

THE FORMATION OF STATE POLICY IN THE SPHERE  
OF LIBRARIES IN THE SOVIET UNION

*This paper analyzes the development of library management system in the USSR during 1917-1945. It proposes that the library sector in Ukraine at the beginning of the Soviet period did not satisfy cultural needs of the people. It mainly served to the ideological needs of the Communist Party. State regulation of library sector under the totalitarian system used command-administrative methods of governance. Moreover, public policy in this area did not exist as an objective reality, but as an ideological quest. It was implemented, first of all, according to the interests of the state, its structures and social institutions. The process of network formation of public libraries by the state administrative-territorial principle in the member states of the USSR had been finished by the Second World War. The USSR had solved the problem of the elimination of illiteracy in limited terms with the active participation of public libraries. However, a practical rejection from orientation on the local governments, the interests of a particular area was the negative feature of the public libraries in the totalitarian state. It is concluded that the process of network formation of public libraries by the state administrative-territorial principle in the member states of the USSR had been finished by the Second World War.*

**Keywords:** state policy, state regulation of libraries, library, the Soviet Union

**Картузов Костянтин. Формування державної політики в сфері бібліотекарської справи в Радянському Союзі**

*В даній статті аналізується розвиток бібліотечної системи управління в СРСР в період 1917-1945 рр. Зроблено висновок про те, що процес формування мережі публічних бібліотек державною відповідно до адміністративно-територіального принципу в державах-членах СРСР було закінчено до Другої світової війни.*

**Ключові слова:** державна політика, державне регулювання бібліотек, бібліотека, Радянський Союз

**Картузов Константин. Формирование государственной политики в сфере библиотечного дела в Советском Союзе**

*В данной статье анализируется развитие библиотечной системы управления в СССР в период 1917-1945. Сделан вывод о том, что процесс формирования сети публичных библиотек государством в соответствии с административно-территориальным принципом в государствах-членах СССР был закончен до Второй мировой войны.*

**Ключевые слова:** государственная политика, государственное регулирование библиотек, библиотека, Советский Союз

**Introduction**

Nowadays there is no consensus in the sphere of periodization of library development and the establishment of state regulation system in this area, in the world in general and on the countries of former Soviet Union in particular.

The first libraries on the territory of modern Russia and Ukraine appeared in the period of Kiev Rus in the IX-XI centuries under the supervision of monasteries and churches. In 1037 Yaroslav the Wise founded the public library at St. Sophia Cathedral. Legislative regulation of librarianship occurred during the reforms of Peter

the Great. Libraries had started to participate in the implementation of the scientific, educational and cultural policy.

However, only at the beginning of the Soviet period the government agencies that were entrusted with regulatory functions of librarianship appeared. The period of 1917-1939 is interesting because at that time forms and methods of implementation of state policy in the field of library sector were transformed and the conflict with already well-established after the February Revolution libraries democratic policies.

The research of the library regulatory system formation in the Soviet Union, which took place during 1917-1939 years, is relevant when taking into account processes that happened in the library sphere of post-Soviet countries after their independence in the early 1990s.

#### **Analysis of recent research**

Challenges associated with the management of library system in the Soviet Union were researched by Soviet, Russian and Ukrainian scientists. Among others there are interesting studies of K.I. Abramov, E.I. Kuzmin, Y.M. Stolyarov and other scientists, who conducted their studies as part of the historical, political, economic, sociological and pedagogical sciences.

Without discretion the importance of the above written authors, it is necessary to say that issues of the formation of state regulation system of libraries in the USSR are not fully analyzed. Articles of the above written authors mainly focus on individual aspects of the library sector, such as library history, libraries collections organization and training of librarians.

#### **Statement of research objectives**

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the development of library management system in the USSR during 1917-1945.

#### **Results**

When analyzing the origins of the Soviet state, it is necessary to note that the October Revolution of 1917 brought big changes to the organization of library sphere in the Russian Empire. As opposed to the February Revolution of 1917 that established democratic regulations of library system, the Bolsheviks set a goal of library reform to implement principles of class, party, rejection from tenets proclaimed in February 1917 of civil and human rights and free development of public and private initiatives in librarianship.

The foundation of a fundamentally different approach to library organization, which was described as a ‘socialist development of libraries, was created in 1917 – 1920. Since that time, the libraries had become one of the most ideological social institutions.

Mastermind for the transformation of the Soviet library was V. I. Lenin, who noted that the Party and the working class were interested to make libraries conductors of socialist ideology in his article “Party Organization and Party Literature” (1905). Literature had to become a part of the general proletarian purpose: “publishing houses and warehouses, shops and reading rooms,

libraries and similar books sellers should report to the Party” [9, p. 101].

In July 1918, Lenin at a meeting of the CPC paid attention of the People’s Commissar to the lack of his concern for correct formulation of library work in Russia, and recommended to Commissariat to “immediately take drastic measures, firstly, for the organization of library work in Russia, secondly, for the implementation of the Swiss-American system” [2, p. 8].

Lenin initiated the centralization of library system that was progressive in general, because it was aimed at rationalization of public owned books, required the elimination of interdepartmental fragmentation and helped to strengthen the interlibrary cooperation. The implementation of Swiss-American system of library business was democratic, because it was supposed to strengthen the international ties of national libraries, mutual enrichment and exchange of experience in library work.

In June 1918 the Decree of the Council of People’s Commissars “On protection of libraries and books”, according to which all libraries in the country were accounted and put under protection of the People’s Commissariat of Education, which was supposed to decide who used libraries after the revolution, was published. Libraries passed into state ownership, ownership of public organizations, and others [3].

Lenin proposed the idea of library politicization, complete submission of library tasks to the building of the socialist society. It was prepared by him and adopted at the VIII Congress of the CPSU (b) in 1919 to the party program. Libraries and other educational institutions were characterized as “guides of the principles of communism” in the masses of working people. The main tasks were to develop the most widespread campaign of communist ideas and to use all levers of governments influence for that purpose. The program also declared the necessity of comprehensive state aid to “self-education and self-development of workers and peasants”, the creation of an extensive network of libraries and other educational institutions. After that V. Lenin repeatedly emphasized purposes of libraries: “because without habituation of more and more people to use libraries, it is impossible to rebuild half-Asian country into socialist and cultural state” [10, p. 112-114].

In May 1919 at the First Common Russian Congress on edge education the question of

foundation of an organized libraries network was discussed [11]. The main principles of the CPC Decree "On the centralization of library science in the RSFSR" were the general availability of libraries and its integration into a single library network. The issue of foundation of "truly unified library network" V. Lenin discussed in the article "On the work of the People's Commissariat" [12]. In particular, under limited financial resources, he suggested to send three copies of the newspaper "Pravda" and "Izvestia" and two copies of all required textbooks and works of the world literature classics, books on science and technology free of charge to each of the 50,000 libraries and reading rooms of the country. These measures allowed having an equal access to information for each person in the country. The selection of "Pravda" and "Izvestia" newspapers was not accidental, because they were the main party newspapers. So the Communist Party, by providing them free of charge, formed the communist view of the world.

Thus, V. Lenin regarded libraries primarily as centers of workers, political education that was subordinated to the general problem of communist society, building. Lenin's demands collided with libraries fundamental democratic principles that were established in the national library sphere after the February Revolution.

The concept of cultural politicization was reflected in the principle of leading and guiding role of the Communist Party in the library system. The party by using Lenin's guidance led the formation of Soviet library as a new library type with its objectives and content. Library sphere has always been considered an integral part of the ideological work of the Communist Party and the support base of party organizations in deployment of mass political agitation and propaganda work among the population in order to wake initiatives and involve in the socialist transformation process.

These new requirements for librarianship are reflected in the following important Party documents: Program of the CPSU (b), resolutions and decisions of party congresses and plenums of its Central Committee. New demands targeted librarians to implement active propaganda of socialism and communism among workers and to attract them to socialism construction. Thus, an important role in the indoctrination of library work had the resolution of the VIII Congress of the CPSU (b) "On the political propaganda and cultural work in rural areas" (1919) [8]. It became the policy document for all libraries in the country.

According to the resolution, the educational work among the population should include: Communist propaganda and dissemination of general and agricultural (production) knowledge. Work in this area was supposed to be well coordinated.

Exploring the emergence of legal forms of state regulation of libraries, it's necessary to note that at the end of 1920s the Glavpolitprosvet of RSFSR was created in Russia: the main task of this organization was to unite all political educational, propaganda and educational work in the country and focusing it on political and economic construction. The Glavpolitprosvet coordinated public libraries and other educational institutions. The terms of "edge education", "cultural and educational work" were replaced by the term of "political-educational work". Thereby, it was emphasized that the main tasks of libraries and other political and educational establishments from that moment were political and educational activities. The Glavpolitprosvet was controlled by the Central Committee of the CPSU (b). The work of the provincial and district Politprosvet was controlled by local Party committees.

After Ukraine's accession into the Soviet Union in 1922 the ideological developments of the Central Committee of CPSU (b) were used by the Communist Party of Ukraine.

The Communist Party restored library censorship from the first months. First, it was connected with nationalization and requisition in bookstores, libraries and private book collections. Most of books were found to be unsuitable for the reading of broad masses. First of all, monarchical, religious, reactionary literature sources, coving dormant laws, counter communist and socialism books were withdrawn.

In 1918 the first purge of public libraries funds was held under the supervision of the People's Commissar. The main aim was the withdrawal of politically harmful and counter-revolutionary literature. The organizers of purges were party and Komsomol cell, councils, departments of the Cheka.

In 1920s, after the transformation of edge education department of the People's Commissariat in to the political-educational department, the last initiated the publication of the first Soviet Instruction "On browse of directories and withdrawal of unsuitable literature". It was sent to all library sections and departments of education at the second half of 1920s. It offered to proceed with an immediate withdrawal of a whole

category of literature, as well as to separate books. These categories primarily contained propaganda books and pamphlets of non-communism content, such as: on the Constituent Assembly, universal suffrage, democratic republic, the Constitution, the rights and freedoms of citizens and others; seized all books with monarchy, spiritual, moral content, except for the Gospel, the Koran, the Talmud, and old Soviet propaganda literature, pornographic publications, etc.

Due to the fact that the libraries were considered as support institutions in the system of public education, general management of libraries was entrusted to the Commissariat. The library department was created to guide the research libraries (state, public, academic, university, etc.) in the People's Commissariat in February 1918. After government movement in Moscow in July 1918 the Department of Research Libraries was formed. Its activity involved reorganization of scientific libraries, security, nationalization and distribution of requisitioned books among libraries. It organized more than 20 provincial, regional and district committees and commissions.

In order to manage libraries at schools and for library sections or sub-sections for children under the relevant sections of the Commissariat were also established in the People's Commissariat. Thus, during the first phase of the Soviet library construction there was an inconsistency state regulation of library system in the People's Commissariat, which adversely affected the development of the general plan of the library development. Therefore, extra effort was required for coordination and coherence in the work.

The library management was established for the first time in the history of the Russian Empire after the October Revolution. These steps indicate the important role of libraries for the Soviet regime. Wide network of libraries was created. The concept of libraries, copied from the American model, was developed. It proclaimed that every town should have library; not just cities and towns, but also remote villages [4, p. 109].

The main party-state document that defined the program of library development in early 1920s became the Decree "On the centralization of library science in the RSFSR" (3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 1921). This document targeted systematic organization of libraries, elimination barriers among them and foundation of the centralized library network in the country. Legal act defined a new stage of reform of librarianship, enforced cooperation,

collaboration and coordination among public and academic libraries and influenced library policies of the Soviet republics. In Ukraine, the People's Commissariat created the Ukrainian central library interdepartmental commission for the implementation of centralization, organization and management of library science in November 1921. Libraries were treated as public cultural educational institutions; common methodological frameworks were developed; the reform of librarianship was started.

The data on "issues of librarianship, which were considered at the meetings of the CPC" [1, p. 252-255] are presented in the monograph of K.I. Abramov. In 1918, the CPC was considering librarianship 13 times in 1919 – 11 times in 1920 – 9 times. While there was no special law in the Soviet period, library activities were regulated by the huge amount of various acts passed by both state and party authorities.

Despite the fact that the library system entered into new stage of historical development, proposals on library legislation in the early years have continued to appear. In an editorial of the Glavpolitprosvet "Red librarian" journal in 1924, the article "About the library laws" was published. It says that "... the field of library work that covers more than 10 institutions (libraries of various types) with an extremely valuable asset of books, with great number of readers and inevitable misunderstandings in the work, have no documents under which it is possible to solve problems" [14].

In addition to issues of legislative regulation of libraries, the Soviet regime prepared staff for libraries due to political nature of librarianship and political orientation of all aspects of theory and practice of books. Therefore, the systematic training of highly qualified personnel for libraries has started since 1921. The Faculty of Political Education was organized at Kharkov Institute of Education. It trained personnel for libraries [5, p. 730-731].

In Ukraine public administration of librarianship was characterized by extreme contradictions: on the one hand, there was a constant search for new solutions and, on the other, totalitarian regime established strict control over all spheres of public and professional life and eliminated all forms of non-state libraries.

The beginning of library censorship in the Soviet Union of this period was the "Instruction on the revision of the Book in Libraries" (1923),



which obliged to destroy the documents that impeded the implementation of the Bolshevik regime. Readers were prohibited to give ideologically harmful literature [7]. Following the adoption of this Instruction book funds purging were held in 1923, 1926 and 1929. According to statistics, during the 1925 – 1926 586 libraries were checked (265 school libraries were checked) and 77,291 units of “harmful literature” were withdrawn from Ukraine [13].

The first Congress on librarianship in the Soviet Union was in 1924. It was stated that the Soviet library is an instrument of communist ideology in its resolutions. The First Common Ukrainian Congress of the library took place in 1926 in Kharkiv. Questions of library building in Ukraine considering the needs of the workers and peasants in the context of the tasks of socialist construction were discussed at the congress [16].

The ideological pressure on the organization of library services became stronger in the 1930s. The ideas were aggressively introduced in librarians' minds that their primary concern was the political education of population, transformation of libraries into centers of active promotion of masses on the implementation of the five-year plan for socialist construction. After the recognition of unsatisfactory state of the librarianship the Communist Party found it necessary to expand network of libraries and to improve their financial situation in a special resolution “On measures on improvement of library work” (October 1929). The focus was on opening the libraries in the work centers, state and collective farms, in all other areas where it was necessary for building the socialist society.

The editorial “Golden Fund of Soviet Culture” published in the central party newspaper “Pravda” (1935), strongly called to use library books for the purpose of communism and the party-educational work the required to infiltrate all their activity to “our socialist commitment, partisanship, erase the spirit of neutrality and culture” [6].

During this period the censorship of library system increased. Resolution of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) proposed to make a review of the libraries book store in the 1929-1930 and purge libraries from ideologically harmful, outdated literature.

Along with the negative aspects of the state regulation of library system, there were also positive changes. There were effective measures to strengthen material and technical condition of

the libraries. The government ordered to extend the publication of popular literature and to reserve a certain number of it exclusively for acquisition of libraries. For these purposes a network of collectors, who made centralized acquisition of library collections, was developed. Libraries were forbidden to move into inhospitable areas.

In the Resolution of the CEC of the USSR “On Libraries in the USSR” (1934), the Republican People's Commissariat, central and local trade union bodies pledged to establish a “solid estimates of libraries” and to send funds constantly to the purchase new books. The State Planning Committee of the USSR and the People's Commissariat of the USSR were supposed to take into account in their financial plans a “mandatory of increase funds for the library system” [15].

Since the mid-1930s government management of librarianship had strengthened. In all Soviet Republics the library departments under supervision of Commissariats of Education were created. Departments had functions of state control upon libraries.

The management of public library organizations took a significant place in the government management of librarianship in the country. For example, the creation and association of academic and special libraries continued in the 1930s. Generally, they occurred on voluntary initiative of the library staff.

The emergence of Library Associations was an urgent need of time, which required developing and strengthening cooperation and coordination of research libraries. Libraries of various departments and organizations, whose employees at meetings solved actual problems of library construction, participated in the associations meetings offered to deploy the activities of library associations and to create regional library associations. There was also an idea to create the Common Union Library Association.

The network of libraries, reading rooms in houses and other rural clubs, in collective farms and state farms, machine and tractor stations was expanded in villages to eliminate degradation of libraries. The task of deploying a network of public libraries in the districts and village councils was solved slowly. Thus, it was planned to build an independent district library in each area in the USSR in 1936, but it was not realized due to the lack of funds.

The attention to the expansion of libraries, network on largest construction, automobile,

tractor and other heavy industries, as well as on the collective and state farms and machine-tractor stations had been significantly increased since the beginning of 1930s.

In order to quickly eliminate the libraries backlog in the country side, the libraries network expansion in reading rooms, village clubs, collective farms, state farms and machine-tractor stations (MTS) was started. There was a plan to have independent library in each area district, but it was not realized not during the first nor the second five-year plan due to the lack of funds. In the mid-1930s more than 50% of rural areas had central district library. There was one library for each 8-10 rural councils.

Since the mid 1930s the government librarianship had strengthened. The library departments under Commissariats of Education were created in all republics. They were entrusted with state control over the activities of all types and kinds of libraries, regardless of which agency or organization they belonged to. In the autonomous republics and other central trade union councils library sectors were created. In regional and city Departments of Education the position of library inspector was established.

Activities of the USSR Government in the 1930s were focused on the introduction of state control of the People's Commissariat of Education over libraries of all types. State policy in the field of library sphere was aimed at centralization and unification of libraries, unification of the librarianship management.

The provisions on the librarianship were introduced and were applied in the second half of 1930s in order to achieve this goal of the Soviet Union. The research organizational process was conducted to develop national standards of service for "usual" reader, guidance of reading and self-education. The monitoring of the literature content was provided by party organs of the Communist Party.

The library censorship increased. The party management tried to cleanse libraries from ideologically harmful literature.

The Central Russian Book Chamber, which was the follower the Common Union Book Chamber of the early 1920s, was created in 1936 in Moscow. It became the center of public bibliography and statistics in the USSR. The Book Chamber was entrusted with updating depositories of the largest libraries in the country on the basis of legal deposit by publishers. On this basis state

Book Depositories, libraries funding, registration and account of national press, bibliographic services were established. In the 1920s the system of legal deposit for libraries became widespread in other Soviet Republics, where appropriate legislation was adopted and the Republican Book Houses were created. For example, according to the Resolution of the Council of People's Commissars of the Ukrainian SSR, the Ukrainian Book Chamber in Kharkiv under the State Publishing House of the USSR was organized in June 27, 1922.

Public policy and regulations of the profile of library collections was carried out primarily through the creation of new legislation on legal deposit. In September 13th, 1933 the Resolution of the Central Executive Committee (CEC) and the Council of People's Commissars (SNK) of USSR "On the supply of major public depositories with publications appearing in the USSR" were adopted. The centralized control system of legal deposit at all levels included the creation of a new content of library collections.

The process of network formation of public libraries by the state administrative-territorial principle in the member states of the USSR had been finished by the Second World War. In the postwar period the party and state management of librarianship was significantly strengthened. In the Russian SFSR the Committee for cultural and educational institutions of the Russian Federation on the Rights of the Republican People's Commissariat was formed. Branches of cultural and educational work were organized in other republics' departments and in the rural areas. State regulation of library sector was created to manage public libraries while scientific libraries had responsibilities to provide state control of public, academic and special libraries of all departments.

### **Conclusions**

Therefore, it can be concluded that the library sector in Ukraine at the beginning of the Soviet period did not satisfy cultural needs of the people. It mainly served to the ideological needs of the Communist Party. State regulation of library sector under the totalitarian system used command-administrative methods of governance. Moreover, public policy in this area did not exist as an objective reality, but as an ideological quest. It was implemented, first of all, according to the interests of the state, its structures and social institutions.

The USSR had solved the problem of the elimination of illiteracy in limited terms with the

active participation of public libraries. However, a practical rejection from orientation on the local governments, the interests of a particular area was the negative feature of the public libraries in the totalitarian state.

Future researches in this direction might analyze the development of librarianship in the Soviet Ukraine and its state regulation in the years 1945-1991 with the purpose to understand the state of library science, mechanisms and methods of state regulation of this sphere by the time of Ukraine's independence.

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