



Fighting Illiteracy and Political Enlightenment: Soviet Educational Policies in the 1920s

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INTRODUCTION

Education policies during the Soviet regime reflected the political and socio-economic agenda of the ruling government and played an important role in “a nation’s sense of identity and national awareness” (Smith, 1997, p. 281). In the early Soviet period, Bolshevik leaders believed that the fate of the regime and *proletariat* (working class) revolution lies in the transformation of the “consciousness”, creating a new culture, raising the new strata of the communist *intelligentsia*, and “promoting the distinct sense of nationhood” (David-Fox, 2016; Smith, 1997, p. 282). The education system had become a ground for not only the economic advancement of socialism but also the instrument of solidifying the political control over the vast territory and “a weapon for the Communist transformation of society” (Lauglo, 1988, p. 293). Although the sense

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of belonging to a wider community in pre-Soviet Kazakhstan had more socio-cultural connotations, its political meaning was acquired via the gradual inculcation of ideologically “right” education and forced political, economic, and socio-cultural changes during the early Soviet period.

Kazakhstan was formed in the middle of the fifteenth century when geopolitical circumstances in the Central Asian region led different Turkic tribes, clans, and families to separate from Uzbek Khanate to the Jetisu region. During the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries, this “multi-ethnic” political union, also known as “Kazakhs”, stretched across the steppe to the Caspian Sea in the west and the Altai Mountains in the east. In the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, khans of Kazakh hordes gradually signed *poddanstvo* (suzerainty) treaties with the Russian Empire to form a temporary alliance against stronger enemies, which consequently led to Kazakhs’ colonization. Although governed by a military administration, Kazakhs experienced little changes in socio-cultural life under the Tsarist rule. The educational system consisted of mostly religious education in ancient Arabic and later Arabic-Persian and Turkic languages (Keller, 2001; Ubiria, 2015). Later, the necessity of an administrative apparatus for imperial services and pro-Russian elites in the region stimulated the introduction of Russian-Kazakh schools with a strict class system of entrance (Sembayev, 1962; Ubiria, 2015).

The following historical changes of the October Revolution and the establishment of the Soviet Union radically transformed the education system. In Marxist theory, domination leverages of the *proletariat* lay in economic and political domains, while education was only a part of a bigger system and gained little attention (Lauglo, 1988). Since classical Marxism provided little theoretical or practical ground to develop a viable political strategy to advance the *proletariat* revolution in the multi-ethnic Russian empire, Vladimir Lenin, the founding father of the Soviet state, placed national policy at the center of the Bolshevik Party’s agenda (Dewitt, 1968; Uburia, 2015). Hence, in order to legitimize and institutionalize formal all-Union and national identity concepts, this initiative was supported by a number of policies, such as the demarcation of Soviet territories, administrative, linguistic, and cultural *korenizatsiia* (literary, rooting) policies, and the Union-wide census in 1926 (Ubiria, 2015).

Consistent with the Marxist-Leninist ideology, Soviet rulers view education as an essential component of the socio-political and economic modernization of nations. Advancing education during this period encompassed not only the eradication of illiteracy among the adult

population but also a political campaign against the elements of the “traditional” or “bourgeois” society, popularizing the regime into masses and indoctrinating new belief systems and economic initiatives (Dave, 2007; Dewitt, 1968; Fitzpatrick, 2002; Hirsch, 2004; Sembayev, 1962; Ubiria, 2015). Hence, in order to strengthen the position of Soviet rule in the region, it was vital to impose upon people the idea that Soviet power is not the continuation of Russian imperialism but an indigenous and unbiased new government that serves the national interests of Soviet citizens (Ubiria, 2015).

Such institutionalization came along with rapid industrialization, urbanization, and more “civilized” Soviet citizenry with absolute disregard for the socio-cultural features of the nomadic population. The years of “great Soviet transformations” came at a high human cost in Kazakhstan due to the “not ‘natural’ development of history” (Kassymbekova & Chokobaeva, 2021, p. 487). Political, economic, and socio-cultural initiatives, such as the abrupt suspension of nomadic lifestyle during the forced sedentarism, collectivization, dekulakization (liquidation of *kulaks*, referring to affluent peasants, as a class), dispossession policies, several *juts* (mass death of livestock) due to harsh winters, massive agricultural and industrial programs with crop failures in some regions, left the titular nation of KASSR¹ with no means of survival (Auanasova, 2012; Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Kozlov, 2014; Romashkina, 2019; Ubiria, 2015; Viola, 2010). Moreover, the mass migration of different nations, especially Slavic peasants, into the steppes added to the changes in ethnic composition in the territory of Kazakhstan (Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Ubiria, 2015).

The chapter consists of the following sections: the literature review introduces the Soviet education system with regard to the political, economic, and socio-cultural changes during the 1920s; the methodology details the archival research that was conducted and the research question on how early education system in Soviet Kazakhstan reflected the policies to develop Soviet citizenry. The findings and discussion section has two main directions, such as general information about the education

¹ In 1920, Kazakhstan was part of the Kirghiz Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic, and in 1925, the Kazak(h) Autonomous Socialist Soviet Republic was created. The author uses the “KASSR” abbreviation for both periods.

system and liquidation of illiteracy in the 1920s and poverty and *polit-prosvet* (political enlightenment), and the conclusion sums up the chapter by supporting the argument on the role of the educational system in Soviet Kazakhstan to build a Soviet citizen.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education policies in the early Soviet period reflected populist democratic values of “free development of personality”, “free development of the post-revolutionary masses”, and “free education for all” (Lauglo, 1988, pp. 288–289). The main direction of the initiatives was predominantly focused on promoting education in native languages and authorizing religious education to avoid resistance from Muslim parents (Lauglo, 1988; Smith, 1997). Undoubtedly, such egalitarian intentions and commitment of the ruling class played a substantial role in gaining the political support of non-Russian nationalities. However, by the beginning of the 1920s and the next decades, it was alleged to lead to another domination of local bourgeois and the elevation of “national unity over class struggle” (Smith, 1997, p. 289). Most of the initial “revolutionary enthusiasms” remained as intentions, and the beginning of the 1920s was marked by the bureaucratization and centralization of the education system that was “dedicated to the Communist cause” (Lauglo, 1988, p. 293). The “Declaration on a unified labor school” published in 1918 emphasized the main principle of Soviet pedagogy as the connection of the school with political ideology (Bogachev & Zakharova, 2015). The Education Act issued in 1923 paved the foundation for the political control of education, such as state monopoly of educational establishments, “politicizing the teaching force”, adjusting the education system to the “economic needs for manpower”, and strengthening the influence and position of administrative authorities and local Party bodies (Lauglo, 1988, p. 294). The government expected “social mobility through education” (p. 8), where schools “must train Soviet citizens, freed from the prejudices of religion and understanding of the meaning of class war, the legitimacy of the revolution and the goals of the Soviet state” for there were “no ‘neutral’ facts to be learned in social sciences” (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 18).

The Sovietization of people was supposed to be carried out on key fronts of a complex educational system, such as “enlightenment (*prosveshchenie*), education (*obrazovanie*), and upbringing (*vospitanie*)” (David-Fox, 2016, p. 4). In Kazakhstan, the Constituent Congress of the

Soviets of the KASSR, which opened on October 4, 1920, in Orenburg, adopted the “Declaration of the Rights of the Workers of the KASSR” to provide “workers, poor peasants, and the entire mass of the working “Kirghiz”² people with the opportunity of a complete, widespread and free education” (Sembayev, 1962, p. 36). Undoubtedly, the challenges of the educational system during this period were vast. Firstly, only a limited number of schools existed at the beginning of the 1920s, and they lacked not only programs and basic literature but also a shortage of human and material resources to “build Soviet citizens” on a large scale. The existing professionals in the technical areas were highly mistrusted by the Communist Party due to being considered “bourgeois”, and the poor educational system was not yet producing the new Soviet technical *intelligentsia* to meet the economic ambitions of the Soviets (Bailes, 2015).

Secondly, the period was marked by active theoretical research and the development of school curricula and methods of teaching disciplines. For example, in 1924, the State Scientific Council (GUS) gave instructions for training skills (*navyki*) that “closely [link] with the study of the real world”; hence, reading, writing, arithmetic, or languages were “no longer to be taught as separate subjects”, leaving teachers “completely bewildered” (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 20). This labor (*trudovoi*) method of teaching is supposed to be imparted under three directions: Nature (includes physics, chemistry, and biology), Labor (covers various historical information about labor production), and Society (encompasses history and literature) (Fitzpatrick, 2002). The First All-Union Congress of Teachers in January 1925 noted that this method was incompatible with the assimilation of deep knowledge by students, and by the 1927–1928 academic year, the leadership of the People’s Commissariat of Education (*NarKomPross*) presented a list of systematic courses in grammar, spelling, and arithmetic (Bogachev & Zakharova, 2015).

And thirdly, the Soviet pursuit of “rapid construction of socialism” led to the dramatic decline of nomads’ only means of livelihood—livestock (Cameron, 2018; Romashkina, 2019). Together with *juts*, the summer drought with swarming locusts in 1921 forced exhausted people to wander to bigger areas in search of survival. Dire poverty

² Initially, the term “Kirghiz” was used by Russian ethnographers to generally designate steppe nomads. In 1925, the term “Kazak” started being used to differentiate Kazakhs as a separate ethnic group and only with the creation of Kazakh SSR in 1936 was the final consonant “kh” officially adopted (Dave, 2007; Ubiria, 2015).

and widespread hunger in the region stood sorely in need of provisions, basic commodities, and medications: Kazakhs lived in dilapidated buildings and barns; ate roots, oats, carrion, and grass (Romashkina, 2019; Sembayev, 1962). These all resulted in rising mortality and fast-spreading typhus, lice, and other epidemics among steppe nomads, with about more than two million starving people, which consisted half of the population of KASSR (Auanasova, 2012; Cameron, 2018; Dave, 2007; Kozlov, 2014; Romashkina, 2019; Ubiria, 2015; Viola, 2010). In addition to the economic hardships, the educational leadership of KASSR faced an escalating number of orphaned, sick, and wandering kids on the streets, while having a limited budget and a small number of buildings for schools (Aubakirova, 2020; Sembayev, 1962). Moreover, in the 1920s, the social status or political affiliation of parents was extremely important to children's enrollment in educational establishments. Whether their parents were labeled as working class or *kulaks* affected their entrance to secondary and higher education, eligibility to the *Pioneer* or *Komsomol* youth divisions of the Communist Party, and employment opportunities (Fitzpatrick, 2002). Therefore, "when accepting children, priority is given to orphans, children of workers, Red Army soldiers, and the poorest peasants" (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 11), stressing that by being an orphan, children had better chances to obtain education rather than having your parents labeled as *kulaks*.

This "transformative" path of the Kazakh nation later was described by L. Brezhnev in the newspaper "*Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*" on August 29, 1970: "...from starvation, darkness, illiteracy, to a remarkable rise of a unique national in form, socialist in content culture - such is the rapid path of modern Kazakhstan" (as cited in Suzhikov, 1972, p. 7).

METHODOLOGY

I conducted archival research on primary sources in the Central State Archive of Scientific and Technical Documentation in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Two research assistants helped me with data collection during the summer of 2022 and gathering literature and official documents, such as protocols, decrees, and acts in the sphere of educational policies issued by the KASSR from 1920 to 1930. Due to the abundance and complexity of archive documents, I spent two weeks with a research assistant in Almaty to select and conceptualize the documents necessary for the project. As a result, the main source of information for the chapter is the Archive Fund N81 from 1920 to 1936.

Generally, 43 cases³ were studied to answer the research question: to what extent did the education system in early Soviet Kazakhstan reflect the policies intended to develop Soviet citizenry?

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The main government body working with the development of Soviet education in Kazakhstan was the *KazNarKomPros* (People's Commissariat of Education in KASSR), founded in 1920 on the basis of the Kirghiz Military-Revolutionary Committee (Sembayev, 1962). At the beginning of the 1920s, schools in the KASSR were built in four main areas: a) first-level schools with four-year education; b) seven-year schools, consisting of first-stage education followed by three-year education, after which students entered technical schools or working faculties; c) schools of the second stage (nine years), after which students can enter higher education; and d) working faculties for working and peasant youth (Fitzpatrick, 2002; Sembayev, 1962).

Despite the trying time, the ideological and political propaganda in the early Soviet period was robust. Accusations for any underdevelopment were blamed on the imperial regime or the “backwardness” of Kazakhs, by overstressing the “cultural backwardness” for being *bespis'mennye narody* (people without scripts) (Dave, 2007). Therefore, raising literacy level and political enlightenment as the basis of the educational system was almost always stressed in the Commissariat meetings:

It would be the greatest short-sightedness to ignore [education] because only it can provide us with the real administering of all human material in the sense of its physical and mental preparation for the great duty of the builders of communism. (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 7)

As a result, the education system of the 1920s was mostly marked by eliminating illiteracy, political propaganda, and theoretical searches and experiments in indoctrinating “foreign” ideology in accordance with Marxist-Leninism.

³ The cases' numbers are: 446, 452, 500, 551, 552, 553, 555, 556, 562, 569, 589, 595, 600, 604, 605, 607, 610, 642, 681, 818, 928, 982, 988, 1018, 1149b, 1149v, 1151, 1187, 1209, 1260, 1263, 1266, 1333, 1341, 1342, 1346, 1347, 1348, 1350, 1428, 1417, 1616, 1430.

*The General State of the Educational System in the 1920s
and the Liquidation of Illiteracy*

The overall literacy rate in the KASSR at the beginning of the 1920s did not exceed 2% (Sharipov, 1960).

In terms of literacy, the KASSR is the most backward suburbs: the indigenous population of the Kirghiz Republic is especially striking in its backwardness, where the percentage of illiterates reaches 95.9%. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 19)

However, the education system in the 1920s was not only about learning to read or write. It carried a complex and genuinely new ideological agenda to people and was complicated by the economic and social conditions in the republic. Generally, despite the grandiose plans and goals, the education system could barely keep up the pace of industrialization or collectivization policies.

The reasons for school declines are in the economic state of the region, which continues to be in a strong decline. This decline can be judged from the main branches of the economy - agriculture and cattle breeding, which decreased in 1923 - the first by 58%, the second by 87%. The restoration of these foundations of life after the imperialist and civil wars, and especially after the juts and famine, is proceeding slowly. (Fund 81, Case 551, p. 15)

Is it noteworthy that in the early Soviet period, the educational system of the KASSR was the subject of massive debates. The Kazakh intelligentsia, which was educated on the principles of the Alash Party's ideology (socio-political and national liberation movement), retained an influence on the most important branches of the cultural construction of Kazakhstan, such as designing textbooks, methodological guidance, and initiatives in developing language problems (Sembayev, 1962). During the first All-Kazakh Conference, officials stated that regardless of classes, a school should be a "product of a society" and stressed the importance of the absence of coercion and authority, and the "natural development of children" (Sembayev, 1962, p. 65). Hence, an ideological confrontation around the "cultural revolution" unfolded the "bourgeois nationalists" who "tried to tear the Kazakh people away from the culture and science of the great Russian people", calling such changes a "method of Russification of the Kazakh language and writing" and "falsify[ing] the history

of the Kazakh literature by calling them folklore” (Sembayev, 1962, pp. 161–162). Moreover, such statements from Kazakh officials went against the main political philosophy in the region, where education was determined by the economic system, the class or classless structure of society, the accepted system of upbringing, and its spiritual and ideological conditions. As a result, the Central Committee of the Communist Party in the resolution of August 5, 1929, “On the leading cadres of public education”, proposed to pay special attention to cleaning public education bodies from ideological alien elements which distort the *proletarian* class line (Sembayev, 1962). Such initiatives affected the narratives in public documents over the justification of the “righteousness” of a “new” system:

The school of the pre-revolutionary period of Kazakhstan in the hands of the tsarist government was an instrument of oppression, enslavement and Russification of the Kazakh people. (Fund 81, Case 1209. p. 47)

The education of the pre-revolutionary period serves as a lesson in how not to enlighten the masses. At that time, the entire system worked out in a way to educate the population as devoted servants of the ruling system. In the old schools, love of God, devotion to the Tsar and the Fatherland, and the upbringing of patriotic feelings were put at the forefront of education. After the October Revolution, an opportunity arose to expand [the education system]. As a result, a number of new cultural and educational institutions are being opened: namely: preschool and political [enlightening] educational institutions. (Fund 81, Case 1333, p. 12)

Certainly, since “opposing” proposals did not serve the main political course of the Soviet Union, they were suppressed from the very beginning and later “eliminated” during the Great Purges in the 1930s.⁴

In order to exclude the independent development and conduct of campaigns, the Political Educational Agencies should strive to fill the activities of all disputed points of education in political enlightenment. For this, both the general plan of agitation work and the plans of individual campaigns should be approved by the party committees and should be made the subject of discussion of the workers of the club, libraries, etc. (Fund 81, Case 562. p. 35)

⁴ Also known as the Great Terror—a brutal political campaign to eliminate real or potential rivals or critics of Joseph Stalin and his regime.

Moreover, at the beginning of the 1920s, the education system did not have a regulated organization of academic work. Schools had no fixed procedures about the beginning or end of the school year, the length of winter and summer holidays, or the length of the school day. The average duration of the school year of schools in settled areas was 130 days, in semi-nomadic regions 110 days, and in nomadic ones, 95 days. Thus, one of the distinguishing factors of the second half of the 1920s was the regulation of the duration of the academic year. In 1926, the Council of People's Commissars of the KASSR adopted the "Charter of the Labor School of the Kazakh ASSR", where the academic year was defined as 8 months (Sembayev, 1962). Moreover, the *KazNarKomPros* gradually started to regulate common academic plans, textbooks, and methodological guidelines, but the availability and quality of Kazakh-language textbooks remained problematic until the end of the 1920s.

Noting the grave shortage of textbooks and political educational literature, especially in the Kirghiz language. Without it, no work in the field of Public Education is possible. Hence Congress instructs to urgently find possible funds for setting up a Kirghiz publishing house. (Fund 81, Case 607, p. 67)

Nevertheless, education became not only "a new survival skill" (Dave, 2007, p. 42) but also widely valued by Kazakh nomads. Sembayev (1962) writes that a big number of young people gradually started to arrive at educational institutions from the most remote *auls* (nomad settlements which later acquired the meaning of "village") and the reception room of the Kazakh Central Executive Committee's chairman was constantly filled with newcomers.

Here, the reporting materials of GuboNO (Provincial Department of Public Education) provide extremely encouraging news. Kustanai (now Kostanay) region, listing the insufficiently active attitude of Soviet and professional organizations (for a number of objective reasons), claims that the main assistant in the development and strengthening of public education is the population itself, which has realized the expediency and necessity of this matter and provides not only moral but also material support, expressed in the construction and repair of school buildings, free fuel supply, etc. (Fund 81, Case 982, p. 1)

Reports show that Soviet endeavors of the liquidation of illiteracy and elimination of the titular nation's "backwardness" as a first step in "building communism" and "civilized Soviet citizenry" stumbled upon the inability to provide a building and basic furniture. Schools in *auls* had no furniture or equipment, a piece of rusted iron replaced the blackboard, and children sat crossing their legs around the common "Asian" (ground) table on dirt floors covered with a felt mat (Sembayev, 1962).

As it can be seen from the reports, the condition of school buildings everywhere is unsatisfactory, and in the Kirghiz ones – catastrophic. Based on the materials of the Semipalatinsk and Aktobe regions, work in Kirghiz schools takes place in dugouts with windows covered with rags. And this is not typical only for the two specified provinces. A school without windows is not uncommon; they are observed everywhere where the population has not taken care of their maintenance. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Universal coverage of education and success in the liquidation of illiteracy is often regarded as one of the grand accomplishments of the Soviet Union—yet little is known about the financial and material assistance of the local population and national solidarity in the educational development of the country. For example, during the hungry 1920s, workers of Vernensk garment industrial enterprises sewed clothes and bed linen for children in orphanages, while local communities undertook responsibilities for school construction and equipment (Sembayev, 1962).

Lack of buildings - 70.5%. Mass construction of school buildings, if any, is carried out only by the forces and means of the population itself. But this construction initiative of the population is definitely not taken into account (Fund 8, Case 982, p. 30).

Akmola GubonO reports that people themselves provide great assistance to rural schools. At their own expense, they repaired buildings and classroom furniture, and procured fuel and lighting. School furniture is also purchased by the population itself. Locals assigned an accommodation to the Head of the school and hired guards for schools. Rural public organizations also provide a great deal of assistance to schools. If we do not count [their] help, the situation of schools in terms of educational and operational expenses would be very tragic. (Fund 81, Case 982, p. 1)

However, such assistance from the population did not mean they could influence the course or content of literacy programs. For example, since

in the 1920s, religious beliefs strongly prevailed among the population, confessional schools received greater esteem and influence among the steppe nomads. For instance, in 1922, the *NarKomPros* of the Turkestan ASSR issued a directive allowing the teachings of the Muslim faith in Kazakh, Uzbek, and Uighur schools, if it is the will of the people (Sembayev, 1962). The directive was halted from the beginning as the antithesis of modernity and Soviet “non-religious education” initiative in schools started to be replaced by “anti-religious education” with opposing doctrine of the Marxist-Leninist ideology on nature and society.

In the Ural province, there were attempts by the population to create a private school with a religious bias, but they were stopped at the very beginning. Thus, a connection with modernity began to be established. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Evidently, *likpunkts* (offices for liquidation of illiteracy) came with ideological “stuffing”. For example, the Program for *Likpunkts* and Schools of the Illiterate states that during the first month, they study differences between socialist, federal, and Soviet states; the second month is all about the official bodies of the Soviet Union and the importance of their duties; the third month is dedicated to the separation of religion from the state and school and eradication of “traditional prejudices”; during the fourth month, children study about the restoration of the economy, Soviet farms, industrialization, and agriculture (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 53); the fifth month is an introduction to the New Economic Policy and the economic dependence of other states and wars between capitalist countries; the sixth month focuses on the dictatorship of the *proletariat*, the need for an international comradeship of workers, and the global role of the Soviet Republic (Fund 81, Case 607, p. 2).

Poverty and Politprosvet

At the beginning of the 1920s, the cultivated agricultural area decreased by 40% (in the Ural region up to 70%) (Sembayev, 1962) and statistics show that the Ural province estimated that up to 99% were suffering from starvation, 80% in the Orenburg province, 74.5% in the Kostanay province, and 40% in the Akmola province (Romashkina, 2019). This and former mentioned adversities at the beginning of the 1920s directly affected the educational works in the republic:

The financial situation of Kirghiz students is in terrible condition. Being children of starving parents, having less training, and not always fluent in Russian, Kirghiz students are deprived of opportunities and have to drag out a miserable existence, [that] hardly supports their lives and certainly affects their academic success. The struggle for a piece of bread distracts students from direct work, forcing them to carry hard physical labor, instead of “gnaw granite of science. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 16)

By January 1922, there were 333,043 homeless and orphaned children (Karsakova et al., 2018), and more than 400,000 by November of the same year (Romashkina, 2019). Demographic losses of the KASSR mostly had an ethnic character, consisting mainly of Kazakhs and estimated in Kostanay province at 37.6%, Akmola province at 23.7%, Ural province at 22.9%, Bukei province at 14.6%, and Orenburg province at 18.1% (Aubakirova, 2020). The educational administration of the republic started to organize nutrition points in the rural area to stop the flow of starving children to the city, since “the army of homeless, half-dressed, and often sick children, who are now in cities, flooding their streets, living in destroyed buildings, bazaars, near railway stations and require assistance” (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 16).

Although larger settlements used requisitioned buildings, the influx of homeless (street) children aggravated the shortage of buildings. Consequently, allocating more buildings to orphanages and providing material and financial support for starving children became one of the central errands of political enlightenment works:

If social education accounts for 86% of expenditures on public education, political enlightenment 8%, and professional education 5.6%, then, in fact, orphanages take up to 58.5% of the allocations of social welfare. (Fund 81, Case 562, p. 50)

Due to the catastrophic events, among all the tasks that were assigned to *KazNarKomPros*, the Commissariat at the beginning of the 1920s was able to fulfill only the abolition of religious education and the introduction of joint training (Sembayev, 1962). Since the deployment of school networks in its scope and plans did not meet the material and human resource capabilities of the republic, *KazNarKomPros* and local authorities began to reduce the number of schools. Thus, the average decrease in schools in 1921/22 amounted to 60%, and in the Kostanay region, even to 86% (Sembayev, 1962). Moreover,

The number of schools operating by January 1, 1922, had decreased by almost 70% compared to the previous year. The state issued such an insignificant loan, which can only support about 300 teachers. (Fund 81, Case 516, p. 25)

In 1922, the 10th All-Russian Congress of Soviets pointed out that the cause of general public education should be continued to develop, since “further retreat in the front of enlightenment is unacceptable” (Sembayev, 1962, p. 80). Therefore, the Congress allocated land plots to schools, assigned state subsidies, allowed a temporary measure of payment for education in schools of the 1st and 2nd levels, and permitted the opening of schools on contractual terms with the population (at people’s expense). Up until the end of the 1920s, the shortage of school buildings was being solved by confiscated premises of *kulaks* or renting facilities. Together with such plans, the Central Committee proceeded to advance their ideological agenda and sometimes even incongruous proposals to fight adversities. Agitators who worked in villages and cities not only called for giving away surpluses but also the redistribution of seeds and the maintenance of the remains of livestock on a collective basis (Romashkina, 2019). An extract from the newspaper “Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic” with the title “Regulations on the All-Russian Bureau of Industrial Propaganda” stated:

The agitation department offers everyone to send in 2 copies of all material that can be used in relation to the famine of 1921. Materials: posters, diagrams, leaflets, individual articles, photographs, reports of counties and volosts, etc; materials on the seizure of valuables, on the fight against theft. (Fund 81, Case 500, p. 1)

Likpunkts should carry out talks and readings of newspaper articles about ways to combat the consequences of the famine. The next issue of “Down with Illiteracy” magazine will be entirely dedicated to the ongoing campaign. (Fund 81, Case 500, p. 12)

In the second half of the 1920s, ideological propaganda and political enlightenment in schools became even more serious. There was no school in the republic that did not conduct works on the formation of a “new Soviet citizen” (Sembayev, 1962). Propaganda works were conducted both during the classes and extracurricular activities. Many schools practiced organizing “Club days” dedicated to visits to nearby *auls* to carry out staging performances for the population, discussions

about the revolution from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, and disseminating the Communist Party's policies on the class struggle against *kulaks* and the collectivization of agriculture in the KASSR (Sembayev, 1962). Additionally, the government introduced the self-government of students (*detskoye samoupravlenie*), where a School Council of students gathered complaints (*donosy*), and established their own police and court divisions to "regulate" undisciplined children. In a word, "Soviet children developed political consciousness mainly by observing and imitating the adult world" (Fitzpatrick, 2002, p. 24; Sembayev, 1962).

In sum, having taken power over the country, the Bolsheviks pursued a fundamentally different state policy in the field of education and in a few decades built a universal Soviet education system. Through *likpunkts* and schools, educational content mostly glorified the Soviet Union, integrated the communist ideology into all spheres of society through a "revolution in the mass consciousness", and raised the younger generation in the spirit of the professed ideals of common Soviet identity.

CONCLUSION

In the pursuit of communism through abrupt and rapid "transformations" toward socialism, the Soviet administration overlooked the socio-cultural and economic features of the region. The result came at a high human cost and altered ethnic composition in the KASSR, making the titular nation an ethnic minority in their own country. Arguably, after the October Revolution, former imperial regions received unprecedented equal opportunities for obtaining education and profession. But this opportunity was based on a highly politicized and fixed "scientific" knowledge of the Marxist-Leninist dogmas. Eventually, the Central Committee, by labeling opposing concepts as "anti-Soviet" or "bourgeoisie", achieved their goal of "imposing their own narrowly utilitarian approach to science teaching, not because it was pedagogically superior, but rather because they argued forcefully that it was the only approach that is ideologically suitable for an education system rooted in Soviet principles" (Weiner, 2006, p. 73).

As a result, the fundamental feature of the educational system in the 1920s was to design educational plans, methodologies, and curricula with the ideals of "productive work" in building a bright future, which brought education and knowledge to "pure vocationalism" (Weiner, 2006, p. 96) and training citizens loyal to the regime. The very notion of "education"

in the 1920s was abandoned from the pedagogical lexicon and replaced by the concept of “social upbringing”. The Soviet school was a communist experiment to train children, whose personalities were just being formed, in the spirit of Soviet patriotism and proletarian internationalism. This legacy continues to affect the debates around national identity in contemporary Kazakhstan.

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