

# State policy of the USSR in the field of education during the Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945

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**Abstract.** In modern Russia, the urgent task of social development is the reform of the educational system. The problems of education, the content of textbooks, the management of educational processes and other aspects of education policy are under the close attention of the Russian leadership. The problem of public education is patriotic upbringing, civic consciousness of the younger generation. Another serious problem facing the modern school is the problem of training qualified teaching staff. These issues require scientific analysis when developing education policy, and History lessons need to be taken into account. The chosen topic is relevant, since the accumulated experience of school education during the Great Patriotic War shows that the political, social, professional management of the education system is of not only scientific, but also practical interest. This is, firstly, a study of the adaptation of school education to the extreme conditions of wartime, the activation of patriotic upbringing. Unfortunately, local wars are being waged on the territory of the former Soviet Union, having a negative impact on the education system. Therefore, the historical experience of the school education functioning during the Great Patriotic War must be adopted. Compliance with the law on universal education was accompanied by great difficulties, especially in the initial period of the war. This was explained by the fact that students at the beginning of the war had no time to study; many evacuees were on their way to their destination; teenagers en masse went to work in production. The problems of universal education at the beginning of the war intersected with the child safety issues. The country faced the task of combating homelessness and neglect. Millions of people had their homes destroyed, thousands of children lost their relatives and families.

## 1 Introduction

The attack on the USSR by fascist Germany led to the cessation of work of almost all schools in the zone of occupation. Nevertheless, the Soviet government did not cancel the universal education. Serious difficulties arose in the logistical issue of providing schoolchildren with textbooks and visual aids.

The methodological basis of the research is the principle of historicism. In the work, the authors adhered to universal values, the principle of an objective approach. The concrete historical method, supplemented by comparative analysis, made it possible to trace the genesis of the educational policy in the country.

The state of scientific development of the problem has shown that, despite the interest of historians in the issue of Soviet education during the Great Patriotic War, there is no comprehensive study. In Soviet and post-Soviet historiography on this topic, there is excessive ideologization and attachment to the political situation. Despite this, the works contain factual and documentary material that makes it possible to imagine the school environment of wartime [1–3]. Party administration in school construction was reflected in a number of

fundamental works [4, 5]. In the work of S.A. Chernik, the problems of the Soviet school development during the Great Patriotic War were analyzed [6]. Modern publications include an article by Yu.G. Rossinsky “The education system of the RSFSR during the Great Patriotic War” [7]. The material on the problem we are interested in is found in the monograph by F.G. Panachin [8]. The content side of school historical education in the USSR was analyzed by L.P. Bushik [9]. The problems of historical education in the Soviet period were studied by scientists of the Perestroika and post Perestroika periods [10, 11]. Foreign historiographical science is represented by such well-known scientists as C. Browning [12], K. Crawford [13], T. Lomas [14].

## 2 Findings

After the attack on the USSR by fascist Germany, almost all schools stopped working, and a mass evacuation of children began. The number of secondary schools decreased by more than one third, the number of students in grades V–VII – 2 times, VIII–X grades – more than 2.5 times. “If in the 1942/41 academic year the number of students was 34.784 thousand, in 1941/42 – 17.765 thousand people, and in

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1942/43 it decreased to 14,036 thousand. The number of active schools decreased from 191.5 thousand in 1940/41 to 107.8 thousand schools in 1942/43" [15]. Only on the territory of the RSFSR, twenty thousand schools out of thirty that existed before the war were destroyed. In Leningrad, the fascists destroyed 390 schools, in the Voronezh region, 1382 schools were blown up, in the Tula region – 1/3 of buildings. In the Belarusian SSR 6,808 schools were destroyed. In the occupied territory, the fascists pursued a policy of de-Bolshevization of youth.

The resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) and the SNK of the USSR dated June 27, 1941 "On the procedure for the removal and placement of human contingents" ordered children under 15 to be evacuated first [16].

In 1941–1942, 600 schools of the Russian Federation were evacuated to the rear of the country. Evacuated educational institutions were sent to Central Asia, Kazakhstan, the Urals, Siberia, and the Volga region. Children from besieged Leningrad, the Ukrainian, and Belarusian republics were sent to Kazakhstan.

The whole country collected parcels with textbooks, notebooks, stationery, and educational equipment. The initiative of the "Teacher Newspaper" in January 1942 to collect textbooks, visual aids, and stationery for schools in the liberated regions evoked a response from thousands of schools in the country. Students of the Sverdlovsk district of Moscow sent three thousand textbooks, two thousand books for reading, and visual aids to Kabardino-Balkaria. "In 1944, 7526 thousand textbooks, 19 million notebooks, 6.5 thousand pencils and quill pens, visual aids for four million rubles arrived in the west of the RSFSR" [17].

During the most difficult period of military operations, school textbooks, equipment, study guides, and inventory were produced. In 1943, the Main Directorate of Educational and Technical Industry Enterprises issued 11,172.9 thousand rubles worth of teaching aids. Meanwhile, there was a shortage of school supplies. The People's Commissariat of the RSFSR established an order for the supply of schools and the purchase of old textbooks from the population [18].

The liberated areas from the fascist invaders had to be equipped with schools and educational institutions. The meager state budget was not the reason for the refusal to supply the country schools with the necessary products. The Pravda newspaper published an article stating that "Caring for children is the main task ... No references to the military situation" [19].

In the 1942/43 academic year, certain successes were taking place in the school policy: school buildings were being repaired, firewood was being harvested, and school canteens were being opened. Schools in the Moscow, Voronezh, and Tula regions often worked in front-line conditions, often behind enemy lines. The activity of schools has been recorded even in besieged cities: in Odessa, schools were engaged in the Odessa catacombs. Here, until the mass evacuation of Odessa residents, two thousand students attended the school. Classes were not interrupted in the besieged Leningrad. The Bureau of the Leningrad City Party Committee since October 25, 1941, decided not to interrupt the educational process, and instructed the military units to vacate the occupied school premises. In the territories and regions of the country,

commissions to combat neglect began to operate, children's reception centers and orphanages were opened. Orphans found shelter in the families of citizens. The Central Committee of the Komsomol created a Fund to help children. Funds were received there from the Red Army, workers, collective farmers, employees, cultural figures. During the war, evacuated children were sent to school boarding houses. As of September 1, 1942, 196 thousand children were studying there. Schools practiced an extended day.

In the Central Asian republics, sanatoriums were created for weakened children, who, being there until the evening, did their homework and ate heavily, played and rested.

In 1943–1945 appropriations for educational purposes increased. This was due to restoration work in areas liberated from occupation. In the Russian Federation in 1944–1945, appropriations were allocated for the construction of 418 new schools. Restoration, repair of school buildings, their equipment, and provision of inventory was carried out by the public, teachers, and students. In Belarus, instead of the planned 2302 schools, 3635 were restored [15].

By a decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR and the relevant orders of the People's Commissariat of the Union Republics, high school students were exempted from tuition fees, which were introduced on September 1, 1940, from the eighth to tenth grade and in universities. Since the beginning of the war, tuition fees have been canceled for children of enlisted staff of the Red Army, Navy, and partisans. Later, children of disabled officers, dead, missing, who died as a result of wounds, injuries, contusions received on the fronts of the Great Patriotic War were exempted from tuition fees in grades VIII–X.

During the war years, the work of the People's Commissariat of Education did not stop: orders were issued, inspections and meetings were held; analytical reports were written. At the end of the war, regional congresses of workers of public education, assets of teachers were held.

With the liberation of the Ukrainian SSR from the Nazi invaders on September 27, 1943, Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR adopted a resolution that obliged the People's Commissariat of Education of the Ukrainian SSR and Councils of all levels to begin implementing the necessary measures to restore the educational system of the republic [20].

Medical care for students was a major problem; systematic sanitary supervision of educational institutions, and sanitary and hygienic maintenance of schools. The People's Commissariat of Education and the People's Commissariat of Health of the USSR approved a special instruction on the sanitary regime "in children's institutions in wartime conditions". Health care was supposed to monitor the organization of children nutrition, to find the opportunity to include valuable food products in the school ration. From 1940 to 1945, medical personnel carried out 37 million vaccinations and 23 million revaccinations against diphtheria [16], thanks to which there were no epidemic outbreaks of infectious diseases during the war years. During the war period, health institutions for children were restored: pioneer camps and playgrounds were opened, as well as sanitary-forest schools.

After the liberation of the territories occupied by the Nazis, in accordance with the resolution of the USSR Council of People's Commissars and the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) of August 21, 1943 "On urgent measures to restore the economy in areas liberated from German occupation" [21], children of the fallen soldiers of the Red Army and partisans of the Patriotic War by German occupiers were sent to Suvorov military schools, special vocational schools, special orphanages; Infant homes; reception centers, at the state expense.

In the 1943/44 academic year there were many innovations, the purpose of which was to increase the level of education; strengthen discipline. Separate education was introduced according to gender and the transition to teaching children from the age of seven. The argument for the creation of schools for men and women was the military-physical and especially pre-prescription training of boys. Separate training was introduced by the decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of July 16, 1943, and the Council of People's Commissars of the RSFSR of July 23, 1943 [22].

Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR of September 8, 1943, "On the admission of children from the age of seven to schools" was applied in 1944/45 [15]. Teaching children from the age of seven eliminated the gap between kindergarten and school age. Thousands of places in kindergartens were vacated, women could work in production. Fourteen-year-old graduates of a seven-year school managed to become qualified specialists a year earlier.

In the first months of the war, schoolchildren were occupied at industrial enterprises and construction sites in Leningrad, Moscow, the cities of the Urals, Siberia, the Far East and many other industrial centers of the country.

In the first days of August 1941, 15 000 pioneers and schoolchildren of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic volunteered to work in the national economy. Schoolchildren collected spare parts and tools for agricultural machines, scrap metal, and helped collective farmers in harvesting. The earned money was contributed to the Homeland Defense fund. In one collective farm, "Mayak of Chechnya", students collected about two thousand puds of wheat ears. In the Ordzhonikidzevskaya village, 120 pioneers worked at the harvest in July–August. Many pioneers were distinguished by their work. In the Gudermes region, on the very first days of harvesting, a twelve-year-old schoolgirl M. Alieva collected 500 kilograms of wheat ears, and D. Timuraliev transported 795 centners of wheat to the elevator during one month [23].

Every evening, 50–60 pioneers patrolled the city, helping the police to keep order. In the first days of July, about 6000 pioneers of Grozny took part in the collection of scrap metal. Young Communists, pioneers, and schoolchildren only in the area of the Grozny railway junction in July and half of August 1941 collected 263 tons of ferrous metal scrap and 540 kilograms of non-ferrous metal. Schoolchildren handed over more than 200 kilograms of silkworm cocoons to the state. In the summer of 1942, students of the Kurchaloyevsky district earned over 4000 workdays [24]. Such examples are numerous.

Many schoolchildren did work at home. They made uniforms and equipment for the army. Students of the Dagestan and Tatar republics knitted mittens, socks, scarves,

balaclavas from wool. They received raw materials from local industrial enterprises.

In the areas liberated from the Nazi occupation, students participated in restoration work. Fourteen thousand schoolchildren were restoring destroyed objects in the Rostov region.

Students of Moscow schools in the summer of 1941 worked out two million workdays. One hundred thousand students of the Kuibyshev region participated in agricultural work, more than forty-five – in Penza; over one hundred thousand – in Sverdlovsk, up to 200 thousand – in Gorky [16].

In 1942, 3 970 866 students and 181,344 teachers were involved in the agricultural sector of the economy of the Russian Federation. In the country this number amounted to 4765 thousand people. The output of workdays amounted to 148 797 thousand. At the end of the war, the contribution of schoolchildren to agriculture increased significantly. It became more organized and efficient. During the entire period of the war, 20 million schoolchildren and more than 500 thousand teachers were occupied in agriculture. They have earned 75 million rubles [25].

More than 60 thousand schoolchildren of Leningrad participated in the construction of defensive structures in 1941. Working 12–14 hours a day, 276 schoolchildren and 35 teachers completed the task and built a two-kilometer line of defense. Teenagers also took part in the construction of the inner defensive lines of Moscow in October–November 1941. Every day, 250 thousand people worked there, three-quarters of which were women and teenagers. School students took part in air and chemical defense activities. Schoolchildren participated in fundraising for the Homeland Defense Fund. They carried out propaganda activities among the population, collected funds for the Defense Fund.

From the first day of the war, the Komsomol organizations of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic were involved in military mobilization work. As of March 13, 1943, the Chechen-Ingush Komsomol Organization sent about 10 000 of its best representatives to the front, including 2000 volunteer girls. Among the Komsomol members there were 420 tank destroyers, 260 machine gunners, 490 snipers, 280 mortar men, 350 machine gunners. They acquired these specialties in the Society for the Promotion of Aviation and Chemical Defense classes. The Grozny flying club has trained more than 40 pilots, including Ivan Zabolotny, Anatoly Sitnikov, Gurgun Seimov and others [26].

The pioneers of the country made a feasible contribution to the victory over fascism. The activities of the pioneer organization were reorganized, taking into account the wartime. The pioneers participated in socially useful work, made specific commitments, engaged in physical education and sports; organized subject activity clubs, contests, meetings with the leaders of labor, cultural workers.

In the occupied territories, along with underground Komsomol organizations, there were pioneer underground groups and detachments. Young defenders of the Motherland showed heroism. The whole country knew about the feat of the pioneer hero Volodya Dubinin from Kerch, Kolya Zverev and Volodya Pavlov from the Velikoluksky region, Vitya Korobkov from Feodosia, Sasha Kovalev and many others. For the heroism shown in the

defense of the Motherland, pioneers – Lenya Golikov, Valya Kotik, Zina Portnova, Marat Kazei and three pioneer leaders – Lelya Kolesov, Klava Nazarova and Lisa Chaikina – were posthumously awarded the title of Hero of the Soviet Union. Many pioneers received high government awards.

During the years of the Great Patriotic War, schoolchildren wrote about one hundred thousand letters, sending them along with gift parcels, putting them in holiday packages to soldiers [20]. Palaces and houses of pioneers, children's clubs, libraries, sports clubs, stations of young technicians and naturalists worked in the rear. The work of these organizations was reorganized in accordance with wartime. Even in Leningrad in the 1942/43 academic year, libraries for children functioned, where thematic exhibitions and creativity competitions for children were held.

### 3 Conclusion

Educational institutions introduced new forms of extracurricular educational work. Military-patriotic conferences and meetings “The Patriotic War of 1812”, “Leningrad under siege and in battle”, “The Battle for Stalingrad” were held. Exhibitions were held that reflected the heroics of the Soviet people, people collected materials for writing biographies of fellow countrymen-heroes of the war.

During the Great Patriotic War, schools of working and rural youth began to function, intended for the education of young people working in production. Schools of working youth were relevant in wartime conditions, with a shortage of workers.

Humanism towards students, the creation of a favorable environment – were proclaimed the most important tasks of the government during the Great Patriotic War. The problems of universal education at the beginning of the war intersected with the problems of child safety. The country faced the task of combating homelessness and neglect. Millions of people had their homes destroyed, thousands of children lost their relatives and families.

The Soviet government under difficult conditions carried out purposeful work in the field of public education. Thus, during the Great Patriotic War, the party, and the government were seriously concerned about public education. Extreme conditions did not prevent the state from doing everything possible to educate children and adolescents; at the same time, issues of the evacuation of schools and students from the front-line or besieged areas were resolved, and recreation of children was organized; nutrition and healthcare. Working teenagers had the opportunity to be trained in schools for working and rural youth.

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