Archives

EDUCATION IN BULGARIA 1937[1)]

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Significance of education

Education is a cultural and social function of the contemporary state. From its degree, quality, and extent one may judge whether this function of the state is complete, alive, and progressive, and also determine the stage of historical development which the state has reached. Only with education that is true to the spirit of the age and its vital needs and to the national existence and traditions can a nation be preserved as a cultural treasure and the state be kept in possession of its highest juridical and ethical heritage. Education, therefore, is the best weapon for the struggle in life's arena; it is the spiritual energy of a nation which, passing to the new generations, transforms itself, refines them, and creates on its part new cultural and material possessions.

Thus have the problems of education been conceived by people and leaders since the establishment and throughout the existence of the Bulgarian state. In the extreme struggle for existence today all nations are forging but one implement with two edges: a generation physically strong and morally sturdy. All their attention is devoted to raising youth of robust, powerful physique and spirit undaunted by bitter fate. For in the final test morals determine economics and politics. Bulgarian education has abundant reason to strive for that physique and that brave spirit. From earliest times Bulgaria has been at

the crossroads of cultural and economic forces; for centuries the country has bowed beneath such forces and, despite two recent national catastrophies, has survived as a nation, sustained by an awakened national consciousness, and pure traditions and spirit. Conceiving in this way the great problems of national education, all the high officials in the cultural-educational effort since the Liberation have more or less contributed to its up-building and have given opportunity to all creative forces.

Preschool education

Nursery schools

Since Bulgaria is a country with still well-preserved patriarchal traditions, especially in the villages, preschool education has been but lately formally adopted. Social consciousness was previously much weaker and the State was not eager for this type of education. As a result of the wholly changed post-War economic and social conditions parents were engaged in their private and public occupations and the children were left without adequate home guidance and opportunity. Until recently, and even today, many aristocratic families leave the early education of their children solely to governesses, many of the bourgeoisie and many of the high official families leave them to their maids, while among workers in the cities and the peasants they are left in charge of older brothers and sisters. In all these cases the education given to the children has often been erroneous, if not sometimes dangerous. Children's lives very often have been sacrificed in cases of fire or drowning, or in traffic accidents with horses, carriages, street-cars, and automobiles, and even in attacks by dogs or hogs. For this reason the provision of nursery schools began to be recognized as desirable.

Until the adoption of nursery schools the theory of Rousseau, that nature and life should teach the child everything, was accepted, but today's life with its fast tempo and dynamic has proved too strong. In order to enable the

children of preschool age to appreciate their environment, and to prepare them for the work of the elementary school, a law was passed in 1921 for the compulsory establishment of nursery schools in cities of over 20 000 inhabitants. During 1925–26 there were 91 such schools with 5297 children and 107 teachers, and by 1934–35 the numbers had been increased to 159 schools, 8425 children, and 185 teachers. Furthermore, 60 vacation schools, initiated by the American Kindergarten Normal School, under the direction of Miss P. Kassabova,[3] were conducted for one month in 1934–35.

Foundling homes

Foundling homes are an even later achievement. They were established for children whose mothers died in childbirth or soon after, or were sick or engaged in supporting their families, and for children abandoned by unmarried mothers. Other mothers give their children to these homes, when they are unable to care for them because of lack of means or broken homes. Illegitimate children, again, constitute a serious social problem, and stress the importance of building up the morale, especially of the woman, that she may not regard social scorn above the welfare of her child. Formerly such children were given to childless people for adoption. Today they are taken to the foundling homes and from there only qualified people are permitted to adopt them. Foundling homes were first created thirty-five years ago, and in 1935 numbered ten with 355 children.

Elementary education

Compulsory attendance

According to Section 78 of the Constitution[4] elementary education is compulsory and free for all children from seven to fourteen years of age. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to suppose that there is no illiteracy in Bulgaria. In spite of the strictness of the law and frequent fines, it cannot be com-

pletely enforced because of economic and geographical handicaps. While the percentage of illiteracy decreases each year, it has not entirely disappeared. During 1934–35 the registration of all children of elementary school age was 92.35 per cent. However, not all unregistered children are illiterate because some had been in school during the previous year. The illiterates that year really numbered but 1.75 per cent of school-age children. During 1931–32, 874 village hamlets and 1,112 home groups and mountain huts were un-provided with teachers, 62,276 children out of the total school population of 873 112 were without schools, and 18,531 were illiterate.

The effort after the War to make attendance at the Progymnasium compulsory did not meet with much success; it was revived again in 1931–33 but in 1934 new restrictions and limitations were once more introduced by the Government.

Statistics

The progress of elementary education may be indicated by the following figures. In 1934–35 there were 4725 schools and 6653 school buildings (including elementary schools and Pro-gymnasia) as compared with 4113 schools and 4831 school buildings in 1925–26; the number of pupils enrolled in elementary schools and including those of elementary school age (eight to eleven years) and retarded pupils over eleven, rose from 402 983 in 1925–26 to 652 882 in 1934–35, and of those enrolled 95.5 per cent completed the school year in 1934–35 as compared with 91.7 per cent in 1925–26. In the same period the number of teachers increased from 12458 (5610 men and 6848 women) to 16309 (7706 men and 8603 women). The number of private schools fell from 1605 with 66 792 pupils and 2260 teachers in 1925–26 to 624 schools with 55 368 pupils and 1699 teachers in 1934–35.

It is interesting to note that in 1878 (the first year after the Liberation) there were only 1711 public elementary schools with an enrollment of about 104 856 pupils taught by 2463 teachers.

Continuation education

The child and the youth ought not to be left to their own devices without supervision by the family, the community, and the state at the conclusion of their compulsory education period. For neither physically, mentally, or morally are they strong enough to stand by themselves, nor have they clear ideas about their future; they still need all possible care, advice, and assistance. Moreover, youth is the most critical and dangerous period of life for moral development. For these reasons, national laws provide continuation education. The aim of this education is to allow those who have completed the elementary school courses to be better prepared for practical life. The continuation schools have three-year courses with a minimum of eight hours per week, beginning early in September and closing in the middle of July. The course ends with examinations in the subjects studied. The attendance for such students as register is compulsory. Employers on farms and in factories and shops employing young people who have not completed their compulsory elementary education, must see that they attend these continuation schools under penalty of fines for each infraction. There are also special courses in agriculture, industry, and commerce in connection with the Progymnasia or the special schools. In these continuation schools the teachers are from the Progymnasium, their additional salaries being paid half by the state and half by the municipality. The teachers in the special courses in agriculture and in home economics are specialists. The continuation schools and the practical courses constitute a heavy problem for the educational system, and must await future solution.

Progymnasium

Changing policy

The Progymnasium was introduced by the law of Minister Mushanoff[5)] in 1909. Until that time there had been in the city centers and in the larger towns and villages various types of schools with advanced classes beyond the grades. In the city centers these classes were organically connected with the Gymnasia. Minister Mushanoff separated them in content but not in purpose, while the present writer separated them both in program and in management, and attached them to the elementary schools with an enriched curriculum. The Progymnasium of today completes and unifies elementary education, and at the same time prepares the student for the Gymnasium, thus serving as a link between the elementary school and the Gymnasium. The education given by the Progymnasium is academic and practical in character.

The law of 1921,[6)] introduced by the present writer, made the Progymnasium compulsory and free, and thus brought about a complete revolution in education in Bulgaria. It gave a broader education to the children, for its author realized that education is an immense individual and collective force in the struggle for existence, and that the peasantry, with whose ideas the writer has been nourished from childhood, could not be a political and economic factor if they lacked the power of education. Was this the only achievement of this Ministry, the people might well be grateful for it alone. Mushanoff remained Minister of Education for three years, but in this short time the country was adequately supplied with Progymnasia. It is true that in striving for quantity quality suffered, because of the lack of buildings, equipment, illustrative material, and teachers. As a partial remedy, teacher training institutions were opened in several places.

From 1923 to 1931 the number of Progymnasia was reduced by closing those that were incomplete in classes or in attendance. During 1931–32, under another Minister of the Agrarian Party, Moravieff,[7)] the number of

Progymnasia was again increased to 1662, and continued at that figure until 1934 when the military government which limited education came into power. Only the old Progymnasia which had their equipment and buildings were allowed to remain. This regime went further, and did not allow new classes to be established unless the required number of students was completely enrolled. A third class with less than the required students might be opened, provided that the two lower classes were combined under one teacher, leaving the other free for the new class. After 1934 the teachers in the Progymnasium were overworked, having twenty-eight hours of instruction a week. The director was also given full teaching duties in addition to those of administration. Only in the elementary schools to which a Progymnasium was attached, were four teachers provided for each three classes. The quality of the educational work was lowered by these measures. That the regime after 1934 was attempting to limit education was evident from the following fact: The law after 1921 allowed opening of the first class of a Progymnasium with twenty pupils, a second and third with fifteen pupils each, or, with special permission, a third class might be opened with only ten pupils. The decrees of 1934 required thirty pupils for the first class, twenty-five for the second, and for the third at least twenty pupils, or a total of seventy where before but fifty pupils were needed, except in the mountains where between twenty-five and twenty were enough, or even fifteen if they had attended school continuously.

Statistics

The development of the Progymnasia is indicated in the following figures showing the growth in a ten-year period. The number of schools rose from 1185 in 1925–26 to 1824 in 1934–35; of the 128 462 pupils enrolled in 1925–26, 108 869 or 84.74 per cent completed the year, while the corresponding figures for 1934–35 were 263 730 enrolled and 219 878 or 92.88 per cent at the end of the year; the number of teachers rose in this period from 5559

(2582 men and 2977 women) to 6414 (3261 men and 3153 women). The enrollments include pupils between eleven and fourteen years, and a small number (29407 in 1954–35) over fourteen who are retarded.

In the decade under consideration the number of Progymnasia increased from 54 with 4210 pupils and 257 teachers to 59 schools with 4474 pupils and 341 teachers. The increase is by no means steady; a peak of 63 schools with 4343 pupils and 349 teachers was reached in 1932–33.

Secondary education

The gymnasium

The school organization of Bulgaria may be compared to a great tree trunk branching into four parts, each with many limbs. These four parts are preschool education, elementary, secondary, and higher. The first two have no branches; the third is secondary education with its main stem, the Gymnasium, and with branches for different kinds of lower vocational and middle, complete and incomplete special schools; and the fourth is higher education with its main stem, the State University, and with branches for the special academies. Secondary education is the main axis of the educational system around which gravitate all school problems, because it gives character, value, meaning, and direction to the whole system. It includes, in addition to the three divisions—classical, semi-classical, and scientific—of the Gymnasium, the following special schools: pedagogical schools, theological seminaries, agricultural schools, commercial schools, and technical schools.

Until 1923 the Gymnasia had a program of general and practical character. The fourth, fifth, and sixth classes formed the so-called ‘Real school’ and the seventh and eighth were the true Gymnasium classes. From the sixth class it was possible to pass into the seventh class only after examinations in Bulgarian, history, geography, natural sciences, and mathematics. Another possibility was to pass from the sixth class into the teacher training school.

The program was changed in 1924 and more attention was paid to the languages and to humanistic disciplines. The Real schools were dropped and became the incomplete Gymnasia whose classes were in fact continuations of the Progymnasia. The Gymnasia were at their best in 1933–34. In the following year the complete Gymnasia were reduced from 59 to 42, and the incomplete Gymnasia were converted into 75 Real schools, with three classes having special programs. After graduating from Real schools students were not fitted to enter either the Gymnasium or the special schools; they were left hanging in the air. That the State favored its Gymnasia is shown by the fact that its teachers and directors were very well paid.

The teaching personnel were recruited entirely from the State University, and women began to make their way as teachers in the Gymnasium. The teaching methods in the Gymnasium are very difficult to change. The older teachers were specialists who had not taken any professional subjects in the University, and who during a year of teacher training had been under departmental specialists who could not help them much outside of their specialties. Hence they taught largely according to tradition and by intuition. The psychology of the youth of today is not very clear in Bulgaria. For this reason skill in methods in the Gymnasium has not been developed. Here the different specialists are trying to weld the various subjects into a solid foundation for future scientific living. The most effective institutions for training are the boarding schools, private or state. The students attend the Gymnasium at a very critical period of their lives and therefore need all possible assistance from society and from the State. In order to aid them student organizations for various purposes are permitted, and themes on civic questions are permitted and encouraged.

Statistics

The development of the Gymnasia may be indicated by the following figures comparing their status in 1925–26 and 1934–35. The number of Gymnasia at the beginning of the decade was 89 (36 complete and 53 incomplete); the enrollment at that time, including pupils in the 89 Gymnasia and 11 pedagogical schools, was 33 571 pupils (19 642 boys and 13 929 girls), of whom 2836 completed the eighth class; at the end of the period there were 117 Gymnasiums (42 complete and 75 incomplete) with 44 142 pupils (28 114 boys and 16 028 girls), of whom 4669 completed the eighth class; the pedagogical schools were closed in 1934. The increased number of incomplete Gymnasia reflects the growth of the new Real schools. Despite the increased number of schools and pupils the number of teachers fell from 1828 (786 men and 1042 women) to 1633 (820 men and 813 women). The above figures do not include statistics for private schools.

Higher education

Higher education has for its aim the development of specially capable and gifted students, and the preparation of an intellectually creative élite for the service of the State. Such education can be obtained in the State University, or in the privately controlled "free" university, in the Theological Academy, and in the military, art, music, and commercial academies.

The State University was founded in 1888, under the name "Higher School," with but two departments, history-philology and physics-mathematics, to prepare teachers for the Gymnasium. A law department was opened later and no further additions were made until 1921 when four other departments were legally opened: medicine, veterinary medicine, agronomy, and theology. The law provides for the inclusion of departments of pharmacy and dentistry in the department of medicine, but these have not yet been established. The medical course covers twelve semesters which include an interne-

ship and the preparation of a dissertation. The veterinary course covers nine semesters, and each of the rest covers eight.

The number of new students to be admitted in each department is determined by the faculty at the end of each school year. Only those student associations which have scientific and literary aims are permitted and then only after academic approval. Political clubs, speech-making, and demonstrations are against the law. There are, however, occasional clashes between unorganized groups of different opinion. The largest number of students is enrolled in law, and the next largest in history-philology.

The privately controlled "free" University has three departments: diplomacy, administration, and finance. Its students are generally employed in state or city service, and come to classes in the evening; the instructors are professors at the State University. A Higher School for Practical Arts is being projected and has in fact been provided for by law, but it has not as yet been established by the Ministry of Education.

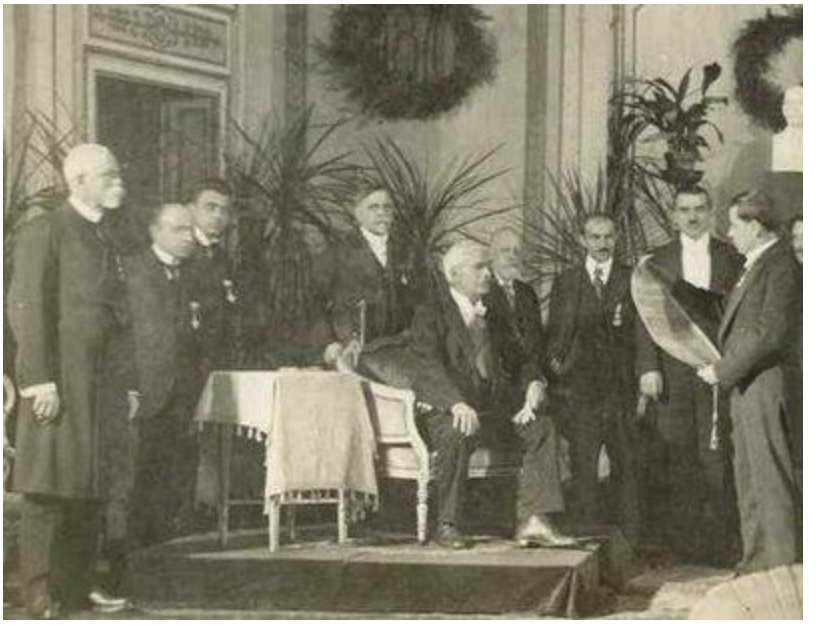
Statistics

The total enrollment in the State University in 1934–35 was 6573 (4659 men and 1914 women) students as compared with 3065 (2278 men and 787 women) in 1925–26; the number of professors increased in the same period from 144 to 297.

The private or "free" University had an enrollment of 1887 students and a faculty of 40 instructors in 1935–36 as compared with 1694 students and 46 instructors ten years earlier. In the Graduate School of Commerce at Varna the number of students rose in the decade from 189 (166 men and 23 women) to 730 (671 men and 59 women). The Graduate Schools of Art and Music in Sofia had 512 students (362 men and 150 women) in 1935–36 as compared with 574 students (313 men and 261 women) in 1925–26.

NOTES

1. An expanded version of this paper was published in *Educational Yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College* Volume 1 Number 1, 1937, pp. 59-84.
2. Стоян Омарчевски (1885-1941) – Министър на народното просвещение (1920-1923), реформатор на образованието, по негово предложение 1 ноември става Ден на народните будители, инициатор на всенародното честване на народния поет Иван Вазов (1850-1921), също б. Министър на народното просвещение (1897-1899).
3. Пенка Касабова (1901-2001), учителка, новатор в предучилищното образование в България, сестра на Гео Милев (1895-1925).
4. Конституция на Българското Княжество / Царство, 16 април 1979 г.
5. Никола Мушанов (1872-1951), б. Министър на народното просвещение (1908-1910), реформатор на българското образование, съден от Народния съд и убит в Държавна сигурност на комунистическата държава.
6. Славчев, Д. & Марков, А. (1940). *Просветно законодателство. Сборник от закони, наредби и правилници, които са в сила по Министерството на народното просвещение, с бележки по тяхното прилагане.* София: Казанлъшка долина. Законът за народното просвещение е от 1909 г. (Мушановият закон). Големи изменения са правени в него през 1912 г. (С.С. Бобчев), 1921 г. (С. Омарчевски) и 1924 г. (А. Цанков).
7. К. Муравиев (1893-1965), б. Министър на народното просвешение (1931-1932), министър-председател на последното демократично правителство в Царство България (2 – 8 септември 1944 г.), съден от Народния съд и останал в затвора до 1961 г.



М-р Омарчевски чете поздравителен адрес към Иван Вазов, 24 X 1920 г. (снимка: НБКИ)

М-р Никола Мушанов

М-р Константин Муравиев