

DPRK's Experience of Abolishing Illiteracy

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On February 8, 1946, that is, after Korea's liberation from the Japanese aggressors, the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea, a central power organ, was founded in Pyongyang. The committee consisted of the representatives of broad strata of social life.

In the 20-Point Platform made public on March 23, 1946 Comrade Kim Il Sung put forward political, economic, social and cultural tasks to be implemented by the Provisional People's Committee of North Korea. The platform issued tasks to introduce a universal compulsory education system in the sector of education, to greatly increase the number of primary and secondary schools, specialized schools and colleges and to reform the public education system in line with the democratic system of the state.

One of the primary tasks facing the sector of education was to abolish illiteracy. From the first period of Japanese colonial rule over Korea, the Japanese authorities set it as a goal to subordinate Korea's educational system by seizing complete control on its educational organs. Japan seized complete control on educational organs in Korea and allowed Korean ministers only to sign all edicts and orders issued by the occupiers. The Japanese were appointed as teachers at all national and public schools. They decided all matters of education and edification.

Only 35% of children of school age were studying at primary schools and 1.8% at secondary schools. Schools were divided into those for Japanese students and those for Korean ones according to nationality. All of them gave lessons in Japanese. This was the policy of turning Korean people into "subjects of the Empire" pursued by the Japanese imperialists in educational sector.

Owing to the policy, more than 2.3 million among the adults became illiterate at that time, that is, in 1945 when the country was liberated. It put a big obstacle in the way of enhancing the people's ideological and political standard and hindered them from being mobilized to the building of a new Korea.

Comrade Kim Il Sung combined the building of a new Korea with the training of national cadres. He paid attention to education not only for youth and children but for adults.

Comrade Kim Il Sung said.

“We should set up many adult schools and enable all the working people to learn how to read and write.”

Putting forward the line of abolishing illiteracy, Comrade Kim Il Sung underlined.

“Now is the time for the intellectuals to work for their country and nation. Teachers and intellectuals should duly devote all their knowledge and technique to the building of a new, democratic Korea. Knowledge and technique have their worth and can produce a tangible effect when used in the interests of developing the country and promoting the welfare of the people. Intellectuals should place their knowledge and skills at the service of their country and people in an active form and bend all efforts for the country’s progress and national prosperity.”

Comparing illiteracy to poison, Comrade Kim Il Sung called upon the intellectuals to conduct the campaign against illiteracy while struggling positively against its aftereffects. He put forward the slogan “Let’s abolish illiteracy first for the cultural improvement of the people!”. Saying that the campaign should be conducted throughout the society and among the entire people under the leadership of the Party and state, he elucidated tasks for each stage of the campaign against illiteracy and concrete ways for their implementation and led it energetically.

This was a start of cultural transformation to abolish illiteracy among broad masses and lead them to the world of civilization.

The Provisional People’s Committee of North Korea adopted a decision on November 25, 1946 to conduct anti-illiteracy campaign in rural areas when peasants were in the slack winter season.

They decided to launch an all-people anti-illiteracy campaign during 4 months from December 1946 to the end of March 1947. Adults’ schools were established in all urban and rural areas, fishing villages and factories, anti-illiteracy committees in the capital, province seats, cities, counties, sub-counties and county towns and anti-illiteracy groups in every *ri*.

In every part of north Korea, people of all ages and both sexes energetically conducted the anti-illiteracy campaign under the slogans “Knowledge is power and ignorance is ruin!” and “Let us learn, learn and learn!” Students at Kim Il Sung University, teachers of educational organs and activists of political parties and social organizations were mobilized in the campaign.

Early in August 1947 when he met Ri Kye San, a peasant from Okdong-ri, So Sub-

county, Pyonggang County, Kangwon Province, Comrade Kim Il Sung came to know that she was an illiterate. He said that it was necessary for her to learn to read and write. He told Ri to write to him when she finished learning. 3 months later he received from Ri a letter saying she had done it. He sent Ri a reply.

At that time Comrade Kim Il Sung received letters from more than 90 000 people who finished learning to read and write. Now it is called Ri Kye San Campaign.

As the anti-illiteracy campaign developed, Comrade Kim Il Sung took some measures to make it more organized.

On May 22, 1948 Comrade Kim Il Sung visited the Central Anti-Illiteracy Exhibition Hall. In his talk with officials of the hall, he proposed to consolidate and develop in future the successes achieved in abolishing illiteracy.

He saw that the winter anti-illiteracy campaign was conducted for the second time from December 1948 to the end of March 1949.

Responding to Comrade Kim Il Sung's proposal, those in Pyonggang County, Kangwon Province appealed the entire people to turn out in the campaign in a more extensive way. Their appeal worked. In every part of the country the campaign was conducted in a more positive way to completely abolish illiteracy during the winter period. Climate of studying prevailed everywhere including schools, working sites and houses. Men and women of all ages learned to read and write in urban and rural areas and in sea, flat and mountainous areas.

Illiteracy was abolished throughout the country in March 1949. North Korea became a country, the first in the Orient that completely abolished illiteracy. The all-people anti-illiteracy campaign improved systematically the working people's level of general education and their cultural and technical standards, thus promoting vigorously the building of the democratic national culture and bringing about the beginning of cultural revolution in Korea.

The general anti-illiteracy campaign rendered big services to liquidating outdated ideological remnants and cultural and technical backwardness that restrained the working people's positiveness and creativity in building a new democratic Korea.