PAPERS IN ENGLISH

HISTORICAL SCIENCES AND ARCHEOLOGY

GENERAL HISTORY

DOI - 10.32743/UniSoc.2024.113.10.18486

HISTORY TEACHING IN THE UNION OF SOVIET REPUBLICS

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ПРЕПОДАВАНИЕ ИСТОРИИ В СОВЕТСКИХ РЕСПУБЛИКАХ

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the characteristics of history teaching in the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) period. Document analysis method was used in the research. As a result of the research, it was determined that history teaching during the USSR period was used as an important tool to establish the state ideology among the peoples within the borders of the country. The research also showed that different approaches were exhibited in the understanding of history teaching in this period depending on the periods. In the emergence of this understanding, the way the party leaders evaluated the events, social, political and economic developments inside and outside the country also affected this understanding.

АННОТАЦИЯ

Целью данного исследования является определение особенностей преподавания истории в период СССР (Союза Советских Социалистических Республик). В исследовании использовался метод анализа документов. В результате исследования установлено, что преподавание истории в период СССР использовалось как важный инструмент утверждения государственной идеологии среди народов в пределах страны. Исследование также показало, что в зависимости от периода в понимании преподавания истории в этот период проявлялись разные подходы. На возникновение этого понимания повлияло и то, как партийные лидеры оценивали события, социальные, политические и экономические события внутри и за пределами страны.

Keywords: USSR, history teaching, ideology, Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Библиографическое описание: Adsız R., Gul Y.E. HISTORY TEACHING IN THE UNION OF SOVIET REPUBLICS // Universum: общественные науки : электрон. научн. журн. 2024. 10(113). URL: *https://7universum.com/ru/social/archive/item/18486*

Ключевые слова: СССР, преподавание истории, марксистско-ленинская идеология.

Introduction

History teaching has been done by societies for different purposes from past to present. In general, it is done to bring societies living within the borders of the same country together, to unite them, to give them common perspectives, that is, to give them a national identity [1]. However, while doing this, historical events can be distorted in line with the needs, values and ideologies of states [2]. The most important reasons for this are; to legitimize the reasons for the existence of the state, to adopt the state ideology, to gain supporters who have adopted the ideology [3]. Therefore, in many countries of the world, students are generally expected to adopt the information given to them about history as it is, rather than questioning it [4]. This is because most of the countries of the world teach the history of their countries from their own perspectives in schools. From this point of view, history teaching in schools can be considered as one of the ways of rationalizing the reasons for the existence of all states. During the USSR period, an understanding of history teaching around common values was followed by societies consisting of different ethnic elements throughout the country. History is also taught in order to contribute to children's understanding of the reasons for the occurrence of events in the past and present [5].

This study aims to determine the characteristics of history teaching in the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) period.

Document analysis method was used in the research

Education in the USSR

The USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) is a multinational state established in 1922 as a result of the success of the October revolution, which was initiated by the oppressed peoples of Tsarist Russia under the leadership of Lenin in 1917 to gain freedom and better financial conditions [6]. According to source [7], in this new understanding of the state based on the views of Karl Marx and Lenin, it was aimed to fuse all ethnic elements living within the borders of the USSR with Russian culture and to build a communist society without classes, property, religious and national values [7]. The point stating the supposed aim "to fuse..." is questioned further in our article.

Realizing that education systems are one of the most effective tools used by states to transform, develop and control societies, the new regime, under the leadership of Lenin, began to carry out intensive educational activities to establish the Communist order [8]. Education was put to work for the construction of a communist society through schools, and it was aimed to ensure that children adopt the state ideology through ideological indoctrination from an early age [9]. For these purposes, the education programs and textbooks prepared in Moscow began to be taught in all schools across the country with the same subjects and methodology [10]. Since it was believed that the adoption of the state ideology by the people could only be achieved by raising the level of education of the people, many compulsory and free education practices were initiated throughout the country in order to raise the level of education of the people [11].

The initiation of a literacy campaign, the opening of new educational institutions and cultural centers are some of the activities in this direction. As a result of these efforts, the level of education of the people was significantly increased [12]. By raising the level of education of the people, the adoption of the state ideology by the people was also accelerated.

Vision of History Teaching in the USSR Period

In the understanding of history created in the USSR, the Marxist understanding is formally dominant due to its approach to the events of the past in the form of class struggles. However, in general, there is an understanding of history that refers to the views of the Communist Party leaders in line with the needs of the country according to the conditions of the period [13].

During the USSR period, history teaching in the whole country was given under the name of General History and History of the USSR, and political and ideological indoctrination was made in the program and course contents [14]. In the content of the books, the role of the Russian nation as a savior for other ethnic elements against external threats was emphasized, and through this means, it was aimed to unite the people around common interests. History textbooks and curricula prepared by the People's State Committee of the USSR were prepared with the approval of the central authority to be used in educational institutions affiliated to the republics in different parts of the country [7].

According to source [15], in the transmission of historical events, distortions were made from time to time, generally in favor of Russian interests [15]. However this depends on the point of view and reasoning of a historian, nowadays one could say that history in the country of that source is viewed from time to time in disfavor of Russian interests.

During the USSR period, many educational policies were developed and implemented to transform society. The discipline of history was also used in achieving the success of these educational policies, and textbooks and educational programs were created in line with the goals to be achieved [16].

During the USSR period, history teaching was tried to be used as an effective instrument in adopting the ideology of the state to the people and in creating the desired human profile. According to source [15], in history education, where ideology was used intensively, history teaching was used to create the new Soviet people by tearing nations away from their essence through textbooks and educational programs over a long period of time [15]. However the development of various national languages (including unprecedent for them numbers of publications in national languages), cultural institutions etc and national industries in the republics

of the USSR indicates the opposite. The central government spent lots of money on all these developments.

According to source [17], with history teaching, it was aimed to realize changes and transformations in line with the policies determined by the party, to bring other ethnic elements closer to Russian culture and to create a society with common values [17]. We should point out that learning the Russian language as an intermediary language was impossible without touching the Russian culture. Today learning the English language as an intermediary language is spread. But the modern culture which accompanies English brings in numerous things which are perversions if one looks at them through the traditional cultures of different peoples. The Soviet culture if taken in general was much more in harmony with traditional cultures of different peoples.

For these purposes, history discipline was used to benefit from the creation of the new Soviet people by instilling Marxist-Leninist ideology in children from an early age [7].

Education of History Teachers in the USSR Period

During the USSR period, teacher training was generally emphasized and teacher selection was meticulous. Care was taken to select the people who would serve as teachers among those who had adopted the official ideology [8]. Particular attention was paid to the fact that the selected teachers were people from the local population who had distanced themselves from their religious values and made the Marxist-Atheist Soviet thought their philosophy of life [18].

The students of the History Department are not only trained to teach, they are trained in a multifaceted way. Since these students were intended to be employed in schools, in the party service and in different departments of the public sector, it was important to train them to be competent in Marxist-Leninist theory, to have deep theoretical knowledge and practical skills in their specialties, and to be experts in organizing political and educational work. [17]. Graduates who started to work as teachers were expected to train cadres to support the regime and to carry out education and training activities in line with the policies and ideology determined by the party [15].

Conclusion

History teaching during the USSR period was used to ensure the acceptance and internalization of Marxist-Leninist thought by the society and to create its supporters. At the core of the idea; an understanding based on Soviet values and internationalism was adopted, in which religious teachings were trivialized. The main goal was to create a society with a common thought and perspective with the newly established state. The science of history was also utilized in the realization of these goals. When the history of the country is analyzed, it is observed that the understanding of history teaching in the USSR period took place in different ways in different periods. The perspective of the rulers of the communist party and the conditions of the period were effective in this. The history of all peoples of the USSR was taught in the context of the whole state/country. During and after World War II, there were some positive arrangements and softening in regards of ideology. Although there have been changes from time to time since the 1960s, this softening continued until the 1980s. Between 1985 and 1990 the obstacles preventing nations from teaching their own history were largely eased.

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