

Children and Politics



Romania: Taking the Pioneer's oath – a compulsory ritual for inclusion in large-scale organisations in communist countries

The (mis)use of children for political and propaganda purposes is linked mainly to the 20th century and mass political parties and movements such as communism and fascism.

Sports, culture and other organizations for children and young people became tools in the hands of national political and religious movements and leaders.

National propaganda, particularly prior to the Balkan wars, was also spread through schools, textbooks, pupils' organizations, choral societies, etc. Schoolchildren's compulsory attendance at public events of national and political character was also a form of the involvement of children and young people in politics and the diffusion of

political propaganda. The dissemination of books on national history, patriotic poetry, maps showing the territorial pretensions of the individual nations, and popular pictures of national heroes were methods used to raise the "national awareness" of the younger part of the population both in those countries that had gained independence (Greece, Montenegro, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria) and in those countries within the borders of Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire (Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Albania).

Nonetheless, the politization of children and young people and their (mis)use for political purposes assumed particular significance after the First World War under



The little eagles: children with wooden rifles are drilled in a village, Greece, 1944.

the influence of authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. There occurred the creation of new and the revival of old national and nationalistic organizations devoted to the "development of patriotic sentiments" amongst young people. They did so by organizing gatherings, militarization and indoctrination.

In Yugoslavia, the foundation of a children's organization called the "Association of Pioneers of Yugoslavia" (APY) was founded within the Communist-led Partizan movement in 1942, that is during the Second World War. It was modeled upon a similar Soviet organization. In the post-war period, it encompassed children between the ages of seven and fifteen. The APY organized various (some overtly political) sports and culture activities, work campaigns, competitions, etc. All children's organizations

(scouts, young mountaineers, ramblers, etc.) were part of the APY. Children's lives were organized in a similar way in all communist countries in the Balkans. An important function of the pioneer organizations was ideological and political education (in schools, summer camps, etc.).

The "political education" of children even started in pre-school institutions. This was achieved by teaching them to sing songs about the Communist

party and Tito, listen to stories and organizing theatre performances about partisans. Children also became involved in large-scale organizations at a very early age. In Hungary, for example, children between the ages of six and eight became members of the *Kisdobos* (Young Drummers) prior to membership in the Pioneer organization. In Romania, children of six to eight became

Questions

- 7.1. Compare the examples from the book with examples of the use of children for political ends in your own country in the various periods of history.
- 7.2. Why do totalitarian regimes need to involve children in their systems from early childhood?



Propaganda image in an almanac for pioneers, Romania, 1982.

members of the *Soimii patriei* (Falcons of the Homeland), while those of between eight and fourteen were encompassed by the *Organizatia pionerilor* (Pioneers' Organization). The Pioneer uniforms and symbols (red kerchiefs, five-pointed stars, symbols, etc.) spoke clearly of the political ideals the children were taught.

We can see an illustrative example of the way children were used for political and propaganda purposes during the rule of Josip Broz Tito in socialist Yugoslavia (1945-1981). His birthday was celebrated with great festivity and called "Youth Day". Schools organized the writing of birthday cards, the sending of birthday presents, and delegations of the most exemplary Pioneers had the honour of going to greet the head of state, etc. The central event was the sending of "Tito's Batons" from different parts of the country. The main "federal" Baton, hav-

Recommendation

- Look for photographs or other illustrations from the past that bear witness to the way children were used for political purposes, particularly in totalitarian systems.

ing been borne through all the Yugoslav republics, was presented to him at a huge rally of children and young people. Josip Broz Tito was represented as both the best friend and protector of all children, who were taught details (both true and imaginary) of his biography throughout their primary and secondary education. Particular accent was placed on his hard childhood, on his being an example of an upright, self-sacrificing child, a model for all Yugoslav children.

Communist leaders in other Southeast



Spelling the name of the leader, Slovenia

European countries were represented as "spiritual fathers", "teachers" and "protectors" of all the children in their countries. Pictures of Ceausescu and his wife Helena, Bulgarian President Todor Zhivkov and Albanian Enver Hoxha with children were among the favourite and most effective forms of propaganda.

M. R.

On the Way to School

We live at Semedela near Koper. Our house is medium big and it faces Koper and the sea. We leave for school at 7 a.m.; this is the time, when the fishermen are coming back from the sea, after they have been fishing all night long. As we are walking along the street, busses, which bring workers to

Koper, pass us by. We try to compete with the steamboat, which brings officials from Trieste. Before we go to school we stop at a shop where we pay 15 liras for the apples. In the port the fishermen are unloading fish and workers various machines, wood and other goods which came from Yugoslavia. We all like Yugoslavia.

Albin Zabric 3rd class, elementary school Koper, Slovenia, (Ciciban, number 8, year 1948/49, page. 159.)

Boundless Love from our Children Hearts

„Protected by the lightness of the homeland, children are growing up to be brave, diligent and admirable. With boundless gratitude, Romanian children are always thinking about the founder of the today and tomorrow's Romania, about their friend and teacher-comrade Nicolae Ceausescu. They are also thinking about comrade Elena Ceausescu, political and scientific personality, whose carefulness and parental love are always close to their hearts.

Children's Crusade

An entire population

as yet unborn

but condemned to birth

lined up in rows, before birth

fetus beside fetus.

An entire population

which doesn't see, doesn't hear, doesn't understand

but develops through the convulsed bodies

through the blood of mothers

Unasked.

By Ana Blandiana,

(dissident poet) -poem wrote in 1984, with reference to the regime's brutal political demographic policies.

(in Gail Kligman, The Politics of Duplicity.

Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu 's Romania, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p.147)



Honoring the Ceausescu's presence, Bucurest, Romania.



...and the reality: orphanage "Gradinari House", Romania, 1990.

Having their parents as a good example of communists, pioneers and pupils, all children of Romania are growing and achieving their aspirations in a luminous era, in the years of glory of our country, when leader of the Party and the State is the most loved son of our people, comrade Nicolae Ceausescu.

His example of serving the goals of the Party from the early childhood, all his restless activity constitute a deep spring of knowledge, a high revolutionary example of abnegation, of selfcommitment and of the hope of do all possible things for the progress and the happiness of our people.

The children of Socialist Romania are learning now, in order to work tomorrow in a revolutionary and communist way. Striving to be successful in studying, in their

actions, in their practical training, in the Pioneers' Organization, children change into reality their oath to grow as reliable sons of the country, of the party, of the people. All their love and boundless gratitude for the country, for the Party, for the people, for the brave communist leader represent their high, fresh and honest esteem for those who are ensuring their happy childhood and their bright future."

Almanac „Cutezatorii“ for Romanian pioneers, 1982 edition, pp. 3-44.

Joke

The oath of the Fatherland's Falcons: „I swear to grow up big and strong - without eating anything“

(in Gail Kligman, The Politics of Duplicity. Controlling Reproduction in Ceausescu 's Romania, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998, p 133

Nicolae Ceausescu in 1985

„The fetus is the socialist propriety of the whole society. Giving birth is a patriotic duty. Those who refuse to have children are deserters, escaping the law of natural continuity.“

(in Adriana Baban and Henry P. David, „The Impact of Body Politics on Women's Bodies“, in Margit Feischmidt et al. (eds.), Women and Men in East European Transition, Editura pentru Studii Europene, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 1997, p. 158)



Famous character from cartoons in communist times in Romania