

THE REPRESSIVE POLICY OF THE SOVIET REGIME IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15602885>

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Abstract

This article highlights the manifestations and tragic consequences of the repressive policy implemented by the soviet regime in the field of education in Uzbekistan during the 1920s–1930s.

Keywords

Soviet regime, communist ideology, “cultural revolution”, soviet-style education system, repressive policy, “enemy of the people”, “counter-revolutionary”.

Introduction:

Higher education institutions are among the key indicators of a nation’s scientific potential, mentality, and cultural as well as spiritual development.

Uzbekistan has long been known as a land of knowledge and enlightenment. Since ancient times, madrasahs, schools and universities that gained worldwide renown have existed in the territory of our homeland. Our great intellectual scholars have made significant contributions to world science and culture.

In every historical period, attitudes toward science, culture, and the education system have varied. If we look at the attitude toward education during the Soviet era, particularly in the 1920s–1930s, this period stands out for its complexity and contradictions. During these years, the Communist Party, based on its ideology, developed and urgently began implementing “cultural revolution” measures aimed at promoting the idea of a system that was “national in form, socialist in content”. These ideological measures also permeated the education system, which was an integral part of social life. From the early years of the Soviet regime, efforts were made to reshape the fields of culture and education in line with the ruling state ideology.

The implementation of a series of measures by the Soviet regime, primarily as a result of the efforts of educational staff, cultural figures, and national enlighteners from among the local population, led to the establishment of a cultural life

characterized by communist ideology in the territory of Uzbekistan starting from the first half of the 1920s.

Methods and Degree of Study:

This article is based on generally accepted historical methods – principles of historicism, comparative-logical analysis, chronological sequencing, and objectivity. It explores the manifestations of the repressive policy pursued by the soviet regime in the 1920s–1930s in the field of education, the persecution of those working in the education sector and teachers, as well as students studying at higher educational institutions. The tragic fates of individuals subjected to repression are also discussed.

Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has seen the creation and publication of numerous scholarly works, monographs, pamphlets, and articles that study the repressive policy, its consequences, and the heartbreaking destinies of our fellow citizens who fell victim to it. Among the prominent scholars and researchers who have contributed to this field are B.Qosimov, N.Karimov, S.Akhmedov, H.Uzokov, D.Alimova, H.Akhrorova, B.Hasanov, Kh.Yunusova, R.Shamsutdinov, N.Rashidova, F.Qilichev, K.Vokhidova, B.Irzayev, A.A.Yuldoshev, Yu.B.Tursunova, and many others. Through their academic research, the names, tragic fates, and activities of the victims of repression have been identified and brought to public attention, thereby restoring historical justice and honoring their memory.

Research Results:

In the 1920s–1930s, the soviet government consolidated its political and economic power. The Bolshevik Party became the absolute single ruling party, exerting its ideological influence over all spheres of social life. This process was especially pronounced in the education system. The rise in literacy rates and the establishment of educational institutions occurred alongside the strengthening of the command-administrative system and the imposition of strict ideological control. As a result, a uniform and centralized soviet-style education system began to emerge.

These developments were reflected in the organization of schools, vocational and higher education institutions, in their curricula and syllabi, in textbooks and teaching aids, and even in the national composition of professors, teachers, and students. Despite the harsh conditions imposed by the oppressive Soviet regime, enlightened intellectuals used every opportunity to contribute to the development and future of the country. However, during a time when communist ideology dominated the government and the totalitarian regime suppressed any form of

national identity, such efforts by intellectuals were labeled as “counter-revolutionary” activities.

In all sectors of society, including education, the dominance of the Communist Party meant that any opinion differing from or contradicting the official stance was met with persecution and repression. A wave of mass repression was intensifying across the country. As a result, the fate of many intellectuals turned tragic. The communist regime aimed to eliminate the most progressive and conscious elements of each nation—those capable of understanding and challenging the essence of the oppressive system.

To carry out these crimes, the authorities launched campaigns to “expose” so-called “counter-revolutionary” groups. The Communist Party ruthlessly suppressed any dissent. At the Second All-Uzbek Party Congress held on November 22, 1925, party secretary V.I. Ivanov declared: “In order to Bolshevize the republic, it is necessary—if need be, through sacrifices—to form a Leninist core; there is no other way. Harsh measures must be taken against those who are indifferent to their duties. Some must even be executed so that others understand that state and party affairs cannot be treated lightly” [1].

By the end of the 1920s, strict control had been established over the socio-economic and cultural-spiritual spheres. Political freedoms were prohibited. Any opinion or viewpoint that opposed the policies of the soviet state began to be harshly punished. Individuals who attempted to implement alternative paths of socio-economic development were accused under the slogan of “struggle against factionalism” and subjected to repression. Thus, open oppression, imprisonment, and repressions began.

The bloody sword of repression was first directed at those working in the field of education – teachers and educational staff. This period witnessed a peak in political repression. The national intelligentsia suffered the most from the soviet regime’s terror. Numerous victims were claimed. Patriotic writers, scholars, and cultural figures were among the first to be targeted.

In November 1929, under the leadership of prominent educator and enlightenment figure Munavvar Qori Abdurashidkhanov, 87 people were arrested as members of the “National Independence” organization, and 15 of them were sentenced to death by execution [2]. According to a special resolution issued on April 25, 1931, by the Special State Political Directorate (OGPU) under the Council of Ministers of the USSR, several members of this organization were accused of conducting anti-Soviet activities as members of a “counter-revolutionary” group and were executed on May 23, 1931 [3].

As a result of the purge of the education system from “alien elements”, in 1930, several prominent public figures who had contributed to the development of national education – including Mannon Abdullayev (Ramzi), Mahmud Khodiev (Botu), and 17 others considered to be their collaborators or like-minded individuals – were arrested by the People’s Commissariat of Education [4]. The 19 arrested “criminals” were taken to Moscow and imprisoned in Butyrka prison. Over the course of three years, they were subjected to various forms of torture, kept in cold and damp prison cells, and on March 31, 1933, they were convicted by the Supreme Court of the USSR under Articles 58.4 (assistance to the reactionary forces of international bourgeoisie), 58.8 (acts of terrorism), and 58.11 (participation in a counter-revolutionary organization and organizing preparations for counter-revolutionary crimes) of the RSFSR Criminal Code.

According to the court's verdict, 10 individuals were initially sentenced to death, which was later commuted to long-term imprisonment; the rest were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 3 to 10 years [5]. Some of those who were released after serving their prison terms were re-arrested and punished again.

In the 1930s, the intensification of the administrative-command system and the ideology of the cult of personality began to suffocate not only the education sector but all levels of the educational system, cultural life, and even the national economy. The life of the entire republic came under the strict control of the central authorities. Any deviation from party directives was labeled as counter-revolutionary or political opposition.

From the second half of the 1930s, the search for and punishment of “anti-soviet elements” and “enemies of the people” escalated significantly. In particular, the activities of the political security organs (OGPU) were primarily directed toward identifying and investigating individuals branded with such accusations. On the basis of these charges and labels, mass repressions against the population reached a peak during 1937–1938. If any leader of a district or village was accused of being an “enemy of the people”, those close to them – their relatives, friends, and colleagues – were also arrested and punished.

For example, in 1937, Ziyu Olmasboyev, the first secretary of the Jambay district party committee of Samarkand region, was arrested for allegedly forming an “anti-revolutionary” group and conducting activities against the Soviet regime. Consequently, three employees of the Jambay district education department, one school principal, and three teachers in the same district were arrested and punished as alleged members of the group organized by Olmasboyev [6].

The families and close relatives of those arrested, sentenced, or executed as “enemies of the people” often had no information about the fate of their loved ones and lived in uncertainty and despair.

The period of most intense mass repression in the country occurred in 1936–1937. During these years, not only educators but also professors, university staff, and even students were subjected to various forms of punishment.

By the second half of the 1920s, secondary specialized and higher educational institutions also began to be established in the republic. Such institutions were founded in the centers of each region. In January 1927, the Higher Pedagogical Institute was opened in Samarkand [7], which was transformed into the Pedagogical Academy in 1930. In 1933, the Uzbekistan State University (now Samarkand State University) was established on the basis of this academy. The curricula, programs, and textbooks at this university were based on communist principles and were required to serve the interests of the party and the Soviet state.

The repression extended to all higher educational institutions in the republic. One example is Uzbekistan State University in Samarkand, whose academic community suffered significant losses as a result of the repression policy. Professors, staff, and students were subjected to various punishments and pressures, having been accused of being “enemies of the people”.

Among those arrested and sentenced to death in 1938 were Karim Abdullayev, who served as rector of the university from 1931 to 1936 and later as Minister of Health in 1936–1937; Hikmat Fayzullayev, rector of the university in 1936–1937; department head Bulat Soliyev; Narzullo Inoyatov, dean of the Pedagogy Faculty from 1930 to 1936 and a lecturer at the Tashkent Evening Pedagogical Institute in 1936; and Magdi Burnashev, dean of the Faculty of Biology at Uzbekistan State University [8].

Thus, the wave of repression spared no one. Regardless of age, status, family background, or ethnicity, individuals were caught in its grip. In 1937, postgraduate students of the university – Hoji Kurpachev, Mirzo Tojiyev, Musabek Sotiboldiyev, Usmon Sultonov, and Murod Muhammadqulov – were arrested and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 5 to 10 years as alleged members of an “anti-revolutionary” organization [9].

The repressions of 1936–1937 were aimed at removing intellectuals from all spheres, particularly from state affairs and educational institutions, and physically eliminating them. This campaign also affected university students, not just teaching staff and professors.

In the early 1920s, a “Central Commission for the Purging of Higher Educational Institutions” was established to evaluate students’ “political purity.”

Each higher education institution had branches of this commission, which were called “student committees” (student council) [10]. These committees were tasked with exposing students who did not meet the political requirements of the proletarian state or belonged to the class of property owners and expelling them from the universities.

On December 29, 1935, the USSR People’s Commissariat of Internal Affairs and the Council of People's Commissars issued a decree “on taking measures against persons of alien social origin (large landowners, merchants, clergy, kulaks, officers of the White Army, anarchists) and those associated with them” [11]. This secret decree was sent to all organizations, institutions, educational establishments, and government bodies. The implementation of the decree at the local level was closely monitored, and reports on its enforcement were required.

Based on this decree, teachers, staff, professors, and students in higher and secondary special educational institutions, as well as schools, were subjected to persecution. The primary goal of this policy was to eliminate the intellectuals who had the potential to elevate the national consciousness and thereby prevent them from influencing the younger generation.

The process of purging individuals with “socially alien” origins, carried out by the Soviet regime, covered all higher education institutions in Uzbekistan. As a result, many students also suffered greatly during these purges.

The consequences of the repressive policy in the field of education were devastating. A large number of qualified teachers, staff, and intellectuals were physically eliminated. Through this campaign, the communist regime systematically destroyed the most advanced and critically aware segment of the educational system. Furthermore, their professional and scholarly work was erased. Those who remained in the system were effectively silenced, deprived of the ability to express dissenting views, and forced into submission.

Conclusion:

In the 1920s and 1930s, the establishment of higher education institutions in Uzbekistan coincided with a growing demand for knowledge and enlightenment in the country. Although a certain portion of the population was enrolled in these educational institutions, serious shortcomings existed throughout the entire education system. Most notably, the Soviet education system paid little attention to the national characteristics of the learners, their spirituality, and the rich cultural heritage of their ancestors.

Even under the harsh conditions of the oppressive Soviet regime, our well-rounded intellectuals made every effort within the available opportunities to contribute to the development, future, and progress of Uzbekistan. However, any

expression of independent thought was considered “counter-revolutionary” and subjected to repression. As a result, hundreds of intellectuals, educators, students, and scholars were persecuted, imprisoned, or physically eliminated. The main aim of the repression policy was to instill fear in society, suppress free thinking, consolidate the totalitarian regime, and maintain its power. This tragic process did not discriminate by age, rank, position, or ethnicity, claiming thousands of innocent lives.

Today, in the era of the “New Uzbekistan”, extensive efforts are being made to restore historical justice, commemorate the victims of repression, and deeply study their legacy. Notably, the decree issued by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on October 8, 2020, titled “On Additional Measures to Deepen the Study of the Legacy of Repression Victims and Perpetuate Their Memory”, has elevated these efforts to a new level. This decree undoubtedly serves as a crucial document in restoring historical memory and honoring the courageous and selfless sons and daughters of our nation.

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