



The Laggard of Christmas Kukryniksy 1931



The poster titles *The laggard of Christmas shall be put on the black board* in red letters; this board at the bottom of the poster dates December, 25 and January, 7, the Orthodox Christmas time. The term “black board” implies a shameful and disgraceful element, as disreputable workers shall be named there. The poster was published in 1931, three years after the political shift in the Soviet Union, which brought the renunciation of the *New Economic Policy*, the introduction of the first Five-Year Plan – and with it a modification of the antireligious propaganda.

During the 1920s, antireligious propaganda was mainly directed against clerics which were – due to the privileged position of the Russian Orthodox Church in the former Tsarist Empire – assumed to be enemies of socialism. Consequently, the Bolsheviks aimed their critique and propaganda only infrequently at the religious laity, assuming that their piousness originated in their underprivileged economic situation. In accordance with this assumption, they also aimed at increasing general education, to move the masses away from religion and towards socialism. Therefore, official critique mostly addressed religious leaders, less often believers. This changed after 1928, and propaganda was directed against both believers and clerics.

Whereas political propaganda prior to 1928 and the Five-Year Plan mainly targeted the “old regime” or political opponents, now efficiency and diligence became increasingly part of propagandistic issues. Hence, so called “spongers”, “loafers”, and “shirkers” were declared enemies of the Five-Year Plan. And since religions and their rituals and holidays were closely linked to alcoholism and to inefficiency, believers were increasingly objectified for antireligious propaganda.

With the empty bottle, the obviously drunk man, and the board of disgrace, “The Laggard of Christmas” shows paradigmatically, how antireligious propaganda of that time associated religions and religious holidays with alcoholism and with an unproductive lifestyle. The board of disgrace with the Christmas dates in front of the poster suggests that religious rituals and holidays turn believers into drinkers and therefore to unproductive members of the socialist society. As an alternative to religious rituals and holidays, the Soviet regime installed non-religious, socialist rituals and holidays, closely related to the religious ones they wanted to replace. As officially declared, the Soviet holidays were, in contrast to the religious ones, celebrated soberly, and this way they were installed to educate the Soviet population to atheistic, nondrinking and efficient workers.