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The “New Woman” in the Context of Soviet Festive Culture of the 1920s-30s

Abstract

The article reviews techniques and methods for solving the “women’s question” in Soviet Russia in the 1920s-30s. The declared “women’s equality” was in fact a double burden on the shoulders of female workers. To help the “new woman” to combine her family responsibilities and factory work, the Soviet state took a number of steps for facilitating her life. Public canteens, factory-kitchens, laundries, tailor shops, and preschool institutions were to liberate the woman from “kitchen slavery” and give her an opportunity to devote herself to production. The declared social equality in practice meant utmost simplification of family life. Of equal importance in creating the “new woman” image were sports events and physical education,

much promoted by the Soviet state as a recreation and a means of managed formation of the “new woman.” Calling women to take an active part in the festivities contributed to their assimilation of social and political attitudes, to the formation of a new system of political values, to the sustention of approved behavior. A case-study of visual propaganda and propaganda during mass games, physical culture parades, and demonstrations on the public holidays highlights the Soviet authorities’ efforts to create an image of the “new woman.” The sources include the 1920s-30s propaganda materials: published and unpublished journalistic writings of Soviet statemen, instructional guidelines and scenarios for public holidays, as well as publications in the 1920s-30s media, all of which demonstrated the ideal of the Soviet woman, which real women tried to imitate on weekdays, as well as on holidays. The article examines how this new identity — of woman who succeeded at the factory and in everyday life — was formed by means of organized mass games, demonstrations, and festivities.

Keywords

Historical sources, archival documents, “new woman,” transformation of gender relations, community facilities, festive culture, formation of a new identity.

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