

What is Useful and Responsible History? Examples from the History of the Soviet Union and Today's Russia

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Examination of the present situation in contemporary Russian historiography reveals the very important changes in the whole historiographical process in modern Russia. First of all we need to take into consideration that in 20th century Russian historiography there has been for the second time a turning point in the interpretation of Russian and world history. The first turning point was the time after the 1917's revolution, the second the period of Gorbachev and after. Practically for the second time in this century the whole interpretation of main directions of world and domestic history processes, methods of historical research, new archival data resulted in new approaches in historical didactics, new teaching methods, new textbooks etc. Describing this phenomenon, we can't forget the few somehow «absolute ideas», which practically exist in any Post-Soviet interpretation of the XXth century historical processes.

Among these «absolute ideas» I'd like to mention the following:

- Importance and significance of Soviet history for the world history process in the XXth century;
- practical policy and ideas of the Russian revolution and its influence on world history;
- the USSR role in world policy during and after the Second World War. Its outstanding importance and influence.

All such conclusions, practically, are widely spread in many books and textbooks. But, simultaneously, we need to mention that as the case already was at the beginning of the century, not all concepts and interpretations of the new past were verified by practice. Of course, such rapid, considerable changes as we have seen in this century our history had never known before. The Post-Soviet situation shows us an absolutely new phenomenon in historiography process: Looking for new national ideas. It leads to new interpretations of national history. This process covers not only Russian but Ukrainian, Belorussian and other national historiographies. As a result, we can find different explanations of the same episodes of Soviet history in textbooks of new independent states (famine 1932/33, Second World War events etc.)

In the last 5 - 7 years a lot of attempts in preparing programs and textbooks for schools and universities of a new generation have been made. Among them are textbooks on history of the XXth century for school: *Peace in the XXth Century* (ed. O. S. Soroko-Tsupa), V. P. Ostrovsky and A. I. Utkin: *History of Russia. XXth Century*, A. A. Kreder: *Current History of the XXth Century*, etc. Textbooks for Universities: *Our Fatherland. Vol. 2* (ed. S. V. Kuleshov, O. V. Volobuev, E. I. Pivovarov), A. S. Orlov, V. A. Georgiev, N. G. Georgieva, T. A. Sivokhina: *History of Russia. XXth century* (ed. V. P. Dmitrenko). Besides, a few western textbooks for university students were translated and published in Russian (N. Vert, G. Hosking, E. Geller and A. Nekrich, etc.).

Practically, there is a variety of historical textbooks and programs in Russia today. And school teachers have the possibility to choose one or many of those for their classes. Besides, the very standards of historical education has changed considerably and has become more flexible.

With changes in school program and structure, the context of textbooks is based on the transition in interpretation of Soviet history in the last decade. There is no topic which does not reflect this. Among them new interpretations of 1917-1920 revolutionary and civil war events, Russian emigration to the west, last year of Lenin's life, Stalin's regime, in general and great purges, in particular, the policy of the great leap in the 30s, the USSR in World War II, the USSR during the Cold War period, the creation of the Soviet military industrial complex, Khrushchev's and many others' reforms.

We can't forget another point. I mean the real revolution in access to archival materials in Post-Soviet Russia. A lot of documents never acceptable before appeared not only in research books and at conferences, but also in regular school textbooks. This was the result of activities of many historians, who published documents devoted to black spots of the Russian history of the XXth century. The very list of such black spots is very long. As an example, we have chosen only one new textbook for 11th form devoted to Soviet history.

This is the textbook prepared by V. P Ostrovsky and A. I. Utkin in 1995. It contains a special section: a collection of documents to every chapter. Among 125 such documents 75 were impossible to be mentioned and published within the country 5 - 7 years ago. What is the character of such documents? Letters, appeals, memoirs, declarations etc. We mean, for example, Leo Tolstoj's letters to Nicholas II, papers by L. Trotsky and N. Bukharin, Khrushchev's memoirs, texts by N. Berdyaev, P. Milukov, documents of A. Sarharov, secret documentation of Soviet regime authorities, letters of rank and file people about Stalin's regime, resistance activities etc.

All these examples are showing very considerable changes in history education at school and the new political situation in Russia today. Such a situation leads to a growing responsibility for historians in general and historical didactics in particular.