

# Public Education and Democracy (1915)

By Nadezhda Krupskaya

*While Anatoli Lunacharsky was head of the commissariat and leader of the collective building the Soviet schools, the leading pedagogical figure was Nadezhda Krupskaya, Lenin's close comrade and companion. A revolutionary Marxist from the late 1890s on, Krupskaya endured five years of Siberian imprisonment and later acted as secretary of the Bolshevik faction, coordinating the work of building an underground party in the tsarist empire. At the same time, during ten years of exile in Europe, she undertook a study of educational reformers from Robert Owen, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Leo Tolstoy to Comenius, J.H. Pestalozzi and John Dewey, and in 1915 wrote a booklet titled Public Education and Democracy.*

*The monograph was published in early 1917 when tsarist censorship still held sway. In a 1920 preface, Krupskaya wrote that she would have preferred to title it Public Education and the Working Class. In that preface (excerpted below), she traces the origins of the idea of labor education.*

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In this essay, author's aim is to investigate how in a democratic milieu the perspective took shape of the need to unite productive labor with intellectual development in the sphere of public education.

This viewpoint arose at a time when large-scale industry began massively employing and exploiting child labor. In the 17th century, the English writer John Bellers was the first to call attention to the need to combine learning with productive labor.

In 18th century and at the beginning of the 19th, this concept found its defenders not only in England but also on the continent. Rousseau ardently defended this idea and his stand on the issue received an enthusiastic response in France, Switzerland, and Germany. In France, the National Convention sought to realize the idea through legislation,<sup>1</sup> while in Switzerland the ardent democrat [Johann] Pestalozzi devoted his life and all of his possessions to demonstrating in practice how productive labor can be used in popular education. In the name of workers democracy, Marx and Engels put forward this idea from the 1850s on, developing and giving it a scientific basis. In *Capital*, Marx shows how technological progress itself creates the need for a highly trained, polytechnically educated worker with multiple skills.

However, the idea of uniting the intellectual development with the physical development, of joining together conventional learning with productive labor, advocated by thinkers of the 18th century, as well as their experience in that regard, were soon forgotten. This was because during the first three quarters of the 19th century, capital required only simple, unskilled labor, which did not demand of the worker initiative, intelligence, knowledge and agility. The voices of democrats demanding all-sided public education, based on combining broad intellectual development with preparation for the most diverse kinds of physical labor, remained a voice crying out in the wilderness. It is true that the number of the public school was growing, yet

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<sup>1</sup> In the period from 1792 to 1795, at the height of the French Revolution, the National Convention established a system of polytechnical education and a national teacher training institute.

these were the conventional schools, where physical labor was excluded and which only taught reading, writing and arithmetic. They mainly focused on bringing up well-behaved, obedient workers. In the 20th century, tremendous technical progress has given rise with particular force to a new tendency of modern technology: vigorous machine labor. There is a growing demand for an well-rounded educated, skilled workers, who can quickly adjust to constantly changing and evolving machinery and production processes.

Of course, this tendency was found at first in the most industrially developed countries: America and Germany. Leading capitalist countries begin to pay particular attention to the development of workers who are well-prepared for labor: they organize all sorts of professional schools, evening courses, etc. As the demand for educated workers grows, they try to convert the technical into conventional learning, they begin to combine it with the basic education, and with that purpose they reform public education. In America, and lately in Germany, conventional schools are being converted into so-called “labor schools” (Arbeits-schule). Labor schools, however, cannot be built on the principals of conventional schools. It requires the fostering of initiative in its pupils, the development of individuality in its pupils. Repression of the pupil’s personality, external discipline, is hardly compatible with the tasks of the labor school. New methods demand a completely new teaching staff. A teacher used to holding onto routine and waiting for the instructions for every step is useless for such a school. Labor schools requires a living relationship to them, they require individualization. Old forms of control become impossible to achieve. It is necessary to have self-management on the part of the pupils, control by the population. But not only control by the population is needed, the widest cooperation is required. Labor schools presuppose a close relationship between learning and production, and this is not possible without the involvement of the working people and their organizations in the task.

Economic development strongly demands the transformation of conventional schools into labor schools, but such a transformation is not possible without reorganizing the whole sphere of the public education.

But at the end of the essay, Krupskaya concludes:

As long as the organization of schools remains in the hands of the bourgeoisie, the labor school will remain a weapon aimed against the interests of the working class. Only the working class is capable of making the labor school into “a weapon of transformation in a modern society”. ■

## **Concerning the Question of Socialist Schools (1918)**

**By Nadezhda Krupskaya**

*Krupskaya’s investigation laid the basis for the revolutionary educational program implemented by the Bolsheviks following the 1917 October Revolution. In the essay excerpted here, published in 1918, she emphasized the need not merely to extend education to the masses previously excluded from access to culture by the bourgeoisie, but to transform the schools to serve the interests of the working class. Attempts at curriculum reform in the interest of the exploited and oppressed or to democratize the educational system will be frustrated so long as the capitalist rulers hold sway. It will take a socialist revolution to make thorough-going educational reform a reality.*

In a bourgeois state – whether it is a monarchy or a republic – the school serves as an instrument for the spiritual enslavement of broad masses.

Its objective in such a state is determined not by the interest of the pupils but by those of the ruling class, i.e. the bourgeoisie, and the interests of the two often differ quite substantially.

The school's objective determines the entire organization of school activities, the entire structure of school life and the entire substance of school education....

In serving the interests of the masses the government of workers and peasants must break the schools' class character and make schools at all levels accessible to all sections of the population. It must do this not in words but in deeds. Until the objectives of schools are changed education will remain a class privilege of the bourgeoisie. The population is interested in ensuring that elementary, secondary and post-secondary schools serve a single objective, namely, the education of comprehensively developed people possessing conscious and organized social instincts, an integral, well thought-out world view and a clear understanding of everything that takes place in nature and in society; people who are prepared both in theory and in practice to undertake all types of labor, both physical and mental, and who are able to construct a meaningful, rational, beautiful and happy life in society. Such people are needed to a socialist society, for without them socialism cannot be fully achieved.

What kind of schools are capable of molding such people?

First, schools must do everything in their power to improve the health of the younger generation: they should provide children with nutritious food, health-giving sleep, warm and comfortable clothing, hygienic care, clean, fresh air, and sufficient physical exercise. All this is given by the ruling classes to their own children but it should be made available to all children regardless their parents' property status. In the summer schools should be moved to rural areas....

The domestic situation of most of the population is not conducive to the development of children's senses and creativity. This is why it is important to set up an adequate number of kindergartens to accommodate all children. These kindergartens should be organized in such a way as to give scope to each child's individuality. They must not be barracks in which small children are forced to march at the sound of a bell, move at the command of teachers ...

Thus, kindergartens, elementary schools and secondary schools form closely interconnected links in the overall development. The most important distinguishing feature of socialist schools should be that their only objective is the pupil's fullest possible and most comprehensive development. They must not suppress his individuality but only help develop it. Socialist schools are schools of freedom in which there is no room for regimentation, rote learning and cramming.

But as they help to mold individuality, schools must also prepare pupils so that they will know how to express this individuality in generally useful labor. This is why a second distinguishing feature of socialist schools should be the wide development of productive work by children. Much is said today about the labor method of instruction, but in a socialist school it is necessary not only to apply the labor method but also to organize the productive work by children. Socialists are opposed to the exploitation of child labor, but they naturally support comprehensive, developing labor for children that is within their capabilities. Productive labor not only prepares children to become useful members of society in the future, but also makes them useful members of society today, and a child's awareness of that fact possesses an enormous educational significance....

Socialist schools are conceivable only in specific social conditions, for they are made socialist not by the fact that they are directed by socialists but by the fact that their objectives correspond to the needs of a socialist society. In individual cases schools could emerge in a capitalist society that also set as their goal the education of comprehensively developed people with pronounced individualities and social instincts, who are equally capable of engaging in both physical and mental labor. But in a capitalist system such schools could only be isolated, hardly viable phenomena. As the young man educated in such a school left it, he would encounter an atmosphere that quickly reduced all the fruits of his education to naught. In society built on a division of people into those who engage in intellectual labor and those who engage in physical labor, he would have to choose one or the other type of labor, and his ability to perform “comprehensive” labor would atrophy. Moreover, the choice of a particular type of labor would not depend on him, but on his pocketbook and his social connections. A propertyless person having “connections” only among workers would be assigned to the category of persons engaged in physical labor, regardless of the course his own life had taken, and once having been assigned to that category would have to share the lot of those living by selling their labor. And here his pronounced individuality would only be a hindrance and would make monotonous imposed labor even more onerous, even more unbearable. Strongly developed social instincts were applicable only when the young man was a fighter by nature. In other cases these instincts were only a source of suffering. As for fighters, socialist schools in capitalist societies could produce them only in exceptional cases. Fighters must pass through the severe school of life, while socialist schools embedded in bourgeois systems could be nothing but exotic plants and institutions isolated from life. And since socialist schools could not be viable institutions in a capitalist system, they could at best only be interesting pedagogical experiments. They could only be private institutions, not public, for the physiognomy of public schools was determined by the ruling class, the class of the bourgeoisie, and the objectives that it set were altogether different. In organizing the school system the bourgeoisie proceeded from its own interests and from the desire to ensure its own class domination rather than from the interests of individuals and of society.

Only a people’s government can, in organizing schools, proceed from the well-being of the individual and society.... If the characteristic features of the capitalist system were the senseless squandering of manpower and excessive labor on the part of some and the forced idleness of others, then the characteristic feature of a socialist system must be the rational, planned and most expedient distribution of labor among all people and the transformation of labor from forced activity into a voluntary one. ■