

# **THE PROBLEM OF ILLITERACY AMONG THE POPULATION OF FERGANA REGION IN THE 1920S–1930 S AND THE MEASURES AIMED AT ITS ELIMINATION**

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## **Abstract**

The article analyses archival documents describing the state of the education system in Ferghana province in 1920–1930, issues of illiteracy, creation of new Soviet schools, etc. The article also describes the level of illiteracy in Ferghana province, measures to eliminate it in the archival documents of practical actions to increase the number of literate youth.

**Key words:** Illiteracy, "Cultural Revolution", Turkglavpolitprosveta, Trade union, Ispolkom, fund, district, national, social

## **INTRODUCTION**

As we examine the period of the 1920s and 1930s of the 20th century, we become convinced that, along with all processes of social life, the cultural and spiritual sphere also proceeded with its own complexities and difficulties. The Soviet government and its ruling party, setting the main goal of establishing socialism throughout the country, well understood the special role of the cultural sphere, without which much could not be achieved. Therefore, from the very first years of Soviet power, they began to develop the process of cultural construction based on their own provisions and ideas.

By the 1920s and 1930s, with the intensification of industrialization and agricultural collectivization policies in the Soviet state, the processes of the "cultural revolution" and the mass events that constituted an integral part of this process began to be organized in a new direction. It was from this period that the goals and essence of the policy of eradicating illiteracy in the Soviet country also changed. That is, every literate person was expected to support the measures of the Soviet government and serve the Soviet regime with loyalty. On the other hand, the industrial enterprises being established throughout the country urgently needed knowledgeable and skilled workers.

## **THE RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC**

The fight against illiteracy was driven not only by economic needs but also by political ones - the necessity to form a Soviet society consisting of citizens loyal to the new regime. In the context of the country's industrialization, the shortage of qualified personnel for its

implementation was on the agenda. From this time onward, the eradication of illiteracy began to be determined simultaneously by the political and economic needs of the state. Therefore, the Department of Political and Educational Affairs of the Turkestan Republic considered the eradication of illiteracy one of its important tasks. The fact that 97% of the country's population was illiterate could be a clear reason for this. It should be especially emphasized that with such cultural backwardness in the education system, it was impossible to transform the economy of the republic. Therefore, the Department of Political and Educational Affairs of the Turkestan Republic focused all its attention on resolving this issue.

The Republic's Department of Political and Educational Affairs, recognizing the importance of this task, began to act decisively. Literacy schools had been removed from state support, and the government had not adequately addressed appeals on this issue. It is worth noting that the allocation of funds for the elimination of illiteracy in the Uzbek SSR increased year by year: in the 1925–1926 academic year, 228,145 rubles were allocated, and in the 1927–1928 academic year, 438,156 rubles. However, the increase in funds allocated for this purpose was insufficient and did not allow for an adequate increase in the number of literacy schools to meet the demand [1]. Furthermore, the shortage of educated and skilled workforce in the country demonstrated that this task could not be implemented on a large scale in the near future. Nevertheless, the report presented by the department emphasized that the existing shortcomings should not lead to inaction. Instead, efforts should be combined to create necessary conditions to prevent this work from stalling. It was stressed that finding local funds to address the illiteracy problem and implement this task, and using these funds to establish a network of schools in the districts, should be the primary focus. It should be noted that “Although urban development has been elevated to the level of state policy, rural areas have been neglected. Explaining the extremely complex and contradictory social life of this period requires historians to conduct a comparative analysis of a wide range of sources to objectively illuminate the reality”. [2: 654].

In the cited protocol, the department proposed the following: 1) involving representatives of professional Soviet schools as the primary resource in organizing literacy schools; 2) the local commission assumes responsibility for overseeing these schools; 3) monitoring to prevent misappropriation of allocated funds. Following the measures taken in accordance with these proposals, the issue of literacy among young people became much more widespread. By October 14, 1922, the Emergency Committee of the Turkestan Political and Educational Administration issued a resolution to divide the youth population into shock groups to further intensify the activities of literacy schools. According to it: 1. Youth of trade unions. 2. The youth of the Qoshchi movement. 3. Young people called up to the ranks of the Red Army. 4. Youth members of the militia. 5. Local women. A strong network of schools was to be established based on these formed groups. Additionally, it was noted that schools should be organized for young people in correctional institutions, depending on the conditions.

The need to conserve funds in opening and operating schools necessitated the consolidation of schools in the regions. Therefore, the Turkestan Political and Educational Administration instructed to organize groups of no fewer than 30 people and no more than 40 people. It was determined that local committees should be given the right to organize children's schools

depending on the conditions, and those with experience in working with adults should be engaged as teachers.

At the same time, the Turkestan Political and Educational Administration gave the following instructions to the Local Committee: 1. The Commission shall organize special questionnaires and books for teacher monitoring in all schools. 2. Classes in schools should be conducted according to the plan drawn up by the Turkestan Political and Educational Administration. 3. Set the age for enrollment in literacy schools at 30 years, and make attendance voluntary for those who are 30 years old. 4. Attract students to schools through mass and individual awareness campaigns. 5. Assign to the local emergency commission the transfer of students who have completed literacy schools to advanced groups. 6. Define the main part of education in literacy schools as conducting lessons on cultural and educational work in conjunction with political, economic, and production activities. 7. Based on the decision of the Labor Commissariat of the Extraordinary Commission of May 14, 1921, establish a 2-hour work exemption for students studying in literacy schools, while preserving their wages. 8. Assign to the Extraordinary Commission the task of securing funds as soon as possible. For this, a) coordinate with the mahalla trade unions; b) create a fund in agreement with the local executive committee; c) establish guardianship over literacy schools. 9. According to the decision established by the Council of People's Commissars of Turkestan, set the minimum monthly wage for teachers working in literacy schools at 9,600 rubles. 10. Establish that teaching in schools is carried out in coordination with local party committees. 11. Monitor attendance at schools and report to the commission at the end of the month according to the plan. 12. Control the provision of school supplies to students and ensure their equal distribution. 13. Assign to the local commission the obligation to report on its work and the state of affairs on a monthly basis. 14. The local commission shall carry out work on the control and management of schools [3].

## **DISCUSSION AND RESULTS**

When analyzing the holdings of the Fergana Regional State Archive, we can encounter numerous materials related to the eradication of illiteracy. For example, the Fergana Regional Department of Public Education reports that in 1923, two public schools aimed at eliminating illiteracy were opened in the Turkestan Republic. However, representatives of the local trade union leadership did not show sufficient interest in the activities of these schools [4]. The primary reason for this was that the economic crisis in the country did not necessitate focusing attention on the education sector. Furthermore, the Soviet government considered educating the local population to be literate as contradictory to the political processes being carried out in the country.

If we examine the figures on the eradication of illiteracy in the cities and villages of the Fergana Okrug during the summer of 1928, it was planned to make 23,400 people literate (16,370 men and 7,030 women) across the Okrug. These figures were distributed across the cities and districts of the Okrug as follows: In the cities of Kokand, Fergana, Margilan, and Chust, 8,100 people (5,670 men and 2,430 women) were to be educated. In the districts of Kokand, Fergana, Margilan, Pop, Buvayda, Baghdad, Kuva, Oltiariq, Rishton, Kudash, and Beshariq, it was

intended to teach 15,300 people (10,700 men and 4,600 women) in schools for eradicating illiteracy [5].

In the following years, according to the plan to eradicate illiteracy, complete elimination of illiteracy was targeted in all regions of the country. Specifically, during the period of 1930–1931, it was planned to fully eradicate illiteracy among the entire population aged 15 to 40 in the cities of Kokand, Fergana, Margilan, and Chust in the Fergana district, as well as in the Kuva district and at the machine-craft station of the Baghdad district within that academic year [6].

In the Fergana district during the 1930–1931 academic year, the planned number of illiterate people to be enrolled in literacy eradication schools was 104,660. To teach them, it was necessary to establish 3,475 literacy eradication schools, with each school accommodating 30 people. In the same academic year, the number of individuals with low literacy skills planned to be enrolled in schools for the semi-literate was 16,000. To address this, 454 schools for the semi-literate needed to be organized, with each school accommodating 35 people [7].

In the 1930–1931 academic year, 3,996 teachers were required for literacy elimination schools across the Fergana district. Of these, 3,475 (including 1,635 female teachers) were needed for literacy elimination courses, 454 for teaching those with low literacy, and 67 for literacy elimination support centers. [8].

## **CONCLUSION**

The relatively low percentage of literacy in the cities of Fergana region can be explained by the fact that the indicators are given in percentages, while the region has a comparatively high number of cities with a significantly larger population than other regions. Consequently, although the number of literate adults in Fergana region's cities is considerably higher than in other regions (excluding Tashkent city), it shows a lower percentage when compared to the total urban population. On the other hand, even before the 1926 census, Soviet power had not been fully established in some areas of the Fergana region. The armed resistance movement against the Soviets continued in this area, which meant that the Soviet government's policy of eradicating illiteracy among adults had not spread widely across all parts of the valley. The higher literacy rate in rural areas compared to other regions was associated with the pre-existing high literacy among the rural population of the Fergana Valley. This is because it is well-known that in the Fergana Valley, both during the period of the khanates and the Russian Empire's colonial rule, the system of national schools (including otinoyi schools for girls) and madrasas had developed quite extensively.

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