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## SCHOOL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH OSSETIA IN THE 1930S

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### *Abstract*

During the years of Soviet power, school education in South Ossetia has accumulated rich experience in the education and training of the younger generation. The 30s of the 20th century in South Ossetia became the time of creating a new public education system. The activity of the Soviet government was aimed at expanding the network of school institutions, and their material base, translating school instruction into their native language, universal compulsory primary, and seven-year education was carried out. The massive movement in South Ossetia to assist schools and public education authorities has led to a rapid increase in the number of schools and student populations. This process led to the full implementation of universal compulsory primary education and the deployment of universal education based on the seven-year plan. The long-term plan for the development of primary education in the specified chronological period was significantly exceeded. The implementation of universal education in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast required significant capital investments in the development of school education. Competitions for the construction of school buildings are widely deployed in the region. The achievements were possible thanks to the mass political and explanatory work among the population, the skillful organizational work of the local party, Komsomol, and trade union organizations from 1930 to 1935. Changes to the school system contributed to raising the level of general education of students, the implementation of universal compulsory primary and seven-year education.

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**Keywords:** USSR, school education, South Ossetia, public education.



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## **1. Introduction**

In the 30s XX century, much attention in the USSR was paid to the public education restructuring and the illiteracy elimination. The eradication of illiteracy was a prerequisite for the political education of the working people and their conscious participation in the life of the country and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region in particular. Under the leadership of the regional committee of the party, the People's Commissariat of Education of South Ossetia mobilized Komsomol, trade union, cooperative, and other organizations, as well as the whole community, to develop school education in the specified chronological period.

## **2. Problem Statement**

Published sources, as well as materials from periodicals, allow considering the features of the development of school education in the 30s XX century in Soviet South Ossetia. The history of the development of national education is relevant, and today is causing interest among modern researchers (Baghdasaryan, 2011, 2013).

## **3. Research Questions**

The subject of the study is the activity of the Soviet government on the illiteracy eradication and the universal education introduction in the territory of South Ossetia in the 30s XX century.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to analyze the activities of the Soviet government in the development of school education in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region in the 30s XX century.

## **5. Research Methods**

The study was based on historicism and scientific objectivity, as well as a systematic approach. The article used general scientific and unique historical methods. The study is based on a historical-local lore methodology using a systematic approach. It is possible to identify the formation of more general processes and phenomena that characterize changes in the development of school education in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region. The use of sociological data and local history material in the study inevitably forms an interdisciplinary connection.

## **6. Findings**

By the decision of the regional party committee and the Central Executive Committee of South Ossetia at the turn of the 20–30s of the 20th century, the People's Commissariat of Education created schools to eradicate illiteracy at the labor schools of the region. The purpose of this activity is to strengthen the educational programs work, which was approved by the teachers' meeting.

The turning point in this process was the decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks of May 17, 1929, "On the work to eradicate illiteracy" and the directive of the 16th Party Congress on this issue: "Conducting universal compulsory initial training and eradicating illiteracy should become the party's combat mission for the near future" (CPPS Central Committee, 1953). In terms of increasing the liquidation points and involving the illiterate and illiterate population of the region, special attention was paid to involving women in the worldwide network for eradicating illiteracy. For this, 30 special women's schools were organized. Traditional living conditions hindered literacy between men and women. That is why a particular network of women's schools was organized. Women worked as teachers in schools since they had not yet freed themselves from the influence of old traditions.

The created commissions for the illiteracy elimination led by the People's Commissariat of South Ossetia, did a great job, rationally. On-time, material and money were used. At the turn of 1929–1930. The number of liquidation centers in South Ossetia increased; 6010 men and 2512 women studied literacy in them (Tskhovrebova, 1974).

Despite all the work done, South Ossetia lagged behind other oblasts and republics of Transcaucasia in eradicating illiteracy and cultural construction. Proceeding from this, in June 1932, the Zakkraj party discussed the issue of cultural construction in South Ossetia. It decided to review and improve the quality of all work (Bolsheviks Party, 1932). The South Ossetian party organization has stepped up the work of local party bodies and the People's Commissariat for the Elimination of Adult Illiteracy. In the 1935–1936 academic year, 11915 people remained illiterate in South Ossetia, of which 9349 people were enrolled in liquidation centers in the same year. However, illiteracy in South Ossetia was eliminated only by 1939.

The discussion about the school system in the USSR was from 1928 to 1930. Some opposed the professional bias in a comprehensive school, others defended it, but with an extension of the term of study in it. The teaching staff of South Ossetia, for the most part, has advocated from the very beginning for the professional bias of the secondary school. As throughout the country, in South Ossetia, the primary type of comprehensive school has become a seven-year plan in the form of a factory seven-year plan for the city and peasant youth schools for the countryside. After graduating from these educational institutions, students could enter technical schools with a three-year term of study. As a result of the work done, the number of technical schools increased from one to five by 1932. This work helped to increase the staff of secondary qualifications. However, work experience has shown that reforming second-level schools has worsened the teaching of general subjects and reduced the level of general secondary education.

By the end of 1932, the question arose of the development of a comprehensive polytechnic school with a ten-year course of study. To resolve the issue, the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks issued a Decree on August 25, 1932, which envisaged the reorganization of the seven-year polytechnical school into the ten-year school year from 1932–1933. In 1934, by decree of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, the types of secondary school were established throughout the USSR: primary school – 4 classes, incomplete secondary school – 7 classes, middle school – 10 classes. The zero group was now called the prep class. The pre-emptive right to higher

education was held by graduates who graduated from high school. The school system adopted in the 1934–1935 academic year remained unchanged in South Ossetia until the end of the 1930s.

In July 1930, a resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) "On universal compulsory primary education" was adopted. "For successful socialist construction, it is necessary for the shortest possible time to eradicate the cultural and technical backwardness of the broad masses of working people. This task cannot be solved without the introduction of universal primary compulsory education," the resolution stated (Soviet government, 1957). The People's Commissariat of South Ossetia was guided by the decision of the Central Executive Committee and the Council of People's Commissars of the Georgian SSR. On this basis, the People's Commissariat of South Ossetia made as early as 1927 a preliminary plan for the introduction of universal compulsory education. According to this plan, the academic school year 1934–1935 was taken as the deadline for the implementation of universal compulsory education in the amount of four classes. The plan provided for two main phases of universal education: from 1928–1931, it was proposed to expand the network of general four-year schools so that every child aged 8 to 11 finds a place in them; for 1932–1934, it was planned to make compulsory education in I–IV groups. According to this plan, the number of elementary schools was to increase by 56. Besides, it was planned to create ten mobile schools for the mountainous regions of the region.

The training of new teachers was also an urgent issue, not only because the number of educational institutions was increasing, but also because 95 % of them did not correspond to the modern school. However, the preliminary comprehensive education plan in South Ossetia was not without drawbacks: children were not accurately recorded, the number of teachers needed to be prepared was not indicated, and the amount of money required for the construction of new school buildings could not be indicated. Despite these shortcomings, the plan introduced its organizational beginnings in preparation for universal compulsory education. In South Ossetia, preparation for the introduction of universal education had to begin under challenging conditions. Economic and natural-geographical conditions played a role here: the dispersion of small villages, impassability, lack of proper communication, harsh climate, and other conditions. Inequality between a woman and a man also interfered; it was necessary to eradicate domestic prejudices that oppressed the woman and prevented her from becoming equal with the man. The lack of the required number of teachers was also an obstacle; many teachers could not withstand the harsh working conditions in South Ossetia since they did not receive several months' salary here.

In 1930, the 16th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) was held, which recognized the pace of cultural construction as insufficient, and called on trade union, economic, and party organizations to take an active part in resolving the tasks of the cultural revolution. Following the directives of the Congress of the Central Committee of the Party, in a resolution of 1930, it was recognized necessary to introduce universal compulsory primary education for children aged 8–10 years everywhere from the academic year 1930–1931. In the 1931–1932 academic year, compulsory primary education for children of 11 years was introduced (Soviet government, 1947). From the 1930–1931 academic year, introduce compulsory education for students aged 11–15 who have not completed elementary school courses based on accelerated forms of education – two-year and one-year courses and

schools. In the same academic year, begin to introduce universal compulsory education in the form of a seven-year school for those who have completed elementary school.

In August 1930, the Central Executive Committee and Council of People's Commissars of the USSR adopted the law "On universal compulsory primary education," according to which universal compulsory primary education was introduced on the territory of the USSR from the 1930–1931 academic year. The party's regional committee decided to introduce universal compulsory primary education for children in the region of 8–10 years old, with subsequent extension to 11 years old children. The resolution became a detailed work plan; already, in the 1930–1931 academic year, universal education was introduced in the Tskhinvali and Java regions.

The party organization and public education authorities of the region carried out significant educational and explanatory work among the population about the importance of education. The leadership of the South Ossetian Autonomous Region launched a vast movement among the working people, organizing cultural campaigns, months, contests, and competitions. Special commissions on universal compulsory education were created at the city and district departments of public education. In Tskhinvali and other district centers, public participation brigades were created to popularize the law on universal primary education and to survey areas to identify children aged 8–12 and the number of schools required for successful work. The work of the brigades was actively covered on the pages of the newspapers *Kommunist* and *Leninon*. Sokurov, the commander of the Dzhava region, wrote about the creation of a headquarters for a cultural campaign in Java and about the work of 30 cultural men who opened 13 liquidation centers with 215 students.

Komsomol and trade union organizations, which took patronage over the implementation of universal primary education, took practical part in attaching schools to enterprises, organized Subotnick to provide schools with equipment, kept records of school-age children, carried out extensive education. A cultural campaign for universal education has put forward thousands of teachers, cultural soldiers, and other workers to the front of the cultural revolution.

In order to enroll children in the school, various activities were carried out: students were provided with clothing, textbooks, preferential, and free breakfasts, orphans were given lump sum benefits. In the villages of Leningori and Java, for students from villages distant from schools, shelter houses, and dormitories were created, the rooms were small, 17 people lived in them.

Thanks to all the measures taken, the school enrollment rate for children aged 8–10 years increased rapidly. A significant achievement of universal education can be considered the involvement of girls in school, the percentage of coverage in the 1931–1932 school year was about 43 % of the total number of students in primary schools – about 30 % of children out of school. Universal compulsory education in the South Ossetian Autonomous Region was carried out mainly in the volume of two years.

Stressing the high turnover of teachers in schools, the Presidium proposed that Oblono, together with Komsomol organizations, conduct a campaign for self-consolidation of teachers while improving their financial situation. Also, Oblon was supposed to present a school building plan for 1932 in ten days, accelerate the release of school textbooks, and present the programs of first-level schools for the upcoming school year.

In June 1932, the Transcaucasian Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks, after discussing the report of the South Ossetian regional party committee on cultural, domestic and economic work, noting the successes and shortcomings in the work of the party organization, decided to introduce universal compulsory education on the basis of the four-year plan and to completely eradicate illiteracy, oblige the People's Commissariat of Georgia to provide textbooks in Ossetian language to primary and secondary schools, and the Council of People's Commissars to provide the designated activities with funds. The party organization of South Ossetia has intensified the work of local party bodies and the People's Commissariat of Education.

The decisions of the regional committee emphasized that Soviet and party organizations had little control over the work of the school. Many party district committees did not discuss the school issue for a year. They did not fight enough for the cultural, social, and material services of teachers, for raising their ideological and political level and for organizing organizations. In order to intensify the work of the school and involve the general population in it, the regional party committee decided to hold a month to prepare for the new school year. The commission for the month made a plan. According to this plan, the school buildings were to be repaired and equipped at a specified time.

The implementation of the monthly plan in the city and the regions was checked. During the inspections, it was possible to find out that schools are provided with textbooks only by 50 %, that 70 out of 105 school buildings need repair. Not all schools were staffed with teachers, out of 65 schools in the Znaursky district, only 34 schools were equipped with teachers. Newspapers reported on the shock work in preparation for the school year not only for teachers but also for Komsomol organizations.

During the 1933–1934 school year, competitions for the best preparation for the new school year became widespread. In the South Ossetian Autonomous Region, competitions were held by the regional department of public education. In the next academic year, the regional department of public education of South Ossetia announced a competition for the best district on cultural construction. The districts and the city competed in raising funds through labor participation of the population for new school construction and renovation of old premises, for 100 % coverage of the school with children, provision of students with necessary supplies, provision of schools with the necessary equipment.

As a result, many schools in the districts and cities were repaired, equipped with everything necessary. In several villages and the city of Stalinir, children aged 8–14 were 100 % enrolled in the school. Among the competitors, the first place was taken by the city, in which new school year preparations were organized. Of the city schools, the Ossetian decade and the Jewish seven-year school were especially distinguished. The first participation of the Komsomol organizations of the region took an active part in the competition. To implement the directives, the regional committee of the Komsomol of South Ossetia mobilized all the primary Komsomol committees to work on preparations for the new school year.

The regional party committee and the Central Executive Committee of South Ossetia ordered the executive committees of all district and village councils to discuss at the next plenary session the question "On preparations for the new school year." The committees were given the task of drawing up concrete plans so that not a single school in the region would meet the new school year unprepared. Schools should have been equipped with textbooks, teaching, and writing materials, as well as materials for the

polytechnic, before August 15. Also, each school had to be provided with fuel for the entire heating season. In order to prepare a new school in 1935, all the teachers in the region were distributed in advance. If, in previous years, teachers before the start of the school year usually did not know which school they would work in, now every teacher knew his place by June 15.

The mass movement unfolding in South Ossetia to assist schools and public education authorities in implementing the party's historic decision led to a rapid increase in the number of schools and the student population in them. As a result, this activity led to the full implementation of universal compulsory primary education and the deployment of universal education based on the seven-year plan. The long-term plan for the development of primary education was significantly exceeded. In the three years since the adoption of the decree on the introduction of universal compulsory primary education, the number of children in comprehensive schools has increased from 10,200 to 16,303. 98 % of the child population was enrolled in primary school. Data on the growth of the primary school network and the enrollment of schoolchildren are a clear indicator of the exceptional pace in the implementation of universal compulsory primary education.

The XVII Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) set the next task to the implementation of "universal compulsory polytechnical education in the seven-years, primarily in the countryside, since in the city this task was mainly resolved during the first five-year period" (CPPS Central Committee, 1953).

Since 1935, in South Ossetia, universal education based on a four-year plan has been completed. Comprehensive training based on the seven-year plan. According to the plan of the Second Five-Year Plan, in 1936, it was planned to bring the number of existing schools with seven-year education to 35. General education based on seven-year education was carried out during the second five-year plan. In the 1936–1937 academic year, there were only 39 incomplete secondary schools in the region. Of the 18 secondary schools, only Tskhinvali had the tenth grade. The general training based on the seven-year plan was carried out during the second five-year plan. In the 1936–1937 academic year, there were only 39 incomplete secondary schools in the region. Of the 18 secondary schools, only Tskhinvali had the tenth grade.

## **7. Conclusion**

Thus, the implementation of universal education in the South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast required significant capital investments in new school construction. Competitions for the construction of school buildings are widely deployed in the region. From 1930 to 1935, mass political and explanatory work was carried out among the population.

Organizational work of the party, Komsomol, and trade union organizations can be assessed as competent. At the expense of the public, 103 school buildings were built. This fact indicates the desire to implement the law on universal compulsory education as soon as possible, as well as the active public participation in the cultural revolution.

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