

Good Cop, Bad Cop

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March 03, 2011

The  Moscow Times

Полицейский: police officer

Пришла весна и народ гуляет! (Spring is here, and folks are having fun!) Or: Ещё не пришла весна и народ с ума сходит! (Spring still isn't here and folks are going nuts!) In any case, ребрендинг (rebranding) of милиция (militia) into полиция (police) has been народное творчество (public creativity) of the best kind. Reading the news is like a night at a comedy club.

It all started with an article on how the public should address the newly named cops. A language expert admitted that he didn't have any idea. Theoretically, we should politely call a cop господин полицейский (Mr. Policeman), but he said: Статус нашей бывшей милиции, а теперь полиции как-то очень плохо вяжется со статусом слова "господин" (The status of our former militia and now police for some reason really doesn't fit the status implied by the word "mister").

On the other hand, he said, "товарищ полицейский" — это страшное противоречие

между советским “товарищ” и западным “полицейский” (“comrade policeman” is a horrible contradiction — Soviet “comrade” and Western “policeman”). He suggested opening up the topic for discussion: Сейчас с помощью интернета можно привлечь кучу народа. ... Может быть, кто-то остроумный что-нибудь и придумает (Now through the Internet you can reach a bunch of people. ... Maybe someone witty will come up with something).

And so the floodgates of Russian folk wit were flung open. Someone suggested полицейонер (a mix of милиционер and полицейский) and господин полицейонер (Mr. Policerman). Someone else was sure people would call a Russian cop “полип” (polyp) or “полицай” (polizei), with all the nasty associations of Nazi Germany. Writer and opposition activist Eduard Limonov thought that the people, in their wit and wisdom, would call a cop “поц” (putz). Another commentator was adamant: Как были “ментами,” так и останутся (They were called “ment,” and “ment” they’ll remain).

Others had a blast with the abbreviated names of police units. Полицейские инспекторы дорожного регулирования (police inspectors of traffic regulation) become ПИДРы, an abbreviation that sounds like a derogatory slang word for homosexual. Another writer realized that железнодорожный отдел милиции (the railway unit of the militia) would now be железнодорожный отдел полиции (the railway unit of the police), with the snappy abbreviation ЖОП — something like BUM (what you sit on).

The writer imagined the process of firing about 20 percent of the police as “отлов и отстрел 200 тысяч уволенных мужиков, умеющих обращаться с оружием” (catching and shooting 200,000 laid-off men who know how to handle weapons).

But then, he suggested: “Уже в 2012 году на улицах будут опрятные, подтянутые и кристально честные полисмены, которые смогут зачитать вам права на трёх языках, включая фарси. От них будет пахнуть парижским парфюмом, на форме от Юдашкина не будет ни одной морщинки, если не считать естественно выпирающих рельефных мышц.” (By 2012 the streets will be patrolled by tidy, fine-figured, purely honest policemen, who will be able to read you your rights in three languages, including Persian. They will be scented with Parisian perfume, wear uniforms by Yudashkin, and there won’t be a wrinkle on them, except for natural bulges of their muscles.)

In this utopia, the cop will ask: “Чем я могу вам помочь, милостивый государь?” (How can I help you, kind sir?) You’ll reply: “Видите ли, сударь, в чём дело ... ” (You see, sir, here’s the problem ...).

And then you wake up.

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Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2011/03/03/good-cop-bad-cop-a5404>