet flag culture was the creation of special flags for children that were linked thematically to different holidays. These flags were known in Russian as праздничные флажки (*prazdnichnye flazhki*) – which means 'little holiday flags'. Russian vexillologists consulted by the author explained that these little flags were just toy flags. They were inexpensive (usually costing about 20 kopeks) and could be purchased in toy stores throughout the country.⁷⁸ The flags were also given out to children when they participated in holiday or Pioneer events. These little flags allowed children to emulate adult behaviour at mass demonstrations and parades. One Russian vexillologist remembered that these flags also had a practical use. When Pioneer detachments went out on excursions, the leaders often carried these small flags at the front of the columns as a way of signalling to the children. They were also used at Pioneer camps. For example, when an American schoolgirl named Samantha Smith visited the Artek Pioneer camp in 1983, she

⁷⁷ Mitiaev and Kopeiko; *Chitaem sami; Rodnoe slovo*; Kuebart, pp. 103–21; *Nashi Prazdniki*.

⁷⁸ Anne M. Platoff, 'Soviet Children's Flags', *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, 17 (2010), pp. 63–84; Ilya Emelin, personal communication (8 June 2009); Viktor A. Lomantsov, personal communication (7 June 2009); Pavel Konovalov, personal communication (7 June 2009); Lydia Agadjanova, personal communication (15 June 2009).



was greeted by children using signs, balloons, and little holiday flags.⁷⁹

By far, most of the designs identified to date conformed to the national colours by using yellow or white printing on a red field. There are some examples with red printing on white, but these are the minority. Most designs use the Russian language for slogans, but examples also have been found with Latvian text. Thematically, the flag designs draw from the official state symbol set, illustrate Red Square and the Kremlin as the centre of Soviet civil religion, have Revolutionary and paramilitary themes, celebrate the Soviet space programme, display themes of peace and friendship, and reinforce the idea of a peaceful happy childhood.⁸⁰



Little holiday flags: left, 'USSR' with arms; right, 'To the world, peace'. Author's collection

One Russian vexillologist commented that, 'It was pretty typical to see a Soviet child holding a flaglet of this kind in hand.' It is interesting that the Russian vexillologists emphasised that these flags were just toys, and not really considered as 'real flags'. An examination of the symbols on many of the flags clearly illustrates that even these inexpensive toys fulfilled a role in the socialisation of children. As the illustrations from textbooks and May Day cards have demonstrated, it was clear that this type of patriotic display by children was not only encouraged, but was also considered to be a pleasing and appropriate way to illustrate Soviet patriotism.⁸¹

Pioneer rituals

As with children's organisations in other countries, such as the Boy Scouts or Girl Guides / Girl Scouts, the Young Pioneer organisation in the Soviet Union had its own set of rituals. Children's organisations in most countries have rituals that relate to the national flag, that encourage displays of patriotic behaviour, and that sometimes draw from the military traditions of their countries. However, unlike children's organisations in the West, nearly every aspect of Young Pioneer rituals incorporated elements from Soviet civil religion.

The manuals for Pioneer leaders explained that the organisation's rituals were an important tool for nurturing highly patriotic feelings and collectivism, and a venue for Pioneers to show pride in their detachments and in the Young Pioneer organisation. It was the leader's responsibility to learn the rituals and to guide their Pioneers through the process. In this way, they were to guide their charges through the emotional aspects of the rituals, and to have a positive moral influence upon the children. Each ritual was to be explained and performed in such a way that the Pioneers were able to understand its meaning. In this way, the members would fully appreciate the sacred traditions of the organisation,

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.



rather than just mechanically carrying out their roles.⁸²

In addition to the ritual for Reception (or induction) into the Pioneers, there was also a ritual for the Creation of a New Detachment each year for the new Pioneers in the fourth grade, and one for saying Farewell to the Pioneers in the eighth grade who had aged out of the organisation, presumably to join the Komsomol. The leader's manual recommended that these two rituals could be held together as a way of allowing the older children to 'pass the torch' to the newest Pioneers. As a way of doing this, the departing Pioneers could ceremonially pass on their detachment flag to the newly formed detachment. In addition the older Pioneers would promise, 'to not forget the Pioneers, to be friends with them, and to help them'. This combined ceremony helped reinforce the friendship between these two youngest generations – the Young Pioneers and the Komsomol – as they worked together to help build communism in their homeland.⁸³

Many Pioneer rituals included flag displays accompanied by bugles and drums, as well as military-style lineups. Furin describes the Pioneer lineup as 'festive,' noting that 'the voice of the bugle is ardent, the rub-a-dub of the drum is vibrant, and the children's hands on their own accord fly up to salute the troop flag'. This ceremony was a regular feature of troop assemblies and an important part of the tradition at Young Pioneer camps. During the lineup, patrol leaders reported on their activities to the detachment leaders, detachment leaders gave a report for their detachment to the troop leaders, and troop leaders gave their reports to the Pioneer council.⁸⁴

Within the Pioneer detachment it was considered quite prestigious to be the colour-bearer and the child thus entrusted swore an oath to protect the flag:

I [given name, family name], standard-bearer of the detachment named for [namesake's name], in the presence of our comrades swear to carefully protect the banner of the Pioneer division, precisely carry out all rules about the handling of the banner, and justify the trust put in me.⁸⁵

After taking the oath, the standard-bearer placed the base of the staff on their right leg. The leader of the detachment gave the command, 'Under the banner, attention! Alignment on the banner!' On this command the bearer reset the banner from the 'attention' position to the position for movement and, having quietly given the command to the assistant standard-bearers to 'forward march,' carried the banner from the left flank to the right. At this point, all the Pioneers and leaders in the formation and the assistant standard-bearers gave the Pioneer salute. The salute was executed by raising the right hand above the head, with the five fingers pressed tightly together and the palm upright. Young Pioneers saluted when responding to the Pioneer summons; as a sign of respect during the presentation of the Red Banner or during the hoisting of the national flag or flags of the Union Republics; during the singing of the national anthem

⁸² Tiazhel'nikov, pp. 27-8; Riordan, "'Be Prepared": Russian Boy Scouts and Soviet Pioneers,' pp. 93–106; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), pp. 49-55, *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), pp. 14-27.

⁸³ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), pp. 50-2, 55, *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), pp. 19-21.

⁸⁴ Furin, pp. 37-8; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), pp. 52-4; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), pp. 21-5.

⁸⁵ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), p. 15.



or republic hymns; and at the Lenin Mausoleum or other monuments honouring Soviet heroes. They also used the salute to greet their leaders and members of the military. The standard-bearers, buglers, and drummers all learned the appropriate positions for different commands, and how to execute the movements required for each aspect of the Pioneer ceremonies.⁸⁶

There were several other traditions associated with the banners and flags of the Young Pioneers. For example, there was a prescribed procedure for 'Carrying out the Banner'. In this ceremony, either the standard-bearer or the 'best Pioneer' (as selected by the leaders) brings out the Red Banner of the Pioneer group or detachment. The colour guard was comprised of the standard-bearer, two assistant standard-bearers, buglers, and drummers. As the banner is brought out, the assistant standard-bearers salute the banner. When the ritual was performed as part of an assembly including multiple detachments, the troop banner led the procession with the detachment standard-bearers falling in behind the buglers and drummers.⁸⁷

During assemblies and troop celebrations, an honour guard of one standard-bearer and two assistants stood watch over each of the banners and flags. The guard was changed every five to ten minutes, through a specified ritual, with the guards selected from among the best Pioneers in each detachment. During the changing of the guard, on the command 'Change stand!' the new guards approached those holding the banners from behind and placed a hand on the staff of the flag. On the next command – 'Change!' – the new standard-bearer took possession of the banner. The relieved watch waited for the command 'On the left (or right) quick march!', after which they joined the ranks of the other Pioneers. Instructions for the ceremony stressed that all commands were to be given 'accurately, but very quietly'.⁸⁸

Soviet children took these responsibilities very seriously. By fulfilling their duty in the execution of the ritual, they demonstrated their ability to contribute to the Pioneer collective, and their dedication to the Communist Party and the Soviet state. S.A. Shmakov noted the value of such responsibility for the development of the Young Pioneer, both as an individual and as a member of the collective:

The strength of children's imagination is so great that it can overcome any difficulty. The child becomes stronger in his own eyes when he can fulfil his duty, no matter what. In a Pioneer summer camp, the girl on flag duty did not leave her position, even when her mother arrived unexpectedly. She asked to relate to her mother, 'I am on guard duty, the change will come in two hours, please don't feel hurt and wait, or come tomorrow.'

Makarenko⁸⁹ was right when he said, 'Respect for the banner symbolizes not only love toward our country, but also efficiency in performing a task in the

⁸⁶ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), pp. 14-19; Furin, p. 30. One of Robin Hessman's subjects recalled a time from her childhood when she heard the national anthem playing from the television. She described how she immediately stood at attention and gave the Pioneer salute until the anthem finished. This is an excellent example of civil religious ritual having become ingrained in everyday behaviour. *My Perestroika* [film].

⁸⁷ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), p. 54.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*



collective.¹⁹⁰



Standard bearers: left, 'Smirno!' or 'Quietly' (Attention); below left, 'Ravniais!' or 'Equal' (Present Colours); below right, 'Vol'no!' or 'Freely' (At Ease). All from Kniga vozhatogo, (1982), plate [11], following p. 64



In this account, we see confirmation that many of the aims of political socialisation had been attained with this particular Young Pioneer. First, she takes her responsibility as guardian of the sacred Red Banner very seriously. She understands that her commitment to this duty, and her obligation to uphold her obligations to the Pioneer Collective, are of primary importance. They are so significant, that when her mother shows up she stays at her post. Like the Pioneer hero Pavlik Morozov, she places the good of the collective and the country above her desire to see her own mother. These are the qualities of a good Young Pioneer and a true patriot, according to Soviet standards.

There were also regulations for how members of the organisation paid homage to the Soviet national flag and the flags of the Union Republics. As the Pioneer Leader's manual explained, 'Pioneer homage given to the state flag of the USSR is an integral part of instilling in Pioneers Soviet patriotism, civic consciousness, class consciousness, [and] loyalty to the revolutionary, military, and labour traditions of the Soviet people.' The manual also stresses that the national flag was 'the symbol of state sovereignty of the USSR and the indestructible union of workers and peasants in the struggle for construction of communist society'. According to the regulations, the national flag was to be hoisted at Pioneer rallies and events, daily on the masts at Pioneer camps, during stays by Soviet

⁸⁹ Anton Semyonovich Makarenko (1888-1939) was one of the founders of Soviet pedagogy and one of the early architects of the Soviet educational system.

⁹⁰ Helen B. Redl and S.A. Shmakov (eds), 'Let the Children Grow as Communists', in *Soviet Educators on Soviet Education* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p. 246.



Pioneers at international Pioneer camps, and on buildings and tents that served as accommodations for Soviet Pioneers at international Pioneer camps. Regulations also specified that the national anthem was to be performed during the hoisting of the Soviet flag. In addition, Pioneers followed regulations specifying that the flags of the Union Republics were to be raised after the national flag, and that the hymns of the republics were to be performed while those flags were raised.⁹¹

Pioneer pilgrimages

In addition to various rituals associated with Pioneer meetings and assemblies, members of the organisation would have participated in pilgrimages appropriate for their age group. By definition, a pilgrimage is 'a journey (usually of a long distance) made to a sacred place as an act of religious devotion; the action or practice of making such a journey'. Communist pilgrimages typically involved a journey to a place with a sacred connection to Lenin, the Revolution, or the Soviet state. For Young Pioneers, these spiritual journeys involved a detachment going together to a hallowed place in their community, such as a war memorial, Lenin monument, or monument to a Hero Pioneer. While there, they would perform a Pioneer ritual involving the laying of flowers or a wreath, 'reporting to Lenin' on their efforts to build communism, or other such practices.⁹²

One particular object involved in these ritual journeys was the Pioneer Wreath of Honour. Furin describes the wreath as 'a symbol of Pioneer loyalty to the heroic military and ritual deeds of previous generations'. The wreath was made either of natural flowers or of the branches from an oak, pine, or laurel tree. Depending on the nature of the pilgrimage destination, the wreath was wrapped in a special ribbon – a red ribbon when it was intended for a memorial to Lenin or to heroes of the Revolution, or a 'Guards' ribbon when the wreath was to be laid at a Soviet war memorial. The laying of the Wreath of Honour was a solemn occasion and involved paramilitary style practices appropriate to a war memorial.⁹³

In the leader's manual from 1968, there is a recommendation for a local pilgrimage that could be completed in any region of the country. The book suggests that the Pioneers undertake an 'Expedition on the Precepts of Lenin'. As part of the expedition, the Pioneers would visit sites in their city or region that either had a direct connection to Lenin, or could be used to illustrate the teachings of Lenin. For example, when visiting a location where Lenin had lived, worked, or studied, the children could feel a physical connection to the founder of their country. Of course, not every location in the Soviet Union had such a place, but nearly every region had a location named after Lenin. These locations, it was suggested, could be used as substitutes. The authors also suggested visiting locations that demonstrated how 'Lenin's precepts are realized in life'. Examples included visiting locations associated with electricity (the fulfilment of Lenin's desire for electrification of the country), a factory (Lenin called for the development of heavy industry), a farm (Lenin dreamed of

⁹¹ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), p. 27.

⁹² Jill Dubisch, 'Pilgrimage,' in Mark Juergensmeyer and Wade Clark Roof (eds), *Encyclopedia of Global Religion* (Thousand Oaks CA: SAGE Publications, 2012), pp. 992-6; Scot Guenter, personal communication (14 June 2017); 'Pilgrimage, N.', *OED Online*, <http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:2048/view/Entry/143868> [accessed 18 June 2017].

⁹³ Furin, p. 39; *Kniga vozhatogo* (1982), p. 25.



the mechanisation of agriculture throughout the country), or a location associated with the arts (Lenin supported a cultural revolution and development of the arts). This physical journey was meant to help children understand what it meant to be 'on the Leninist path' – a phrase that was often used to describe dedicating oneself to the study of Leninism and fulfilment of Lenin's precepts.⁹⁴

The most important pilgrimage site in the Soviet Union, for children and adults alike, was the Lenin Mausoleum. On a daily basis, citizens queued in long orderly lines that usually extended well beyond the boundaries of Red Square. Excerpts from Hedrick Smith's classic book, *The Russians*, illustrate what it was like to wait in the queue and experience the opportunity to be in the presence of the great leader of the Soviet Union. Smith describes how, as the line approached the mausoleum, militia (police) members collected women's handbags and organised the pilgrims into two straight lines – arranging couples with the man on the right and the woman to his left. As the queue reached the middle of the square, the line executed a sharp right turn toward the mausoleum. Guards instructed people to remove their hands from their pockets and the men to remove their hats, and everyone assumed a solemn demeanour appropriate to a visit to a holy shrine. When the queue at last entered the mausoleum, the pilgrims moved along a clearly defined path until they reached the crypt room.

The column made a swift circuit around the coffin. The crypt room is constructed so that visitors enter, immediately turn right and walk up half a flight of steps along the wall, turn left and walk along another wall on a balcony overlooking the glass tomb of Lenin, turn left again and descend another half a flight of stairs, and exit the room. This semicircular route permits a view of Lenin from both sides and from the feet, but never at closer than ten to twelve feet and never with an instant to pause and simply look.⁹⁵

Once the visitors had paid their respects to Lenin, they proceeded to the exit of the mausoleum and passed along the part of the Kremlin wall in which the most important heroes and political figures of the Soviet state had been interred. Soviet children experienced this spiritual journey either accompanied by their parents or in the company of their Pioneer comrades. The experience would have been the culmination of their education about Lenin, and it most certainly had a strong emotional impact on the participants.⁹⁶

This most sacred of places in Soviet civil religion was also the location of other

⁹⁴ *Kniga vozhatogo* (1965), p. 39.

⁹⁵ Hedrick Smith, *The Russians* (New York: Quadrangle/New York Times Book Co., 1976), pp. 273-6.

⁹⁶ A dispatch from TASS dated November 1974, quoted by Hedrick Smith, demonstrates that the Soviets recognised the religious nature of the pilgrimage to Lenin's mausoleum:

From early dawn an endless line of people formed up across Red Square from the granite sepulchre held sacred by the working people throughout the world. Over the half-century, 77 million people [have] passed in a mournful and stern march by the sarcophagus where the genius of humanity lies in state. From this day onwards new thousands and millions of people will be bringing worship to Lenin from all over the world.

Hedrick Smith, p. 279; see also Thrower, pp. 89-90.



Pioneer rituals. It was a favourite location for children to visit in order to lay flowers or wreaths in honour of Lenin. The sacred nature of the mausoleum extended well into the square, adding an extra element of solemnity to the Pioneer induction ceremony or the ceremony in which Young Pioneers joined the Komsomol. And, of course, there was also the importance of Red Square for the parades and mass demonstrations associated with May Day and the anniversary of the October Revolution. All of the practices ensured that the Lenin Mausoleum, Red Square, the Kremlin, and Moscow itself, would be understood as the focal point of the Soviet citizen's world view, and the ultimate destination in their practice of the rites and observances of Soviet civil religion.



Young Pioneers before the Lenin Mausoleum. Lev Polikashin, photographer, RIA Novosti archive, image #640497 / CC-BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RIAN_archive_640497_Young_Pioneers_at_Vladimir_Lenin%27s_Mausoleum.jpg [accessed 26 June 2017]

Taken as a whole, the rituals and pilgrimages practised by Soviet children as members of the Young Pioneer organisation illustrate how the symbols of Soviet civil religion were sanctified, and how the principles of Marxism-Leninism were reinforced through ritual practice. For children, aged seven through fifteen, these practices would have been performed with the highest reverence. To this age group, the supremacy of the Soviet state would have been without question, the wisdom of Lenin would have been highly valued, and the responsibilities of the average Soviet citizen would have been taken to heart. All of these feelings contributed to the political socialisation of the youngest citizens, preparing them for the next step in their political evolution – elevation to the status of Komsomol member. These were vital steps in the socialisation of Soviet children and instilling in them a sense of Soviet identity and a communist world view.

Conclusion

In his book, Hedrick Smith noted that Soviet patriotism had become 'the most unifying force in Soviet society, the most vital element in the amalgam of loyalties that cements Soviet society'. For much of the country's history, Soviet patriotic practices were key to the development of a sense of Soviet identity among the citizenry. It was this sense of Soviet identity that united Russians, Kazaks, Moldavians, and persons of other ethnicities into a cohesive population.



The Soviet people, working together, accomplished a great many things in the seven decades of the country's existence. They electrified the country, they expanded the nation's transportation network, they repelled the fascist invasion, they developed a highly successful programme of space exploration, and they elevated their country to superpower status. While many in the west liked to believe that all of these accomplishments were possible because of the autocratic nature of the Soviet government and the strong control exercised by Soviet authorities over the population, this belief cannot completely explain the successes of the Soviet state. Clearly, there were other types of cohesive forces evident in the USSR.⁹⁷

Strong governmental control does not sufficiently explain why so many in the Soviet Union considered their Soviet identity to be primary, even over their ethnic identity. Clearly, at least until the Gorbachev era when the policies of *glasnost* (openness) and *perestroika* (restructuring) allowed the average citizen to recognise and acknowledge flaws inherent to the system, the unifying factors inherent to Soviet society were strong enough to create a sense of unity among the majority of the population. The average citizen, no matter how cynical they might have been about the messages of state-sponsored propaganda, still took pride in the successes of their Soviet homeland. Their pride in their country was just as genuine as that of any citizen of one of the western democracies. As this study has shown, the national pride of Soviet citizens was clearly rooted in the lessons of their childhood.

The Soviet state invested a great deal of effort into the socialisation of its children. As has been demonstrated, the educational system was developed and operated in such a manner that it instilled in the citizenry a strong sense of Soviet identity, rooted in the teachings of Marx and Lenin. From the very first day of school, children were socialised to think of themselves as members of a collective; to put the needs of the collective above their own; to honour their country and those who had died in its defence; to value labour and the contributions of the working people; and to dedicate themselves to the building of communism. The Young Pioneer Organisation supplemented the formal school lessons while also giving millions of children their own role in achieving national goals. Little Octobrists and Young Pioneers throughout the Soviet Union all contributed as best as they could to help their elders accomplish the goals of communism as prescribed by Lenin. Through these organisations, the children experienced the 'happy Soviet childhood' envisioned by Lenin and Krupskaya in the early years of the Soviet state.

Finally, this study of the socialisation of children in the Soviet Union can serve as a valuable reminder of the importance of civil religion, especially in large multi-ethnic states. By nature, civil religions incorporate symbols, myths, and rituals to produce an emotional tie between citizens and their countries. As is evident from the examples given, a well-developed symbol system, deployed throughout the society and charged with meaning through civil religious rituals, was the key to the success of Soviet civil religion. Of all the symbols used, the Red Banner of Revolution and the variety of flags descended from that banner were held to be the most sacred. This primary position of flags in the Soviet symbol set stands as an important reminder of the importance of flags in civil religions and in modern human societies.

⁹⁷ Hedrick Smith, p. 371; Thrower, p. 75.



Appendix: catalogue of little holiday flags

The author has documented at least 47 different designs for *prazdnichnye flazhki* – little holiday flags. These flags were considered to be toys, but the symbolism and themes on the flags clearly demonstrate that they were also tools to assist in the political socialisation of Soviet children. With the exception of one flag which the author purchased in a school supply store in Kiev in 1983, holiday flags in her collection were purchased through the eBay online auction site. The bulk were purchased from sellers in countries that were once part of the USSR.

For the discussion of these flags within the context of this study, see p. 36. For an earlier discussion of these flags, see also Anne M. Platoff, 'Soviet Children's Flags', *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology*, 17 (2010), pp. 63–84.

Designs are grouped thematically, with translated text provided with the images. All flags are from the author's collection.

Holiday flags using national symbols

Some little holiday flags incorporated elements of the national symbol set, such as the Soviet arms, the red star, and the hammer and sickle.

These flags most likely served as 'substitute Soviet flags' for children, since a small replica of the national flag would have been inappropriate for use as a toy.



Holiday flags showing the Kremlin and Red Square

Every schoolchild in the Soviet Union knew the importance of the Kremlin and Red Square as the 'centre' of their country.

This part of Moscow was central to the history of the country, as well as being the location of the Soviet government. In addition, the mausoleum of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin was located on Red Square, making this location the focal point of Soviet civil religion.

These flags often show Spasskaya Tower (Saviour Tower), one of the most distinctive towers of the Kremlin because of its clocks and its location near St Basil's Cathedral and, more importantly, the Lenin Mausoleum.

Flags typically show this tower with the surrounding buildings orienting the tower on the left-hand side as viewed from a point directly opposite the mausoleum.



The domed structure shown to the right, behind the wall, is the Kremlin Senate Building. This structure housed the personal offices of Lenin and Stalin, and from 1946-91 was the location of the Council of People's Commissars.

Of special symbolic importance, the dome of the building held a flagpole, on which flew a large Soviet flag. From this perspective, the Lenin Mausoleum would be located to the right of Spasskaya Tower, in front of the wall with the Senate dome behind.

This particular section of Kremlin wall, between the mausoleum and the Senate Building, was one of the most important burial sites in the Soviet Union. The most honoured heroes of the USSR were interred in the wall.



Holiday flags related to the October Revolution and military themes

The anniversary of the October Revolution, celebrated on 7 November due to the change from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar after the Revolution, was one of the most important dates on the Soviet holiday calendar. These flags show images related to the Revolution. Typical symbols used on these flags are the cruiser *Aurora*, the ship that fired the first symbolic shot of the October Revolution; the insignia of the Order of the October Revolution (showing the *Aurora* on the badge); and the *budenovka* – a broadcloth helmet worn by Red Army soldiers during the Russian Civil War and by Young Pioneers.





Holiday flags celebrating the Soviet space programme

The Soviet space programme was a source of pride to every Soviet citizen.

During the space race, the Soviets accomplished many victories including the first launch of an artificial satellite (Sputnik 1), the first animal in orbit (a dog named Laika), the first man in space (Yuri Gagarin), the first woman in space (Valentina Tereshkova), and other achievements.

While the images on some of these flags are a bit fanciful, they portray the hopes of the people for continued advances and accomplishments in space exploration.

These flags might have been used to celebrate Cosmonautics Day on 12 April, the anniversary of Yuri Gagarin's historic flight in 1961.



Holiday flags with themes of peace

Peace is a common motif on little holiday flags. This theme is illustrated using text that usually says either 'Peace' or 'To the world, peace'. Peace-themed flags often portray doves, an international symbol of peace.

Other imagery associated with peace flags are flowers, especially poppies which are associated with revolution in Russian symbolism.

The primary Soviet holiday connected to the theme of peace was May Day, as it was an internationally celebrated holiday for all workers of the world. It also marked the end of the long, cold Russian winter.



'Peace'



Two Latvian examples



'To the world, peace'



May'





'With the holiday'



Doves of peace



Holiday flags illustrating friendship

Young Pioneers were taught to be friends to all the children of the world. The concept of international friendship was typically illustrated with the images of three children – one European, one Asian, and one African (the three-races theme). Use of the word 'friendship' is also typical on these flags.

'Friendship' in Russian (left) and Latvian (right)



Holiday flags celebrating the happy childhood of Soviet children

Soviet sources often refer to children as 'the privileged generation'. Childhood was a happy time, and children were valued by the entire society.

Numerous state resources were invested in the children's organisations in order to provide frequent opportunities for the enrichment of the lives of the country's youngest citizens.

Many children each year attended Young Pioneer camps, often at little or no



cost to their families. One of the favourite songs sung by the Pioneers at their camps and gatherings was 'Let there always be sunshine':

The sky's bright blue.
The sun is up high—
This is the little boy's picture
He drew it for you
and then wrote there for you.
Just to make clear what he drew.

May there always be sunshine,
May there always be blue skies,
May there always be my mama,
May there always be me!



Left and middle, 'Let there always be sunshine!'; bottom left, the sun; bottom right, the Pioneer flame



Author biography

Anne (Annie) Platoff is an American vexillologist who lives in Santa Barbara, California. A librarian by profession, Annie holds a bachelor's degree in political science and history, master's degrees in library science and historical studies, and a graduate certificate in museum studies. She is currently a postgraduate student in the School of History, Politics and International Relations at the University of Leicester (Leicester, England, UK). The topic of her dissertation research is the role of flags and symbols in the civil religion of the Soviet Union.

Annie has been an active member of the North American Vexillological Association (NAVA) since 1984. She has presented and published papers on topics such as flags in Kansas, flags of the United States space programme, flags of the subdivisions of the Russian Federation, the bear as a symbol of Russia, and the Soviet Banner of Victory that was raised over the Reichstag at the end of the Second World War. Annie has twice won NAVA's Captain William Driver Award for the best paper presented at a NAVA meeting. At ICV24, the *Fédération internationale des associations vexillologiques* (FIAV) recognised her book, *Russian Regional Flags*, with the Vexillon Award for the most important contribution to vexillology for 2010-11. Annie was named a Fellow of FIAV at



ICV25 in 2013. In 2015 she won the 'best paper' award for the co-authored paper that she presented at ICV26.



The author (second left) with the officers of FIAV: (left to right) Kin Spain, Michel Lupant and Graham Bartram. Photographer, Michael Platoff