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The Pedagogical Process in Educational Institutions within the USSR's State Labor Reserves System during Ukraine's Economic Recovery in the Period 1943–1950

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the characteristics of the pedagogical process in educational institutions within the USSR's State Labor Reserves (SLR) system during Ukraine's economic recovery following its liberation from German occupation. The study is based on materials from the Central State Archive of the Higher Regulatory and Administrative Authorities of Ukraine, the Central State Archive of the Public Associations of Ukraine, and several Ukrainian regional archives. An insight is provided into the key characteristics of the educational process in institutions within the Labor Reserves system. The process of training a young workforce in the SLR schools comprised the following key components: industrial training, instruction in special technical and general disciplines, citizenship training, and physical or military education. The primary focus was on enabling a person to gain some practical experience via industrial training, which took up the lion's share of the time. It may be argued that putting students undergoing practical training to work was essentially a way to exploit them for free labor. The study helped identify some of the key characteristics of educative work and student leisure in the Labor Reserves schools. The organization of extracurricular activities for youth in the Labor Reserves schools was based on paramilitary education. Student leisure activities were to have ideological and patriotic connotations. The authorities in charge of the SLR system generally frowned upon, and sought to counter students spending their free time informally.

Keywords: school, education, nurturing, education policy, vocational education, State Labor Reserves, trade school, factory training (FZO) school, labor reservists, Ukraine.

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1. Introduction

Essentially, the systems of vocational education in the post-Soviet states are descendants of the USSR's State Labor Reserves system. Despite, the fact that the Soviet centralized system of workforce training emerged as far back as eighty years ago, its vestiges in terms of organizing the pedagogical process within the system of vocational education linger to this day. It goes without saying that, without taking account of these traditions and best practices, both negative and positive, it will be difficult to comprehend the processes at work within this area in post-Socialist countries, which can make it more difficult to modernize it.

The SLR system was in place from 1940 to 1959. Activity in this area reached its maximum level during the period of economic recovery from 1943 to 1950, when the country managed to turn its mobilized adolescents in a very short time into a new generation of workers to make up for the skilled labor force lost during World War II.

The purpose of the present work is to provide, through the example of Ukraine, a comprehensive analysis of the pedagogical process in the Labor Reserves schools during the recovery period. The term 'pedagogical process' is used here in the classic sense to mean a combination of processes related to the educating, nurturing, and organizing the leisure of students in a school.

2. Materials and methods

The present study is based on materials from the Central State Archive of the Higher Regulatory and Administrative Authorities of Ukraine and the Central State Archive of the Public Associations of Ukraine (Kiev, Ukraine) ([TsGAVOVUU](#); [TsGAOOU](#)). Use was also made of relevant records belonging to the regional Labor Reserves authorities that are a part of the holdings of the State Archives of Zaporozhye, Lvov, Sumy, and Odessa Oblasts (Ukraine) ([GAZO](#); [GALO](#); [GAOO](#); [GASO](#)). Extensive use was made of official documents and materials published in the SLR system's official mouthpiece – Proizvodstvennoe Obuchenie ('industrial training') magazine.

The present work is based on the principles of objectivity, historicism, and comprehensiveness. The principle of historicism envisaged taking into account the period's specific historical circumstances and understanding why, when, and where certain relevant events had occurred. The principle of objectivity required relying upon real facts, assessing the facts in an unbiased manner, and approaching the sources and historiographical material in a critical manner. The principle of comprehensiveness enabled taking account of the influence of social, economic, political, and other factors on the pedagogical process in the Labor Reserves schools.

Apart from general methods of inquiry, use was also made of the following special methods: the chronological method (employed to pinpoint certain narrow historical aspects within the topic); the comparative analysis method (employed to identify the differences between the various types of school within the Labor Reserves system in terms of the educational process); the historical-systematic method (employed to determine the mutual effect of the social-political situation in the country and the nature of the education of labor reservists in it on one another); the hermeneutics and content analysis methods (employed to interpret and characterize the text of the study's source materials). In terms of its methodological basis, the study relied on relevant insights from other researchers ([Magsumov, 2014](#)).

3. Discussion

The foundations of the historiography of the State Labor Reserves system were laid in the 1950s by Soviet scholars. The first substantive scholarly works on the subject were produced by A. Veselov, F. Blinchevsky, and G. Zelenko ([Veselov, 1955](#); [Blinchevskii, Zelenko, 1957](#)). Subsequently, the work in this direction was continued by S. Batyshev and E. Kotlyar ([Batyshev, 1971](#); [Kotlyar, 1975](#)). At the level of the Ukrainian SSR, the SLR system was explored by A. Tereshchenko, V. Yurchuk, and I. Kozhukalo ([Tereshhenko, 1974](#); [Yurchuk, Kozhukalo, 1986](#)). However, all Soviet-period works on the subject are largely biased, as they were written under the pressure of Party precepts and official ideology, often covering up the shortcomings and negative aspects of the Labor Reserves system, while, at the same time, little effort was spared in trumpeting its achievements and successes.

During the post-Soviet period, historians gained an opportunity to explore the subject in an objective manner now. A distinctive characteristic of the way the subject was investigated by

contemporary Russian researchers is in each focusing in this context on a particular geographical region of the Russian Federation. Specifically, V. Ageeva has explored in detail the development of the Labor Reserves system in the Don and Kuban regions, G. Tkachova – in the Far East, I. Bal'khaeva – in Buryatia, and F. Drachikov – in the Lower Volga region (Ageeva, 2007; Tkacheva, 2006; Balkhaeva, 2009; Drachikov, 2012). With reliance upon local sources, in Ukraine research in this area has been conducted by A. Bombanderova, M. Loboda, and A. Seletsky (Bombandiorova, 1999, Loboda, 2012; Seletskii, 2012).

In the West, research on the Soviet Labor Reserves system was pioneered by M. Matthews (Matthews, 1983). Among the contemporary Western European scholars interested in the subject, worthy of particular mention are D. Filtzer, L. Coumel, and M. Kragh (Filtzer, 2002; Coumel, 2006; Kragh, 2011). Certain aspects of the labor exploitation of students in the factory training (FZO) schools have been explored by O. Kucherenko, a member of the Russian diaspora in the UK (Kucherenko, 2012).

It should be noted that today there is unjustifiably little research examining the history of the SLR system. There are many aspects of its past that remain entirely out of the sight of researchers, including those associated with the pedagogical process within it.

4. Results

The constitutions of the SLR schools required that each student's most serious obligation was to “study hard and persistently to master the basics of the occupation to the extent prescribed by the curriculum” (Trudovye rezervy SSSR, 1950: 52). For each curriculum, an occupation description profile and a syllabus were drawn up.

The occupation description profile contained requirements for the industrial training of workers of a particular trade. It listed the skills and technical knowledge students were to master.

The syllabus determined the structure and general mode of study. It specified the length of study, courses to be taken, course start and end dates, and number of hours devoted to each discipline in a week, a quarter, a year, and the entire period of training.

The length of study in the Labor Reserves schools varied considerably. In the factory training (FZO) schools, it was 6 months. In the trade, railroad, and mining schools, it was 2 years. There were also schools where the length of study varied from 3 to 7 years. Intended for orphans ages 12-14, these special schools provided one, apart from a qualification sought by employers, with secondary education. The period of study in them was longer due to in-depth study of general academic subjects (Korol, Korol, 2017: 81-82).

In the period 1943–1945, pursuant to the decisions of the State Defense Committee, the activity of the Labor Reserves schools was to a maximum degree oriented to fulfilling factory orders and carrying out recovery efforts in areas liberated from German occupation. Back then, theoretical education often had the form of technical instruction in the workplace, while industrial education was conducted in several shifts. It was not until after the end of the war that the SLR schools returned to a healthy educational process (TsGAVOVUU. F. 4609. Op. 1. D. 9: 21-22).

In the trade schools and their sectoral analogues, the school year ran from September 1 to July 31. It was divided into four terms. There were some differences between the modes of study in the first and second grades. According to the curriculum, students in first grade had 6 hours of school per day – 3 hours of theoretical instruction and 3 hours of industrial training. Sunday was a day-off.

In second grade, the amount of time devoted to industrial training increased with each term. In the last term, students had 7 hours of industrial training per day (Soderzhanie obucheniya, 1947: 8). This approach was dictated by the objectives set for each relevant period of industrial training, the rationale behind it being to prepare students gradually for the real working conditions of a production facility.

Vocational training was grounded in industrial training as the key to the successful training of skilled workers. Industrial training, deemed central to enabling students to acquire the necessary professional knowledge and skills, always took up over 60% of the time.

Besides industrial training, much importance was attached to theoretical training. Students were to learn as much about a job and the production process associated with it as was needed to enable the output of quality products at maximum productivity and with minimum costs on raw materials and power.

Theoretical instruction was based on special technology classes designed to provide students with the necessary knowledge of the parts and operation of equipment and machinery, the use of various tools and implements, and the various work techniques employed at a production facility. Among the most important courses in the curriculum were Materials Science and Technical Drawing, intended to foster students' technical literacy (GAOO. F. R-28. Op. 1. D. 30: 3-5).

While the formal requirement for entering a trade school was a primary education, in actuality this was not enough to master most of the vocational skills properly. Gaining a thorough command of technically complex specialties was impossible without acquiring the necessary knowledge in the areas of mathematics, the natural sciences, and the humanities. Therefore, the schools provided supplementary general education training to understand natural and social phenomena better and facilitate the development of essential mental abilities such as memory, reasoning, and problem-solving. This focus area was grounded in the trade schools in major disciplines such as mathematics, physics, and Russian.

General academic training in the trade schools was not a mere copy of the country's secondary education practices, differing tangibly from what regular schoolchildren would undergo. Their curricula were designed by reference to sets of requirements associated with specific specialties. For instance, students taking math were trained in relevant technical calculations. Those taking physics considered physical phenomena and laws in the context of production processes. As part of the Russian course, introduced in 1943, students were given written and oral assignments containing materials dealing with the production process (Soderzhanie obucheniya, 1947: 9).

Unlike the trade schools, no prior education was required of individuals entering an FZO school. These schools often admitted even barely literate teenagers who had difficulty reading and writing. In terms of curriculum, unlike the trade schools, these schools did not provide instruction in general academic subjects. The general belief was that instruction in them was not necessary for workers in mass professions.

The theoretical instruction section of the FZO curriculum was entitled 'Technical Knowledge Minimum Instruction', which included classes covering the following areas: occupational safety, materials science fundamentals, drawing interpretation, equipment structure, technological process, and workplace and work organization. Thus, the FZO schools made several subjects, which the trade schools treated as separate courses, part of a single integrated course, though in highly condensed form (Soderzhanie obucheniya, 1947: 10).

Typically, the FZO schools recruited twice a year. Accordingly, individuals recruited in fall were to attend school from October to March, and those recruited in spring – from March to October. The period of study in the FZO schools was nominally divided into three terms.

FZO training included 6 hours of industrial training daily in each of the first four weeks. In addition, on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays, students were to attend 2 lessons in Technical Knowledge Minimum Instruction, and on Tuesdays and Thursdays – a citizenship training lesson and 2 hours of physical education. The schedule for the period from Week 5 to Week 16 was different on Sundays. Students were to have physical education instead of theoretical training. Weeks 17 through 26 were entirely devoted to industrial training, which took up 8 hours per day now. As a rule, during this third, term students underwent practical training at a production facility. Nevertheless, citizenship training was conducted steadily as well (Veisbland, 1947: 7).

Citizenship training was compulsory and was provided in all the schools. Its purpose was to "foster in students a Socialist attitude toward work and cultivate in them a sense of public duty to the Motherland" (Lerner, 1947: 20).

The expected time commitment for citizenship training in the FZO schools was 52 hours. Instructors were obligated to stress the importance of the Bolsheviks' relentless struggle against "the enemies of the working class" and all kinds of "opportunistic" elements. Throughout the study program, it was required that teachers accentuate the vital role of the Party and its chiefs – above all, Joseph Stalin as "the great builder of Socialism" and "the strategist and architect of the victory over fascism" (Lerner, 1947: 20).

Given the longer period of study in the trade schools, 3 to 4 times more time was allocated for citizenship training in them than in the FZO schools. There were some differences in syllabus content as well. In the postwar period, the country's education authorities had included as part of the trade schools' citizenship training syllabus a set of classes focused on particular knowledge

domains associated with the USSR (e.g., history, geography, and political/legal configuration) (GASO. F. R-3369. Op. 1. D. 15: 2-4).

However, ideological/political education in the Labor Reserves schools was not confined to citizenship training alone but was an integral part of instruction in each subject in the curriculum. Textbooks for technical disciplines included quotes from prominent Communist figures, Five-Year Plan data, and information about the achievements of Stakhanovite Shock Workers (Brushtein, Dementyev, 1948: 137-141).

During World War II, given the necessity of meeting the country's defense needs, all Labor Reserves curricula had military training added to them. Students could gain primary military knowledge and some practical skills needed to be a competent combatant. In 1946, military training was replaced with physical education. Nevertheless, both the FZO and trade schools continued to maintain the military component of labor reservists' education through voluntary clubs intended to provide instruction in a variety of military specialties [e.g., marksmanship, machine gunning, or mortar gunning] (Korol at al., 2020: 97).

Physical education was regarded as an important component of the pedagogical process in the Labor Reserves schools. It was aimed at strengthening the health and ensuring the all-round physical development of students. In addition to compulsory physical education classes, significant effort was also put into training and assessing youth based on the requirements of the Ready for Work and Defense (GTO) national physical training program (Soderzhanie obucheniya, 1947: 9).

The Labor Reserves schools were committed to maintaining a military-style strict discipline. The school day started at 8:30 am. Fifteen minutes prior to the start of classes, students would have line-up and roll call. Students would have classes until 4:30 pm (inclusive of an hour-long lunch break). Strict regulations were also in place with regard to when to do one's homework (from 7:30 to 9 pm) (Trudovye rezervy SSSR, 1950: 74).

Each theoretical class was 50 minutes long. On the other hand, the issue of how to time industrial training had been the subject of debate throughout the second half of the 1940s. The discussion found its way into the pages of the Labor Reserves system's mouthpiece – Industrial Training magazine. The magazine's editorial board would receive from scholars and master practitioners suggestions as to timing it accompanied by a rationale. There were suggestions to establish an industrial training class that is 45–50 minutes, 120 minutes, or 3 hours long. There were also suggestions to make the length of an industrial training session variable during the day, and even to make it the length of an entire workday (Blinchevskii, 1947: 14; Golant, 1947: 9-10; K diskussii ob uroke, 1947: 16-17; Skvirskii, 1947: 16-17).

It would have been possible to implement any of the above suggestions as part of initial training within the schools' own workshops. However, it was somewhat difficult to conduct practical training at a production facility in the form of timed classes. Nor was it reasonable to do so, given that students would be engrossed in the production process. Despite instructions from the Main Administration of the Labor Reserves, the schools fashioned their educational/production process at their own discretion, based on existing local conditions. It all depended on the availability of premises, material and technical resources, and competent personnel, as well as the level of cooperation with the base production facility (TsGAVOVUU. F. 4609. Op. 1. D. 45: 43).

Hence, there was a pressing need to coordinate industrial training with theoretical instruction, as without the latter the quality of training would remain low. Among the key factors affecting the quality of the educational process, in terms of both theoretical instruction and practical training, were a lack of material and technical resources, insufficient course literature, and a shortage of skilled pedagogical personnel (Korol, 2015: 129).

In addition to formal academic and vocational education, the Labor Reserves system was tasked with the objective of ensuring the ideological/political nurturing of future workers. This was handled by agitation teams composed of pedagogical workers and student Komsomol members. However, this work was mandatorily conducted under the supervision of local Party and Komsomol organizations. The Department for Trade and FZO Schools, established under the Central Committee of the Leninist Young Communist League of Ukraine for this specific purpose, was to oversee the activity of its own establishment in the Labor Reserves schools (TsGAOUU. F. 7. Op. 6. D. 2141: 2-3).

One of the more prominent initiatives implemented by Komsomol was holding Socialist contests on academic progress and production plan fulfillment. Such contests were staged at

several levels: between students, between groups of students, between similar educational institutions, and between neighboring regional Labor Reserves administrations.

At least once a month, the schools held awareness-raising lectures. Such activities were organized at the schools' community centers or the base production facilities. Lectures and political presentations were delivered not only by trade and FZO school instructors but by agitator lecturers from the Regional Committees of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine and the Leninist Young Communist League of Ukraine as well. While such activities were mainly focused on matters of a political nature, topics related to natural, historical/patriotic, and moral/ethical issues were covered as well. With that said, no matter what topic was going to be covered, atomic structure or differences between love and friendship, the lectures were to invoke Marxism and be in line with official ideology (TsGAVOVUU. F. 4609. Op. 1. D. 21: 37-38).

Extensive use was made of biographies of V. Lenin and J. Stalin as "great leaders" and "ingenious teachers of the proletariat", which were seen as a rich source for educating youth. The use of airbrushed descriptions of their life was a means of both establishing an ideal role model for youth and maintaining a cult of personality in a totalitarian society. The schools set up special clubs for the extracurricular study of the great leaders' biographies, where students could deliver presentations and engage in discussions on the subject. As a rule, however, most students would join such clubs under pressure from the administration, with many attending them on an irregular basis (Korol at al., 2020: 93).

A great deal of attention was paid within the SLR system to cultivating correct behavior among youth in an effort to combat "petty-bourgeois looseness and laxity in daily life, at work, in public places, and on the street". The objective was to free the consciousness of members of the new generation from the "holdovers of capitalism" acquired at home (Khoikhin, 1947: 14-15).

Yet what Socialist collective education theoreticians tended to be reticent about at the time is that, in actuality, the fact that many adolescents were undisciplined, inclined to wrongdoing, and neglectful of hygiene was the consequence not of their class origin or of problems with the traditional model for bringing up children, followed by many (especially peasant) families at the time, but factors such as poverty, child neglect, parentlessness, and lack of parental care, associated with the tragic events of the 1930-40s.

The internal code of conduct within the trade and FZO schools, established by the Labor Reserves Ministry, required that each labor reservist do their best to "look fresh, well-groomed, and neat, be properly dressed, and behave in a polite manner". When being approached by an instructor, students were to get up and stand until the former was past them and allowed them to sit down. When addressing a superior, students were to come to attention. When moving in groups, students were to do so only in formation and under the guidance of a school's staff member or a monitor. One was not allowed to leave the formation without permission (Trudovye rezervy SSSR, 1950: 71-72).

While it was commonly unacceptable to consume alcohol, gamble, and swear, labor reservists were not allowed to appear in public in improper attire, hold their hands in their pockets, and sit in front of their superiors without being allowed to do so. Smoking was permitted for individuals 18 years of age and older and only in designated areas. Some hostels had special rooms for smokers (GASO. F.R-6477. Op. 1. D. 43: 1).

For educative purposes, students' good academic progress and positive behavior were rewarded in a number of ways, including receiving an oral commendation in front of a row of fellow students or a written commendation based on a directive from the headmaster, a cash award, a certificate of achievement (mainly in the FZO schools), a certificate of merit from the Labor Reserves Ministry, or a State Labor Reserves Honors Student badge.

On the other hand, students disrupting the educational process could face various forms of punishment, including the following: being reprovved in front of a row of fellow students, being deprived of a day-off, receiving a reprimand or a severe reprimand based on a directive from the headmaster, receiving a warning of a suspension, and, finally, being expelled (Trudovye rezervy SSSR, 1950: 73).

At that time, students expelled from a trade or FZO school for committing grave violations of discipline more than once were regarded to have willfully terminated their study and have committed a penal offence and could face up to one year in prison (Spravochnik po zakonodatel'stvu, 1946: 105).

As a means of reforming careless students and improving discipline and academic progress, wide use was made of satirical wall newspapers carrying jokes and caricatures targeted at troublemakers. Such newspapers were dubbed 'krokodil' ('crocodile') by analogy to the famed national magazine. Similarly, they were called 'perets' ('pepper') in Western Ukraine by analogy to the Ukrainian satirical publication (GALO. F. R-2226. Op. 1. D. 38: 3, 5).

The popularity of satirical newspapers produced by students is attested by the fact that they significantly surpassed in number similar newspapers on other subjects. Specifically, in 1945 labor reservists in the UkSSR produced around 4,900 ordinary wall newspapers and 6,500 satirical ones (TsGAVOVUU. F. 4609. Op. 1. D. 21: 41-42).

Aside from school, work, and drilling, the Labor Reserves schools also had a number of interesting leisure activities on offer. From time to time, students were taken on cultural outings to the movies, the theater, and a museum. The regional cinema authorities helped the schools with mobile film projectors. Libraries were set up at the schools' clubs and reading rooms. To support students in their creative initiatives, suitably equipped premises were provided for young inventors (Trudovye rezervy SSSR, 1950: 141).

The pride and joy of all trade and FZO schools was amateur talent activities. To meet youth's need for entertainment and creative self-expression, all kinds of orchestras, choirs, and drama clubs would be set up. Concerts would be staged at community centers, production facilities, hospitals, and collective farms. There were cases where amateur performers from the schools were invited to perform on the radio, with some going on to become a real celebrity in their area (GASO. F.R-6477. Op. 1. D. 27: 6).

Subsequent to World War II, it became a frequent practice for the regional Labor Reserves administrations to set up community centers of their own, where amateur talent contests for labor reservists would be held. Normally, such festivals were staged once a year in early summer (GAZO. F.R-1360. Op. 1. D. 24. L. 2-3; GAOO. F.R-6722. Op. 1. D. 1: 10-12).

To help promote the practice of sports and physical activities within the trade and FZO schools, a voluntary sports society named 'Trudovye Rezervy' ('labor reserves') was established in 1943, with its clubs opening in virtually all Labor Reserves schools. The most popular sports in the schools were soccer, volleyball, track and field, skiing, and shooting (Korol et al., 2020: 96-97).

A great deal of attention was devoted to drill, which was regarded as an important means of maintaining discipline and order within the schools. In 1944, the authorities introduced the requirement for the administrations of the schools to hold drill inspections monthly and for the regional administrations to do so quarterly. War song contests were often held concurrently as well (TsGAVOVUU. F. 4609. Op. 1. D. 5: 7-8, 56).

5. Conclusion

The organization of the pedagogical process in the USSR's Labor Reserves schools was based on authoritarian principles and was strictly regulated. Education in them was oriented toward the speedy mass training of workers, often at the expense of the quality of the education. Practical classes in the factory training schools prevailed over theoretical ones, with the educational process being integrated with the performance of industrial tasks. It may be argued that the SLR system not only had youth undergo vocational training but exploited them for free labor as well. In line with the interests of a totalitarian state, student labor reservists underwent intensive ideological education both via compulsory curricular citizenship training and via Komsomol activity and extracurricular work. The availability of interesting leisure activities in the schools was attractive to youth, made up for the negative aspects of the pedagogical process, and contributed to the cultural nurturing and socialization of future workers. Amateur talent and sports activities in the Labor Reserves schools were employed as part of agitation/propaganda work. Youth underwent serious physical training via physical education/sports and military training clubs. The schools tried to maintain a military spirit among their students. The operation of the Labor Reserves schools was in perfect alignment with Stalin's model for the economy and society, i.e. the state having maximum control over the process of incorporating youth into the worker environment.

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