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The Formation of the “Soviet Human Capital” in Higher Education in the 1920s

Abstract

The article analyses the policies of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) in formation of Soviet student community. It draws on archival sources to study the educational process in national higher educational establishments and portrays the “Soviet studentship.” The authors use methods of scientific and historical research (analysis and synthesis) to study the historical sources. In its political practices of the 1920s, the RKP(B) implemented measures for a radical reform of higher education and for establishing a system for formation of “Soviet human capital.” The emphasis was placed on essential measures consistent with goals and objectives of the Soviet government, which determined the qualitative content of educational and pedagogical processes in the universities. In the 1920s the state regarded higher education as an institute for “production” of “human capital,” as well as that of specialists. The term “human capital” was coined in 1958 by the American economist Jacob Mincer. Then the concept was elaborated by Theodore Schultz and Gary Becker. Initially, economists termed human capital as investments in the individual that increase the individual’s ability to work, i.e. education and professional skills. Later the concept was expanded and deepened; human capital is now considered the main factor in the development of economy and society as a whole. This is how this term is used in the article. Thus, the 1920s saw the destruction of the old system of education and the formation of the Soviet higher school, accompanied by the contradictory search for development models in view of socialist construction plans. With training, the student was to become not just a good specialist, but a socially active member of the society; they were to devote their life to work for the benefit of the state. Social experiment in reforming the higher education carried out in the 1920s had contradictory results. Proletarianization of the higher education and introduction of innovative approaches coincided with complete abandonment of traditional forms of teaching, while the emphasis was put on socio-political discourse, but not of that of education, which negatively affected the quality of training. Finally, there came an understanding that active participation of students in economic and political campaigns distracted them from their studies; emotional reaction led to incompetence, inability to cope with basic problems, and growth of negative phenomena.

Keywords

Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks), sources, human capital, students, Soviet higher education, family, youth, socio-cultural values.

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