

## **Ideas of social justice in soviet and post soviet textbooks for primary school.**

### *Introduction*

According to the classic definition ([John Rawls](#)) justice is a set of rules and principles of social order, which are accepted by different people, who do not know yet what social status they will have. By “social justice” Russian authors means conciliation of private freedom and wellbeing with public welfare in whole. Social justice is always connected with people’s ideals about the social order and the existing social order as well as with the comparison of these notions with each other.

The concept of justice is extremely important for the rising generations to choose their perspectives and behavior models. In every culture generally as well as in every pedagogical culture in particularly at this or that time of historical development the concept of social justice takes a different position in the hierarchy of values that have to be transferred to the rising generations.

The power elite include its own myth about social justice into the social system without fail. The socialization of a child more and more depends during the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the state activity and first of all on school as a state institution. In school everyday life a textbook takes the dominant place. Until nowadays it introduces knowledge of the social order principles to Russian pupils as something standard, which does not need any critical thinking. This knowledge is presented to a child and his or her surroundings as generally valid. A number of stereotypes and prejudices in contents of textbooks influences on a) pupils’ willingness to accept or reject the existence of social justice and fair interrelations, b) their attitude to educational system and educational process itself as accessible or inaccessible “way to the top”, c) their ability to recognize

the entitlement of an alius on difference, and d) ability to recognize own responsibility for reproduction of social injustice and discrimination. The presence in school books of a positive (sometimes implicit) assumption of social injustice convinces children and adults that there is no fair alternative to such view of social relations.

In some cultures the distinctions between fair and unfair things in our everyday life are rather vague. They permit more violence to a person. In other cultures vice-verse these distinctions are rather strict and they are intolerant to social, economic and ideological violence. In the same culture at different steps of historical development there may be different “thresholds of justice”. Traditions of political struggle and subordination play rather important role.

In the system of beyond the constitution rules and national values of the Russian culture the idea of justice per se is situated very high but it is not connected with such high position of the value of an individual. Historically the notion “justice” derives from the meaning “fairness” that is to find justice for a criminal. In pedagogy there is a great number of nonequivalent childish and adult conceptions of justice. In the global world of 2000s the problems of social justice do not lose their urgency, but vice-verse their importance goes up and up. The subject of the justice discourse focuses upon states, society systems, nations, transnational corporations, military and political alliances and organizations, etc. The (in)justice problem is in the centre of many discussions. The understanding of what (in)justice is goes back to the childhood of representatives of different generations and cultures, who take part in these discussions. The feeling of fairness acquired in childhood helps people all their life to negotiate with each other and coordinate their behaviors. The discussion about justice at school is so called survival training. The absence or incorrectly formulated

existential problems of justice in soviet and post soviet text books has led to minimization of self-respect.

As a rule when they speak about social justice in education, they mean first of all the possibility to realize children's constitutional right to gain good education regardless of their place of abode in Russia. It means that they all have equal access to all educational levels. But the problem of social justice is much more complicated. In text books there are different levels of this problem, not only the idea of equal access to education. We need to study this problem entirely taking into account explicit as well as implicit context of text books, which corresponds with common understanding of the essence of social justice, and rooted in the soviet time heritage, and which is changing nowadays.

*The development of the problem of social justice up to 1990s.*

The revolutionary ideology of the Bolshevik party having won in 1917 provided establishing of universal social fairness. And a new educational system being built on the ruins of the old prerevolutionary one focused on that utopian goal. Justice was understood first of all as destruction of any exploitation and establishing of fair labor and public relations. That ideology was proclaimed in the country where the gap between the rich and the poor was much bigger and constantly growing compared to more developed European regions because of relative backwardness from industrialized European countries and started modernization. The problems of social injustice were widely and keenly discussed by Russian intelligentsia at the beginning of XX century. (Intelligentsia was a social group of educated people, who alienated and opposed to the government.) Archaic peasant society had its own understanding of justice, but it also perceived that countryside was torn

by contradictions and life there was far from fairness. There were different movements among industrial workers. Some of them were eager to solve the problem of establishing fair and respectful relations with plant or fabric management in a constructive way. But the others insisted on enterprise expropriation and achieving justice by means of workers' self-government. In whole the threshold of justice feeling was rather low because the conception of individual personality was not developed. Tsar's government was not interested in strengthening of the idea of its value.

During its overthrowing the problem of fair social relations became the most important one. Devastation, the Civil war, mass violence and disturbances intensified mass expectations for fair order after the beginning of world building in the middle of 1920s. It was necessary to create new pedagogy aimed to bring up for a new fair world order a new personality, who was able to think by the concentration of inner perfections and who was devoted to the winning party and building of socialism. Socialism per se had to mean abolishing of any injustice.

The conception of new civil upbringing concentrated the idea of bringing up a feeling of justice in an individual. But justice was defined by means of class criteria: they considered everything fair that was used for the benefit of the working class, which struggled for Communism all over the world. In text book they began to use topics and images of justice struggle and its achievements with respect to earlier oppressed groups. Reality of the Soviet country was far from the social justice. So the proclaimed ideas of fair world order in the body of soviet school texts were inexpressive regardless of their explicit ideological nature. The number of the topics devoted to the fair world order in the pre-revolutionary text books for primary school was at times bigger than their specific weight in post revolutionary text books. The collapse of the

soviet system at the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s temporarily intensified the discussion of social justice problems. How do they show fair relationships between pupils and their peers and adults and on the whole the ideas of social justice in modern Russian school literature?

*Method. Sample.*

For our research we have not used pedagogical theories and political declarations of the government and parties. But we have used school textbooks as mediators between politics, pedagogy, culture and everyday school life. We have analyzed texts of ABC books and primers for last twenty years according to 38 criteria, which were coded at least by two researchers. We deliberately chose text books for primary school because firstly, these very books start systematically to indoctrinate growing up generations, and secondly they much more seldom become the subject of scientific researches than text books for secondary and high school. Because of the complexity their context analysis for the researchers of political ideology compared to textbooks on history and geography for secondary school and textbooks on ethics and religion for higher school and so on.

Geographically we take into account the modern borders of post-soviet Russia. Chronological borders of our investigations are from the collapse of USSR up to present time (for comparison we used soviet textbooks and German textbooks of XX century). We realize that the analysis of textbooks cannot a complete picture. We admit that there are some teachers who have critical attitude to textbooks and are able to suggest their pupils alternative or multidimensional views to the world. But apparently the number of such teachers is not very big, and their influence cannot be compared to that of mass textbooks. We have not

tried to assess the work of specific textbooks authors. Eventually they like everybody could be hostages of prevalent comprehension standards of social differences and accessibility threshold of social injustice.

School textbooks help to create understanding of social norm – what problems are important, what deserves our attention and what can be neglected. Textbooks contain implicit ideas fair people’s relationships with each other and society. Our task was to reconstruct a procedure of the world picture establishment with its social justice concept, and to demonstrate existing handling rules of social justice differences and ideals inside the textbook discourse.

Social reality and its conventional concept are specifically organized in the textbook language and in the context of the texts. They are reproduced during categorizing process and demonstration of reality the picture prepared for schoolchildren. The demonstration of fair and/or unfair social order of reality can be seen by the means of reconstruction of explicit and implicit topics discussed in textbooks for primary school.

### *Results*

Having analyzed textbooks for primary school for the last twenty years we managed to single out 17 dominating topics considering social justice problems from the positive side, 11 topics denying justice, and 10 topics directly concerning the problem of social justice, but which are not reflected in textbooks. These 38 topics connected with the social justice ideology became benchmarks to identify the level of social justice understanding by textbooks authors.

#### **Positive topics:**

1. MUTUAL ASSISTENCE and MUTUAL AID are presented as socially fair actions. An unfair person is someone who does not help.

Such character deserves punishment and boycott. Mutual assistance is the basement of wellbeing, peace and safety.

2. EQUALITY, this topic was emphasized in 1920s, but then it appeared less and less in textbooks for primary school. In 2000s it has been only once mentioned in a new post soviet theme about human rights.

3. PROVERBS ARE STANDARDS OF TRADITIONAL JUSTICE. In post soviet period they are widely used, but inside rather limited set of standards “educational topics” where in the post soviet period they have included the “God” and “Its Commandments” theme together with the following topics: work, study, friendship, motherland and seasons. They do not discuss ambivalence of proverbs.

4. MUTUAL CAUSE IS FAIRER THAN PRIVATE ONE. When a person takes part common business and devotes all his time and strength to it, it means he is fair. They approve only group games and entertainments. As if children do not play alone, and problem of children loneliness does not exist during the primary school period.

5. TOLERANCE AND DIPLOMACY AGAINST TEASING RHYMES AND MALICE, HUMAN ATTITUDE TO THE OTHER. They have emphasized that friendly and sympathetic tone, external favor to other people help better to achieve somebody’s goals, to acquire authority than communication from the position of strength. Diplomacy is fair, and teaches to respect each other.

6. PUNISHMENT IS FAIR. RESTORATION OF LOST is nominated as a justified action.

7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SOMEBODY’S SERVICE. A child is suggested that fair attitude to anybody depends on amount of somebody’s services. The textbook teaches you should deserve fair attitude.

8. INEVITABILITY OF LOSSES. WHERE ONE GOOD FINISHES ANOTHER ONE STARTS. Melancholic attitude to changes. Adult's world tries to "code" rising generation from soul stresses. The idea of fair turnover of benefits is presented as a soothing medicine which adult world gives to childish.

9. JUSTICE OF FRIENDSHIP AS A PHENOMEN AND JUSTICE IN FRIENDSHIP. Friendship a vital topic of last soviet years is loosing its political character but it remains in the justice discourse.

10. SYMPATHY is especially appreciated by the creators of educational discourse. Probably they consider that sympathy is able to prevent from injustice. (Sometimes it is ambivalent).

11. RESPECT FOR OTHERS, EAGERNESS TO WAIVE ONE'S INTEREST FOR THE SAKE OF GROUP INTERESTS. A child has to be able to overcome his/her egoistic "I". One can do this "I" socially correct only by force. In this case this force is introduced as fair. They persistently persuade not to pay attention to own wishes and desires.

12. THE VALUE OF COEXISTENCE OF DIFFERENT PEOPLE: THE MORE THE MERRIER – TO SOLVE PROBLEMS BY AGREEMENT INSTEAD OF CONFRONTATION. They should discuss the problems of smoothing social differences between children and fair relationships between them. They should demonstrate how groups (belonging to various cultures, strata, nations and religions) can overcome difficulties together.

13. FALSE FEELING OF INJUSTICE. Textbooks convince a child that his/her private feeling of injustice is nothing more than a false fiction. An individual attitude to injustice is deliberately false.

14. PROPORTIONALITY OF STRENGTH AND EMPATHY IS AS JUSTICE TOWARDS THE OTHER. At the same time this individual needs empathy to realize justice towards the other.



15. JUSTICE OF SOFT TREATMENT OF THE OTHER. It will be fair to treat this other politely and without violence.

16. DEFENCE. The universe fairly includes the notion of defense. It is fair to defend young and weak.

17. JUSTISCE OF THE STATE. "RIGHT FOR JUSTICE". Defense can be provided not only by concrete people. They introduce the notion of just state. The Russian Federation is striving to this ideal. As it was in the soviet period children are convinced that the state is fair and caring and it is the most important organization of people<sup>1</sup>.

**Negative topics:**

18. INGRATITUDE. It is evidently unfair but it is everywhere.

19. DISTRIBUTION. A fair organization is that one where a manufacturer and owner shares with other what he has.

20. INEQUALITY OF POSSIBILITIES, INEQUALITY IF ABILITIES. The important part of negative justice discourse is legitimization of differentiate attitude to a character, basing on his anthropometric data and (dis)abilities to do something.

21. RANK. SOCIETY STRATA DIVISION. People, dogs, hares, frogs are all afraid of more powerful one, but there always is one, who is weaker and lower. All these examples strive to convince children that it is fair to abbey adults, and it is fair to dominate above younger children.

22. BRIBES AND PATRONAGE. It is shown as a common thing that a competitor can unfairly rank thanks to a bribe or patronage. Everybody should be on the alert.

23. TEASING OF PEERS. Teasing is presented as something usual. It is meaningful that teasing is not considered to be unfair.

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<sup>1</sup> Similar German textbooks don't have such picture of a state. The soviet ideology of political education is replaced, but they have saved the methodological base of ideological education with the help of the etatism imperative and individual's subordination to it.

24. OFFENCES. But at the same time school children are convinced not to offend anybody. The list of “offences” does not contain a lot of thing we would like to insert including teasing.

25. INJUSTICE OF LONELINESS. Emphasizing the injustice of loneliness is a new important feature comparing to the soviet time. But the textbook does not penetrate into existential situation of an individual, and does not help a pupil to overcome his/her personal problems. Probably problems are always individual even if they are very similar to the neighbor’s. Textbooks do not teach how to solve them. So the injustice of loneliness is a slogan not for those who experience it, but for other characters, which like in a tale have to help this lonely creature. It is interesting and deliberate that they demonstrate how to overcome loneliness by the example of animal care but not how we should help people to overcome this problem<sup>2</sup>.

26. DISAPPROVAL OF THE OTHER AS HE /SHE IS. (vs. German textbooks, which pay a lot of attention to understanding of the other who is different.) It is typical for the Russian mentality to treat all alike. An alius skills do not prevent him/her to follow the common demands.

27. JUSTICE OF REVENGE. It is ironically but they often emphasize that it is fair to revenge oneself even to kill. Adequacy of revenge is defined by victims. Nothing can prevent it.

28. JUSTICE OF PUNISHMENT. Punishment for misconduct is always fair. There is no evidence of remorse, confession, inner sufferance for one's own fault, self reeducation self punishment.

### **Not reflected at all:**

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<sup>2</sup> The first part of the textbook Kunterbunt. Lesebuch 4. Hrsg.H.Bartnitzky & H.-D.Bunk. Leipzig: Klett, 2004 is called Keiner lebt allein.

29. The discussion of different pupils' equality: in one class there may be talented and untalented children; healthy and disabled; representatives of different nations and cultures. Achievement to treat them "equally" makes society healthy. But there is this programme in the most Russian textbooks.

30. Discussion of the equal educational opportunities in textbooks. This problem is considered to be solved in the soviet period, but new multiculturalism that has appeared in classes testifies the importance of this problem. It is demonstrated by unequal knowledge of official language of education. Formally this inequality of peoples (most titular ethnic groups and ethnic minorities) concerning the teaching language is not marked anyhow (except textbooks for special so called "national schools" where these nations live compacted).

31. Acquiring the skill to understand the other's position. If there are several children they pay attention only to a group activity. The unity of a micro group is dominating. They pay no attention to conflicts, tension, gangs, outcasts and such like situations, possible behavior patterns.

32. There is not any idea of social justice against every (one) person so called idea of existential justice. A textbook reader is "opposed to all". Context of a textbook and questions does not base upon a personal and individual position of every reader, but upon their group reality. Moreover personality and individuality are denied and blamed. In post soviet as well as in soviet textbooks social justice mostly concerns groups and "a person for the sake of the group".

33. A person does not have any right to be different from other one. And they do not have any equality in this differentiation. They do not discuss the problem of differentiation justice and discrimination injustice. Probably because in the contemporary Russian society in

communication between people and between an organization and a person they widely use unlawful distinction in addressing (according to sex, age, residential area, ethnic s and so on). A pupil cannot understand rules: in what situations these distinctions are legal and in what situations they are illegal. They do not discuss and/or illustrate these discrimination cases.

34. One should take into account that other people are able to make conclusions from their own mistakes are able to change.

35. Cross-cultural education is used much less than in corresponding West European textbooks. Cross-cultural education is aimed to achieve social justice. Textbooks do not lessen injustice and they do not discuss social justice. These discussions might focus upon the problems (e.g. poverty, discrimination, war, state budget) concerning the groups, which are culturally different. And they also might focus upon pupils' possibilities to influence the situation. But textbooks for primary school almost do not discuss any of these problems. There is tolerance to poverty, but there is not any tolerance to dissimilarity.

37. Diversity is blamed, uniformity is supported and praised.

38. They develop children's ethnocentrism. There is no didactic cross-cultural model.

Moreover there is not any honest discussion about justice or injustice. But these notions are very urgent for children's world as well as for adults'. Justice is not included into the list of discussion topics composed by adults for children. They have left it for children and adults to judge what is fair and what is unfair in accordance with their conscience. Two conceptions of justice do not combine and practically do not see each other. The conception of social justice, which adult world demonstrates to children's world, has a lot of gaps and essential losses (It is heritage of soviet political discourse)

### *Discussion*

We are far from stating that there are direct cause-effect relationships between the context of textbooks for primary school and people's understanding what social relations between people are fair and what are unfair. But we can distinguish evident faults in the classification of fair and unfair. They are connected with the preceding period ideological order reproduced in the post soviet, which is adapted to the needs of modern Russian etatism and political elite. The educational ideal reflected in modern Russian textbook gives preference to social and state principles instead of individual and/or family. Ideal textbook society consists of adults and children, who want to be like adults. They do not discuss the question, which is very important for 6-9 year old people, how to establish relationships in a new society of "strangers" (which are not relatives or neighbors). Ideas of closed hierarchic totalitarian society are still being explicated by the norms of social interactions, which are presented to children by the examples of 1930-1950s, 1970s and early 1980s. Devaluing the meaning of personal post soviet textbooks continue the soviet paradigm to create a world of necessity imperative. Textbooks become a child's guide to the world of social values; where social and impersonal prevail over personal and individual though they officially recognize the necessity of liberal concept to respect individuality of a pupil. About one third of social justice oriented topics, which are presented in a modern textbook, has been solved positively. And this fact inspired moderate optimism that Russian literature for primary school will develop progressively.

### *Conclusion*

Child's sensitivity to justice problems (some adults have not already got it) remains his/her personal source and resources, which he/she acquires during socialization regardless of how justice topics are presented in school textbooks. A child craves for justice and he/she manages to find it where adult world has not expected him/her to succeed (e.g. in the systems "live by the rules of the underworld", "(with)in the out circle"). And children do not see justice where adults want them to see. It is better, when justice is vividly depicted and perceived by children as moral benchmarks and influences all children's life regardless textbooks. Being convinced by textbooks that justice is not always welcome nevertheless children preserve the feeling of social justice. Unfortunately Russian textbooks do not often help children. They traditionally have a small number of topics (situations, incidents) concerning the notion "social justice". Even externally democratic textbook phraseology does not make any basement for democratic ideals to cultivate social justice in pupils. We may suppose that some other countries also have these problems, but may be their problems are not so vivid and neglected. We think that the international discussion of cross-cultural problems in education indicates the permanent necessity to improve methods and means of the investigation of the topic "Education and social justice", which well deserves to be in the focus of these historic and pedagogic congress.