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Not So Stories — A Soviet Myth Revealed

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Generations of children in the Soviet Union were taught the story of “Comrade Pavlik,” a young boy and “Young Pioneer” who “heroically” denounced his own father to Soviet authorities, accusing his father of hoarding grain. After young Pavlik [whose full name was Pavel Morozov] betrayed his father, he was supposedly killed by “kulak” relatives in retribution for his commitment to the Communist Party.

Thus, “Comrade Pavlik” entered the pantheon of Soviet heroes. Now, *The Moscow Times* reports, Russians are learning that the story was a fabrication. Here’s a section from the paper’s report: *Generations of Soviet citizens grew up with the Morozov story, in one version or another. Illustrated biographies of Pavlik were written for children, poems and songs were composed, movies were made and Socialist Realist paintings contributed iconic images of the boy to the national subconscious. After World War II, statues of Pavlik were erected all over the country, and playgrounds, streets and schools were named for him. Almost anyone born before 1980 has heard of Pavlik and his heroic deeds.*

The truth behind the story emerged recently with the publication of Catriona Kelly’s book, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero*. Here is a summary of her findings:

As it turns out — not surprisingly — there are few if any facts in the Morozov affair that can be taken at face value. There is no record of Pavlik’s famous denunciation of his father, Trofim; no proof, indeed, that Trofim was ever tried for anything. There is only scant evidence that the boy’s father served as chair of the village soviet, and even then, not at the time of the alleged denunciation. Gossip and hearsay suggest that Trofim left his wife and children to live with another woman. There is, however, plenty of evidence in official records of animosity between Pavlik’s paternal relatives and his mother. What does seem reasonably certain is that in September 1932, near the end of the First Five-Year Plan — which brought the bloody collectivization of Soviet agriculture — a 13-year-old boy named Pavel Morozov and his 9-year-old brother, Fyodor, were found murdered in the woods outside Gerasimovka, a dirt-poor village in the forests of the Urals province. The boys had apparently been out berry-picking; their bodies were discovered some distance apart, splattered with cranberries and the blood from multiple stab wounds, and Pavlik’s head had been covered with a sack of some sort. Within a few weeks, the crime had come to national attention thanks to an article in Pionerskaya Pravda. Prosecutors contended that Pavlik had been murdered by a “nest of kulaks” resisting collectivization that included his grandfather, grandmother, uncle and cousin. These four people were found guilty in late November and sentenced to be shot. Subsequently, the Soviet propaganda machine began to mythologize the story of Pavlik Morozov in fits and starts. . . . The authorities sought to turn the murdered boy into a model of selfless dedication to the state that could be useful in raising further generations of the “new Soviet man.”

There are real lessons here. One of the most important is the fact that any regime that would celebrate a boy’s betrayal of his own father deserves to die. A second is that such a regime will demonstrate little respect for the truth. The myth of Comrade Pavlik was a deliberate communist lie. But, as George Orwell understood; the bigger the lie, the bigger its impact. We should be deeply and eagerly thankful to God that this regime no longer exists.

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