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Professor Aleksander Tsankov - educational conceptions and political activities

Aleksander Tsankov was one of the brightest figures in the new Bulgarian history. His valuations as a statesman and an Education Minister were extremely contradictory. In the historical insight of people with left political convictions, he was “a butcher”, “a professor with bloodstained hands”, who conducted “reactionary, fascist educational policy” /3.6/. In the opinion of his adherents he was “Messiah and genius”, “Saviour of the Bulgarian nation”, Education Minister whose school policy is “a cultural feat” in the education history /7.5/. This kind of valuations on Tsankov’s personality and government activity dull our contemporary’s conscience with its consistent bias. That’s why every real valuation or revaluation on Al.Tsankov’s historical personality predetermined: extensive research of complicated and weakly documented period of his government; using of concrete historical, not dogmatic and speculative approach, to analyse the historical sources; compulsory consideration of the modern investigator with the trends in the political and economic development of post-war Europe and the evolving from them transformations in the ideological outlook of the Bulgarian authorities.

The present investigation is an attempt for a real valuation, on prof. Al. Tsankov’s government activity as an Education Minister which suppose an analysis of his cultural and educational views.

Al. Tsankov was born on 29th of July 1879 in the North Bulgarian town Orjahovo in the family of a famous trader and, contractor Tsalo Tsankov - “a highly accomplished person for his time”. /7.2/. He spent his childhood in his home town where he received his elementary schooling. The young Aleksander impressed his teachers and fellow-citizens with his curiosity and that necessitated to continue his education. When he finished his first year in Vidin Secondary school, he was sent in Burgdorf-German Switzerland to get his-first impressions of West European culture. After a year lasting stay he came back to Bulgaria and in 1899 he graduated the classical department of the notable high school in Russe. /4/ Since 1900 Al.Tsankov, was a student in the High School where he studied law and economics. In Sofia he at first joined at the social and political activities. In this period of his life he shared the Marxist ideas and participated in the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union. He co-operated with, the magazines “Novo vreme” and “Novo obshtestvo”.

In 1902 he was turned out of the High School because, as an active member of the social-democratical party, took a part in the antigovernment activities. A year later he has his student rights restored with the help, of professor G.T.Danailov who saw the young man’s talant and qualities. In 1904 Al.Tsankov and D.Mishaikov won two scholarships for law and economic specialization in Germany where the first of them got ready to inherit professor G.T.Danailov’s department. Their specialization was at the Universities of Munich, Breslaw and Berlin, where Al.Tsankov listened to lectures of the world known scientists - economists Z. Brentano, V.Zombart, A.Vagner, M. Zeering and G.Shmoler /12/. In Germany he not only improved his scientific knowledge but he went through a serious evolution in his ideas - in his scientific and political ideology outweighed the arguments of the socialist, conception’s critics. Tsankov was impressed by the social - reformists school in face of his founder professor L. Brentano a Marx` opponent but an adherent of the social

reformation policy /12/. During his specialization Tsankov did his doctor dissertation which subject was “The Capital and a capitalist production process at Bjom-Baverk”. A big part of it he printed off in authoritative German economic magazines. Unluckily he didn't finish his work because the Education Ministry refused to continue his specialization with 6 months.

The solid scientific training received at the German Universities “opened” his professional carrier. After his returning to Bulgaria /in 1908/ Al. Tsankov worked in the Bulgarian National Bank and the Ministry of Finance. At the same time he prepared his research work qualifying, for an academic degree “About the capital and capitalist production process” which he successfully defended in 1910. /1/ In 1911 he was elected reader at the Sofia University. The war years were so beneficial for his academic carrier. At this time he wrote his monographs “Bulgaria after the war” /1912/; “Serbian - Bulgarian trade relations” /1913/; “The war of the nations” /1916/; “Our economic interests along the Danube and the Sea” /1917/.

He published many features in economic magazines. He realized his ideas practically as being on the Committee of social foresight and the Department of economic concern and social justice, which were the authorities control in allocation the country's output, trade and industry. Al. Tsankov's solid scientific publications and professional contributions were academically and socially acknowledged. In 1916 he was elected a special professor to the department of Political economy. He read Political economy lectures, managed special courses in: “Theoretic Political Economy”, “The basic points in Political Economy's Theory”, “Economic Policy”, “Theory of Valuables”, “The Valuables and Worthy”, “The basic Problems of the Economic Science”. Since 1917 Al. Tsankov was a legal professor of Political Economy and two years later /in 1919/ he had the honour to be elected a chancellor of Sofia University. Since then began his contributions in the Bulgarian political life.

In his 25 years lasted political carrier, he took different political and public responsibilities - adherent, and after A. Grekov's death - a chairman of “Naroden sgovor”. After the splitting up of the National Social Movement he began Prime Minister in the first agreement government /1923-1926/, Minister of Education twice /1923-1926; 1930-1931/, a chairman of the XXI-st and XXII-nd National Assembly, a M.P. in XXIII-rd and XXIV-th National Assembly.

In 1920 Al. Tsankov published his work “The consequences of the war”, where he shortly declared his educational points of view. The Bulgarian scholar, thought that a judicious and expedient policy had to adapt the Bulgarian school to the necessity of the local economic life. The professor was convinced that only the rich material culture could assure and secure the general cultural progress of the nation /13/. In his opinion, the post-war social-political and local-economic conditions in the country forced the change in the educational aims - labour education and personality turning to the professional contribution, which corresponded only to his own interests and possibilities. At his pedagogical views, in this period, Tsankov was influenced by the educational reforms done by S. Omarchersky. In his memoir Al. Tsankov said that he even apply for membership in the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union, but the overt hostility of the Agrarian administration to the Bulgarian intellectuals followed his rejection. Deeply pained of the government position, he definitely parted with his illusion about the left-wing parties reforming ability and turned to the right-wing political spectrum /A.N./. I consider it, necessary to mention that Tsankov and

Stamboliisky's acquaintance dated back to their studying in Germany. In 1915, during the trial against Stamboliisky, Tsankov appeared before the court as his witness and defender, and when the agrarian tribune was thrown in the jail he visited him many times. Maybe his refusal to be a member of the Bulgarian National Agrarian Union was the reason which brought their contacts. Nevertheless, the Bulgarian scientist thought that the Bulgarian Agrarian Union saw the government's tasks, but they had no ruling opinion and professional competency for their solving.

After the military coup on the 9th of June 1923, professor Tsankov held government posts as a Prime Minister and an Education Minister. As an Education Minister he worked from the position of a well known scientist and an expert in high education. But he held all negatives of the political leader whose power was given forcibly. Leading the Education Ministry the new Minister lined the priority of his educational policy:

- raising the quality principle in the education;
- material security of the Bulgarian school;
- strengthen the humanitarian training and a priority for civil and national education;
- physical and health education for the coming generation.

Minister Tsankov was hardly convinced that a "new era" came in the Bulgarian Education. In his opinion in the epoch of social reorganization every new reform started with a change in the person's conscience.

The school would have a fateful role in this respect. As a statesman Tsankov believed that the school had to be "a centre for culture and civil conscience", feeling of duty and love for school /10.12/. The Education Minister found that Bulgarian students had solid knowledge, but were lacking in virtues like respect for the state, love for their country and had not a profound respect for the government. Tsankov's opinion was that the state is a necessity without which is impossible the culture development of the nation. That's why he thought the main educational aim was to form virtues of the coming generation by purposeful civil and national education.

Defining the instructive and educational aims there stood out the strong influence of civil education ideas over the pedagogical ideology of prof. Tsankov.

The professor many times told about the pedagogical ideas of the German pedagogue George Kershtenshtainer. The main part in A. Tsankov's cultural - educational views took the problem for the orientation of Bulgarian culture. German trained he definitely defended the west direction in Bulgarian culture and education. In his opinion the west European material and mental culture was the base of the modern civilization. But as their culture had a national characterization at first, it had to be built on the national spirit and national foundation.

Extremely negative was the Education Minister's attitude to the destructive ideas of the proletarian culture which lowered the foundation of the democratic society /8/. Tsankov was uncompromising against the propaganda of class and estate doctrines in Bulgarian school: "But teaching the arts I couldn't allow vapid teachers to enforce Marxian method for materialistic reading of history, to get students stupid, indoctrinating them with the Marxian ideas; to demote the best Bulgarian kings and statesmen as exhibitors of class interests of a certain bourgeoisie. Weren't they the same gentlemen who consider Vazov a bourgeois poet and the others, those who artistically re-create the popular customs as petty bourgeoisie's writers? I couldn't

stand these nonsense and perversions. I didn't allow any communist teachers to turn the school into a party club and to get students stupid by the theses of Marxism and Leninism, theses which they themselves didn't understand. There were no place for this kind of teachers in Bulgarian school and I dismissed them." (12,255) In these words were mixed his professor's arrogance, political lack of tolerance and truth, but they couldn't probably be a justification for the committed dismissings and outrages against Bulgarian teachers in the years of "terroristic duel". In four short months (IX.1923-I.1924) the Minister himself dismissed 962 teachers and since the Law of state defence operated to the end of his government the dismissed teachers increased to about 3000. In those days of civil war died dozens of Bulgarian intellectuals and teachers with left or right - wing persuasions!? "They killed my brother, too"-these only words, written by Anton Strashimirov in the obituary of his brother - T.Strashimirov - personified the gloomy situation in those days. These methods of power blazed a deep trail in the Education Minister and Bulgarian teachers' relations and lost his prestige. Unfortunately Tsankov was the next Education Minister who didn't go deep in that which prompted the most Bulgarian teachers to profess left wing ideas. Nevertheless the truth required to be said that most of victimized teachers later were reinstated and this process began during A.Tsankov government and finished under his successor N.Naidenov.

Of utmost importance for the main direction in Tsankov's educational policy had his views about the leading role of intellectuals in the state government. The Bulgarian statesman underlined the necessity of training of competent leading elite who were able to take out the country from the grave economic and mental crisis.

In general, Tsankov's educational and government activities had the next directions:

- 1.Rehabilitation of the educational System as N.Myshonov's Law (1909) and correction in some week points of the educational policy of the Agrarian Union.

- 2.Rising the quality principle in the secondary school by rising the requirements to the teachers and students and optimising the school system.

- 3.Reformation in the school programmes with of view to form students' ideology, civil conscience and enterprise, an accent on the arts subjects (in the education Law from 1924 the civil upbringing is elementary school's purpose)

- 4.Steps for improving the social status of the Bulgarian teachers:

- 67 % equally rising of salaries for a period of two years

- providing salaries for teachers in the secondary schools by forming a wage fund.

- helping teachers and their families, encouraging their cultural activities by forming a fund "Cultural and Social helping for teachers" This innovation and its results were confessed, even of his most fierce critics, as an undisputed achievement of the social laws in the education.

- 5.Cares for the material status of the Bulgarian school- On Tsankov's initiative was done the law of cooperative structure for the primary schools which carrying out brought the building of over 400 new schools for the period 1923-1931. On his initiative were built the secondary schools in Sofia, Plevna, Vidin, etc., the main University building, the building of the Agrarian department.

- 6.Rehabilitation of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the independence of Sofia University, seriously harmed during the government of the Agrarian Union.

7. Activities to raise the quality in the health and physical education of the coming generation:

- restoring of the teacher - doctor job in the secondary school.
- establishing of an inspectorate of physical training
- enacting the physical training law, in accordance with the physical training was compulsory for all young people to the age of 21.

8. Raising the requirements about the pedagogical and methodical training of the teachers.

9. Stimulating the development of the professional education. (During Tsankov's government were created the laws for Agrarian and Trade education (1924-1925), which formed the status of the respective dependent schools and lined their development in accordance of the social-economic needs in the country.

10. Encouraging the publish activities of the Education Ministry by establishing different libraries: "Zibrary for young ones", "Bulgarian Literature", "Classical zibrary", "Seliminski". Their aim was to popularize the artistically and informative reading among the young people. During the Tsankov's time started the series "Materials for education".

11. Popularizing the leading ideas and theories of the reforming pedagogic. (It's known that the 20-s and 30-s of the XXth century were decisive for the reforming in the Bulgarian pedagogical ideas). In the official pedagogical press were propagandized the ideas for "civil" and "national education", "moral pedagogic" and "social pedagogic". There took places some articles developing the ideas of: "labour school", "experimental pedagogic" and even "psychoanalytic pedagogic". At its summit during the 20 - s was the magazine "Svobodno vazpitanie", where were declared different durations in the reforming pedagogy. It's regrettable that Tsankov didn't show tolerance to the ideas of the proletarian pedagogy. During his government the newspaper "Uchitelska iskra" was forbidden, and for a short time and the magazine "Nauka i vazpitanie", too. These unpopular acts contrasted to the democratic customs in the developing of the Bulgarian pedagogical thought.

The government activity of professor Tsankov as an Education Minister couldn't be measured simply. The positive innovations to perfect and raise the Bulgarian education were combined with typical post-war power methods ranged from political dismissing to the physical restriction of Bulgarian teachers. In this respect it could accept that professor Tsankov's educational policy had right conservative character. But the definitions "reactionary" or "fascist" were unacceptable. Although he allowed the mistakes to slip up, the period of his government was dynamic and innovative for the Bulgarian education.