

The Imperative of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia: Teachers to Fight Against Religious Education

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The roles and attitudes of primary school teachers in the campaign against religious education in Slovakia, 1952 – 1953

ABSTRACT: The paper deals with a complex issue – the involvement of the teachers at primary educational institutions (the first [first to fourth grade] and second schools levels [fifth to ninth grade] at that time) in the anti-religious campaign – the campaign to sign children up for religious education, launched by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the early 1950s that escalated in the 1952/1953 school year. It refers to the fundamental postulate of the Communists in the field of school policy – to educate pupils in accordance with the ideological doctrine of Marxism-Leninism, including the inseparable component of atheism. The result of the educational process aimed to create a young generation with a materialistic worldview. In this context, the first step was to limit children's participation in religious education in the first and second levels of school. The study presents the policy of the ruling political party's attempt to achieve the lowest possible attendance of pupils in classes of religious education and the different steps that the communist regime used to achieve this goal. It analyzes the participation and attitudes of teachers in the campaign to enrol pupils in religious education and highlights the primary role of teachers, who played an indispensable part in that campaign. The campaign focused primarily on persuading parents not to enroll their children in classes of religious education. As civil servants, the teachers were used by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the pursuit of its goals. The paper points to the fact that school staff, similar to Slovak society as a whole, overwhelmingly supported a religious worldview, which was confirmed by the results of a census conducted in March 1950. It was therefore necessary to 're-educate and vet teachers'. In this context, the study discusses the various new forms of 'education' of teachers in order to achieve the highest possible number of those in their ranks who would at least formally declare their atheistic position.

Keywords: Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Teachers, Religious Education.

The goal of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in the field of the young generation's worldview

The beginning of the 1950s was the period of the harshest communist dictatorship in the history of the Czechs and Slovaks. These years were marked by political persecution, lawlessness and trials. According to the intentions of the Commu-

nist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC), the inhabitants of the Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) were to identify themselves with the ideology of the Communist Party and Marxism-Leninism, of which atheism was an integral part. The struggle against the idealistic worldview, represented in our conditions by Christianity, was one of the essential characteristics of the communist regime. The dictate to eradicate religious beliefs was directed at the entire population, however, not all strata of society were equally affected by it. Civil servants, including teachers, were subjected to particularly severe pressure. The CPC demanded that teachers abandon their religious beliefs and unreservedly adopt a materialist worldview, which was dictated by the very nature of their work. In the exercise of their profession, they had an influence on the formation of the young generation, including their worldview.

The intention of the communist regime in education was to win the young generation over to the ideas of building socialism in the Czechoslovak Republic, which presupposed a fundamental change in their worldview. The ideas of Christianity were strongly rooted among the population of Slovakia, as was confirmed by the results of the census conducted in Czechoslovakia two years after the communist takeover. In the March 1950 census, 3,430,361 persons (99.6%) of the total population of 3,442,317 in Slovakia identified themselves with a religious worldview. Catholics were the most numerous, with 2,623,198 members (76.2%), followed by Evangelicals of the Augsburg (Au.) Confession (V.), with 443,251 believers (12.9%), and Greek Catholics, who numbered 225,495 (6.5%). Only 9,679 (0.28%) persons indicated that they were of no faith in the census, and 2,276 residents (0.06%) did not choose either of the options offered.¹ Thus, as many as 95.6% of people identified with Christianity. The results were unfavourable for the communist regime. The aim of the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was to bring about a radical change in the worldview not only of the party members but gradually of broad layers of the population of the Czechoslovak Republic. The party initiated the process in the ranks of the young generation.

Since the influence of the Communist Party on the education of children in the family environment was not effective, educational institutions, whose task was to educate young people in the spirit of a materialistic worldview, became its main instrument. A resolution of the Presidium of the Central Committee (CC) of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) of 28 May 1951, provided a striking expression thereof, when it stipulated that the task of the schools was to arm the youth with "*a worldview of scientific socialism, to a degree that knows no concession in the principles of Marxism-Leninism, no compromise in matters of worldview.*"² The realization of the aforementioned aim was impossible without the active cooperation of teachers, and so the communist power took full advantage of teachers as employees of the state and, in this context, of their existential dependence thereon. The leadership of the Communist Party of Slovakia

¹ Slovak National Archive (hereinafter SNA) in Bratislava, fund (hereinafter f.) Slovak Office for Church Affairs (hereinafter SO CA), secretariat, carton (hereinafter c.) 3, number (hereinafter No.) 220/53. Správa o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952/1953.

² KOTOČ, Ján. Významný dokument starostlivosti strany o školu. In *Nové slovo*. vol. 8, iss. 26, 28 June 1951, p. 507;

(CPS) was aware that a majority of teachers had a negative attitude towards the materialist worldview or rejected it. Dissatisfaction in this regard was voiced at a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia on 24 June 1950, where it was stated that there were open enemies of democracy, advocates and even promoters of Christian ideas, teachers who put up newspapers about Vatican in the schools or read Catholic newspapers.³

The action of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia against religious education in first and second level schools

A fundamental step in the re-education of the younger generation in the spirit of a materialistic worldview was the gradual restriction of religious education at individual school levels, which constituted a significant interference with the religious rights of citizens guaranteed by the Constitution.⁴ The struggle to implement religious education in schools was an integral part of the struggle between the communist regime and the churches to gain decisive influence on the education and ideological formation of the young generation. Despite the gradual loss of influence by the churches in all cultural and sports activities, as well as other areas targeting the youth,⁵ the authorities did not decide to take such a radical step as eliminating religion from instruction. This fact was used as an argument for the preservation of some religious freedom in the Czechoslovak Republic.

Until 1952, the top leadership of the CPC paid less attention to the issue of religious education as it focused on the primary issues – the struggle against the churches. This included the drafting of the so-called Church Acts, the preparation of the State Catholic Action, measures against bishops, and repression against monasteries. While the the late 1940s and early 1950s were characterised by the Communist Party's efforts to control the institutional base of individual churches, especially the Catholic Church, during 1952 the power-political struggle against the churches changed into a struggle against religion as an ideology.⁶ The gradual restriction of religious education in schools became an integral part of this new policy.

³ SNA, f. Central Committee (hereafter CC) of the Communist Party of Slovakia (hereinafter referred to as the CPS), Presidium, c. 796, archive unit (hereinafter referred to as a. u.) 16. Zasadnutie 24. júna 1950. Uskutočňovanie uznesenia IX. zjazdu KSS na školstve.

⁴ In accordance with the fundamental law of the Czechoslovak state, the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic of 9 May 1948, every person had the right to privately and publicly profess any religious belief or to be without confession. Worldview, faith or conviction was not to anyone's detriment, but it could not be a reason for denying someone the fulfilment of a civic duty imposed on them by law. *Sbírka zákonu a nařízení republiky Československé*. vol. 1948. Part 52, published on 9 June 1949, pp. 1090.

⁵ These were mainly the Catholic Youth Association and the Evangelical Youth Association. Both associations were organised on a denominational basis and worked under the administration of the churches. The Association of Catholic Youth was founded on 26 May 1925 in Bratislava. It was dissolved by a decree of the Interior Commission of 6 August 1945, including its branches. In August 1945, the Evangelical Youth Association with its branches was also dissolved. Despite the efforts of the churches, the activities of both could not be restored.

⁶ PEŠEK, Jan – BARNOVSKÝ, Michal. *Štátna moc a cirkvi na Slovensku 1948 – 1953*. Bratislava : Veda, 1997, p. 263.

The initial step was a change in the educational institutions of the third level,⁷ when, in accordance with the decree of the Commission for Education, Sciences and Arts (CESA) of 7 October 1949, religion was designated as an optional subject from 1 September 1950 and teaching religion was reduced to one class per week. Religious education classes were held in the later afternoon and only the students who had enrolled for the classes were allowed to attend. The selection of the third level schools was a deliberate step. Secondary comprehensive and vocational schools were located in towns and cities where the relationship between people and religion was not as strong as in the Slovak countryside. At a meeting of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the CPS on 24 June 1950, Július Bránik openly declared this in the discussion when he said, “*As far as the religious education is concerned, there is no point in rushing, mainly in the villages. It should be done at the schools of the third level and at vocational schools. Those who desire religious education, let them apply...everyone will apply in a village...Proceed with caution so that we don't impose unnecessary trouble on ourselves.*”⁸

Following the restriction of religious education in third level schools, the attention of the CPC leadership shifted to educational institutions of the first and second levels. Changes in the teaching of religious education were prepared by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia during 1951. On 30 May 1951, Zdeněk Fierlinger, chairman of the State Office for Church Affairs⁹, informed the Church Commission of the CC CPC about a set of changes that were to be implemented in the near future.¹⁰ The primary amendment was the registration of children for religious education, as well as the reduction of the number of classes from two to one per week in each grade. This practice contravened the explicit stipulations of the School Act of April 1948, which stated that parents had the right to withdraw their children from religious education.¹¹ Z. Fierlinger further elaborated at the Church Commission of the CC CPC that the school administration must pay more attention to teachers

⁷ In accordance with *the Act of 21 April 1948 on the basic regulation of unified education (the Education Act)*, compulsory school attendance was set at nine years for pupils after the age of six and divided into two levels: level I - national schools with five consecutive grades and level II - secondary schools with four consecutive grades. The third level consisted of primary vocational schools (compulsory) and selective schools (vocational schools and higher vocational schools). Secondary comprehensive schools with four consecutive grades provided higher general education. *Sbírka zákonů a nařízení republiky Československé*. vol. 1948. Part 38, issued on 10 May 1948, pp. 829 - 838.

⁸ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 796, a. j. 16. Zasadnutie 24. júna 1950. Protokol zo zasadnutia Predsedníctva ÚV KSS 24. júna 1950.

⁹ The State Office for Church Affairs was established by Government Decree No. 228/1949 of 25 October 1949. As the central authority, it exercised all the powers relating to church and religious affairs, including those previously exercised by other central authorities. In Slovakia, there was Slovak Office for Church Affairs, while in the regions and districts the respective regional and district national committees exercised jurisdiction in religious and church matters.

¹⁰ JAKUBČIN, Pavol. Začiatky „ideologického zápasu o dušu dieťaťa“. *Vyučovanie náboženstva na Slovensku v rokoch 1948 - 1953*. In *Pamät' národa*, 2018, vol. 14, iss. 3, p. 28.

¹¹ The Education Act adopted immediately after February 1948, made it obligatory for schools to provide religious education for pupils in accordance with their religious beliefs. It also allowed parents to sign their child out of classes of religious education. Thus, all pupils could attend classes except those whose parents had signed them out. Religious education and its supervision were vested in the competent religious authorities (religious communities), but without limiting the autho-

of religious education (mostly priests) in the coming period and subject them to rigorous scrutiny.¹² Individuals whose positive disposition towards the new state system was not substantiated were to be dismissed from the schools. However, the preparation of the aforementioned changes was to be carried out with caution, to avoid any potential social unrest.

At the beginning of 1952, the district church secretaries were instructed by the higher authorities to ascertain the exact number of pupils who were attending religious education in the 1951-52 school year. According to the data obtained, as many as 98% of all children in Slovakia (91.62% in the Czech regions) were attending classes of religious education, a figure that caused concern among the leaders of the Party.¹³ The problematic issue became the focus of a meeting of the Political Secretariat of the CC CPC in June 1952.¹⁴ At the meeting, a decision was adopted which set out a new approach to the teaching of religious education. As previously stated, classes of religious education, as a compulsory subject, were attended by all pupils, except those whose parents withdrew them. According to the resolution adopted, only pupils whose parents had signed them up for religious education could attend. The standard procedure of informing the lower party structures followed. At the beginning of July 1952, the decision was discussed by all the regional committees (RC) CPS, then by the district committees (DC) CPS, and finally by the basic organisations. A widespread organised campaign against religious education was launched at the level of the party structures and among the ordinary members of the Communist Party. In April 1952, regional meetings of chairmen and secretaries of the basic organisations (BO) of the CPS were held in schools. Discussion speeches pointed to the 'lack of maturity' of the teachers and declared the absence of so-called comrades' collectives, as well as the fact that "*bolshevik criticism has not taken root in the teachers' collectives, which is a serious obstacle to their ideological development.*"¹⁵ Religious education, however, was identified as a fundamental problem at all the meetings. Educators – members of the CPS, criticised religious education in schools and characterised it as an organised

rity of the supreme supervision and administration, which belonged to the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment.

„Škola je povinná starati se o náboženskou výchovu žáků podle jejich vyznání, vyjímajív případy, kdy rodič (zákonní zástupci) odhlásí dítě od této výchovy.“ Sbirka zákonů a nařízení republiky Československé. vol. 1948. Issue 38, issued on 10 May 1948, pp. 831.

The curricula of religious education were established by the Ministry of Education and Enlightenment on the proposal of the religious authorities (religious communities), examining them from the aspect of civil and religious tolerance. Teachers of religious education (church bodies and religious societies) had to comply with the regulations issued by the education authorities within the limits of the law.

¹² The Commission for Education of Sciences and Arts (hereinafter referred to as the CESA) dismissed from its service all the religious men and women who taught religious education in the schools. Thus, priests were more involved in the teaching process, which was unacceptable to the communist regime. Its aim was to eliminate the influence of priests on the younger generation as much as possible and to involve lay teachers in the teaching of religious education in as large a number as possible.

¹³ JAKUBČIN, Pavol. Začiatky „ideologického zápasu“, p. 29.

¹⁴ ŠMEJKALOVÁ, Olga. Akce Vyučování náboženství. In FIAMOVÁ, Martina – JAKUBČIN, Pavol (eds.). *Prenasledovanie cirkví v komunistických štátoch strednej a východnej Európy*. Bratislava : Ústav pamäti národa, 2010, p. 570.

¹⁵ SNA, f. Commission for Education (hereafter CE), c. 131. Zasadnutie kolégia 5. mája 1952. Správa o krajských aktívoch predsedov a tajomníkov ZO KSS na školách.

obstruction of *“the work of teachers, and this ranges from the most sophisticated camouflaging to the open refutation of what is taught in other subjects.”*¹⁶

During the summer months of 1952, district meetings of communist teachers were held, and those present were informed of the contents of the aforementioned measure of the Political Secretariat of the CC CPC. At these meetings it was declared that the question of teaching religion was one of the main tasks to which the teachers – members of the CPS must devote themselves. The course of the discussion at the district meetings apparently did not fully meet the expectations of the leading party bodies about the world-view orientation of the teachers – party members. At the meeting of the Presidium of the CC CPS 14 February 1953, Miloš Gosiorovský's report in this connection stated that *“even the overwhelming majority of teachers – communists are not reconciled with the question of religion. Only sporadically did they act militantly, as atheists and ones formally settled with the Church.”*¹⁷

A specific problem of the CPS was the fact that a significant number of its members were religious, which was also reflected in the participation of children of Communists in religious education. M. Gosiorovský also drew attention to this fact. *“There are frequent cases that the officials of the BO of the CPS and CO of the CPS..., as well as workers of the People's Administration, members of the SNB (National Security Corps) and the army send their children to religious education.”*¹⁸ The leading employees of the CESA also pointed to the attitude of the Communists. Some members of local CPS organisations even declared that *“if they could not enroll their children in religious education – they would rather quit the Party.”*¹⁹ Initially, the leadership of the CPC did not rule out simultaneous membership in the Party and affiliation in one of the churches. Later, especially after the failure of Catholic Action²⁰, they intensified atheist propaganda coupled with a campaign to leave the church.

The new approach to religious education was presented by the Ministry of Education, Sciences and Arts (MESA) in a circular, the Slovak translation of which was published by the CESA on 20 July 1952 in *Školské zvesti* (School News). Its wording was based on the resolution approved by the Political Secretariat of the CC CPC of June 1952, and thus the fundamental change was the establishment of a condition of participation of pupils of schools of the first and second levels in religious education. Children were permitted to attend classes only if their parents signed them up for classes at the beginning of each school year, no later than 8 September. If they

¹⁶ SNA, f. CE, c. 131. Zasadnutie kolégia 5. mája 1952. Správa o krajských aktívoch predsedov a tajomníkov ZO KSS na školách.

¹⁷ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium c. 833. Zasadnutie 14. februára 1953. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

¹⁸ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 833. Zasadnutie 14. februára 1953. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

¹⁹ SNA, f. CE, c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane boja proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

²⁰ Catholic Action was an artificially organised movement in the Roman Catholic Church between 1949 and 1951 intended to break the internal unity of the Church and ultimately pit it against the Vatican. The Catholic bishops rejected it and issued the pastoral letter *Hlas biskupov a ordinárov v hodine veľkej skúšky*. Heated protests (hundreds of people were arrested, investigated and tried) forced the communist regime officials to stop Catholic Action. Catholic Action was replaced by the pro-regime Peace Movement of the Catholic clergy.

failed to do so, the pupils were unable to attend the classes. The circular contained seemingly innocuous wording, stating that parents were free to decide whether or not their children attended classes of religious education and that no one had the right to force them to sign up for classes, but this in effect amounted to a unilateral emphasis on the right not to attend.²¹ Classes of religious education were to be scheduled in a way that would not interfere with the continuity of the teaching of subjects compulsory for all pupils, which in practice meant that they were scheduled at the end of the school day.²² The clear intention of the adopted measure was to reduce the number of children attending classes of religious education.

Church institutions reacted negatively to the changes in the way pupils register for religious education. Both the Catholic and the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession demanded that the CESA circular be read in the churches before the beginning of the 1952-53 school year. The Communist regime rejected this planned procedure on the grounds that it was political pressure on the free decision of the believers. Consequently, parents were not informed in advance of the contents of the circular, i.e. of the new approach adopted, thus creating a moment of surprise and reducing the possibility of an early reaction.

The situation among teachers and their new roles

The question of teaching religious education was also on the agenda of the district teachers' meetings, which were held in all districts of Slovakia before the beginning of the school year, on 27 - 30 August 1952. The leaders of the CESA evaluated the meetings negatively and in their final opinion stated that, especially in connection with the decree on the teaching of religious education in schools of the first and second levels, they had not fulfilled their mission. The presentations of the district school inspectors were mostly "unspecific, cautious, platitudinous and unconvincing", which was then reflected in the discussion. School inspectors delivered uncompromising reports on the issue of religious education in only a few towns - Dunajská Streda, Pezinok, Trenčín, Banská Bystrica, Rimavská Sobota, Bytča, Medzilaborce and Humenné. In Modrý Kameň and Skalica they did not mention the event at all and referred the teachers either to the secretary of the DC CPS or to the regional inspector. Discussions on this issue were at the deadlock and were apparently conditioned by the reluctance of teachers to publicly present their views, and so there were only a few "*decisive discussion contributions from the ranks of teachers - atheists*", which, according to the responsible staff of the CESA, showed that the majority of teachers, as well as teachers - communists, were "*in the thrall of religious prejudices.*"²³

In the terminology of the time, the terms "persons unclear on the issue of religion" or "burdened with religion" were used to describe teachers who did not identify themselves with a materialistic worldview, did not leave the church and participated

²¹ LETZ, Róbert. Prenasledovanie kresťanov na Slovensku v rokoch 1948 - 1989. In MIKLOŠKO, František - SMOLÍKOVÁ, Gabriela - SMOLÍK, Peter (eds.). *Zločiny komunizmu na Slovensku 1948-1989 (1)*. Prešov : Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2001, p. 196.

²² *Školské zvesti*. vol. 8. Issue 15 issued 20 July 1952, p. 1.

²³ SNA, f. CE, Kolegium, c. 132.

in religious ceremonies, or otherwise presented Christian persuasions. Teachers who made no secret of their Christian worldview were targeted by the Communist Party, the school administration, and the security authorities, and their religious activities were monitored. The punishments were exceptionally severe – transfer to another school, mostly located in a small remote village, loss of employment, but also criminal charges and trials, which affected many teachers. Banal statements that did not conform to the demands of the communist regime were enough to bring charges. To illustrate this point, we present the case of two teachers, Vilma Dovalová and Edita Mikulová from the National School in Dolné Držkovce (Bánovce nad Bebravou district), which aptly documents the atmosphere of that time. In early September 1949, V. Dovalová said to a group of people in front of the local church that according to the regulation they had received at the school, children would not be allowed to engage in prayer and self-blessing in the classrooms. However, she committed a more egregious act in the school classroom in front of the pupils, when she ordered her colleague E. Mikulová to tie red ribbons in the hair of several boys as they had disobeyed her repeated warnings to cut their hair. However, the biggest transgression was that the red paper ribbons allegedly came from the pictures of K. Gottwald and J. V. Stalin and the pupils in question were the sons of members of the Communist Party. The two teachers were charged with the offence of sedition against the Republic, defamation of the Republic and the Allied State, and brought to trial. V. Dovalová received a sentence of seven years and E. Mikulová one year and ten months. They served their sentences in the women's prison in Ilava. Both were released early.²⁴

Belonging to a church also became a negative point in the evaluation of teachers. In their personnel records (cadre questionnaires), the column “religious confession” or no confession appeared. This information could not be absent from appraisals or promotion proposals and was the primary factor in assessing the performance of school staff.

The leaders of the CPS were aware of the situation among educators in Slovakia in terms of their worldview orientation. They knew that at that time there were only a few dozen teachers identifying with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, of which atheism was an integral part. Paradoxically, a number of teachers, as well as other groups of workers in various professions and fields who endorsed the ideology of the Communist Party, rejected atheism. It was a testimony of the deep Christian roots of the Slovak population, not excluding educators. Nevertheless, the communist regime required teachers to implement its aims in school policy, which was also true in the implementation of enrolling pupils in the classes of religious education. The role of teachers was to persuade pupils' parents not to sign their children up for classes of religious education. The “mission” was to be carried out during chance encounters, but especially during home visits. This created a largely paradoxical situation where religious teachers were forced to persuade religious parents not to sign their children up for classes of religious education.

Teachers were first to go through a phase of religious “detoxification” and, thus “armed”, to influence parents. During the summer holidays in 1952, individual ed-

²⁴ VIŠŇOVSKÁ, Ivana. Politický proces s učiteľkami Vilmou Dovalovou a Editou Mikulovou. In *Verbum Historiae*. vol. 2015, iss. 2, pp. 179 – 197.

ucation was also to be provided to prepare teachers for the planned changes in the enrolment of pupils in classes of religious education, where all school staff were required to study the work of P. F. Kolonický, *Marxism-Leninism on Religion*. This event was organised by the CESA, which set up consultation centres in each district. On designated days, teachers were required to attend consultations, conducted under the guidance of supposedly trained lecturers. In essence, these were interviews in which the teachers had to present whether, or to what extent, they “came to terms” with the Christian worldview. In the evaluation report submitted by the Commissioner for Education, Ernest Sýkora, at the meeting of the Presidium of the CC CPS on 13 September 1952, it stated that the intention of the Department of Education was to prepare teachers for the signing up pupils for religious education and, at the same time, to contribute to their own shedding of the idealistic world-view.²⁵

Based on the fact that before the individual holiday education in 1952 there were only a few dozen atheist teachers in Slovakia, the commissioner spared no criticism and expressed dissatisfaction with the religious convictions of the majority of teachers. Interviews in consultation centres confirmed that “*majority of teachers are burdened by the influences of bourgeois ideology. They are philosophical idealists, in the decisive majority they have not even begun to come to terms with religion.*”²⁶ However, some resigned from the church after completing their holiday education in the first days of September, which was perceived as a manifestation of an atheistic attitude by the party and state authorities. E. Sýkora estimated their number to be as high as 1,000 at that time, but this has not been confirmed. After a more accurate registration, the CESA determined their total as follows.

Region	Number of atheist teachers					Total
	Kindergarten	Level I schools	Level II schools	Level III schools	IV. ref. DNC and RNC	
Bratislava	3	27	3	6	38	77
Nitra	unknown	12	10	unknown	15	37
Banská Bystrica	0	19	30	9	31	89
Žilina	0	13	11	6	26	56
Košice	0	9	16	5	19	49
Prešov	2	69	40	0	39	150
Slovakia	5	149	110	26	168	458

Tab. 1 The number of atheist teachers and school staff at the end of September 1952.²⁷

²⁵ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 823, a. j. 26. Zasadnutie 13. septembra 1952. Správa o prázdninovom individuálnom štúdiu učiteľov.

²⁶ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 823, a. j. 26. Zasadnutie 13. septembra 1952. Správa o prázdninovom individuálnom štúdiu učiteľov.

²⁷ SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane boja proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

As evidenced by the data presented in the table, the number of atheist teachers in kindergartens and educational institutions of first and second levels reached 290. In the 1952-53 school year, there were 21,989 teachers in the aforementioned schools, which means that atheists accounted for only 1, 1.31 % of the teachers in schools. The data further indicate that the highest number of atheist school staff was in the Prešov region. It is obvious that the situation was influenced by the Orthodox action.²⁸ According to the information of the CESA, the number of atheist educational workers increased in the coming period. From the end of September 1952 to the beginning of February 1953, i.e. in four months, their total in kindergartens and educational institutions of the first and second level rose to 1,020, which represented an almost fourfold increase. However, this dramatic increase meant that only 5.49% of the teachers working in schools in that school year were atheists.

Less than a month after it was no longer possible to sign children up for religious education in the 1952-53 school year, the course and results of the action were discussed by the Commission for Education at a meeting 3 October 1952. It paid increased attention to the attitude of teachers in terms of worldview. It was repeatedly noted that there had been an increase in the number of teachers who had left the church and in the number of teachers "coming to terms with the issue of religion".²⁹ This fact was allegedly the result of individual holiday education of teachers and was positively influenced by a number of school inspectors, school headmasters and activist teachers who, through the so-called mass political work and patient persuasion, managed to win many co-workers. However, the greatest credit was given to the atheist teachers. At the meeting of the Commission for Education, it was stated that the successful implementation of the CESA decree was also largely due to the teachers who, although at that time they had not yet decided to do away with religious prejudices formally, as they remained members of individual churches, their attitude towards religion was reserved. By not signing their children up for religious education and persuading their parents, they were becoming role models and, according to a statement by the Commission for Education, "*knocking insidious weapons out of the hands of reaction, which seeks to poison the youth with anti-proletarian ideology*".³⁰

The leading officials of the CPS considered the situation in the Košice region favorable in terms of the attitude of teachers in the action of signing children up for religious education. Teachers in Košice exerted increased activity in persuading parents. Every day from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m., they carried out anti-religious agitation, therefore the results were quite pleasing to the CPS. A notable number of teachers

²⁸ The Orthodox action, which took place in the early 1950s, illegitimately destroyed a religious community of many thousands in Czechoslovakia - the Greek Catholic Church. In the action, its organisational and economic structures were smashed, but also its clergy were criminalised and ingeniously persecuted, as well as the faithful who were unwilling to submit to the discriminatory decision and protested against it directly or indirectly.

²⁹ SNA, f. CE, c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Predbežná správa a priebehu plnenia výnosu PŠVU o vyučovaní náboženstva. As an example, the town of Trnava was cited, where 17 teachers left the church, followed by Banská Bystrica with 22 teachers, Prievidza with 9, and the Prešov region, where 135 teachers left the church.

³⁰ SNA, f. CE, c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Predbežná správa a priebehu plnenia výnosu PŠVU o vyučovaní náboženstva.

left the church, with 16 in the Sečovce district, 36 in the Rozňava district, 21 in the Košice district, but only a few in the other districts. A small number of teachers in the region signed their children up for religious education, with the exception of Kežmarok district, where 19 teachers requested religious education for their children. In the other districts, the number ranged from one to five.³¹ According to the report of the IV. Department of the RNC in Košice, which evaluated the action of signing children up for religious education, the clergymen of the individual churches in the region were reportedly isolated, so they could not carry out any activity among parents, with few exceptions.³²

In accordance with the resolution of the Political Secretariat of the CC CPC of 4 November 1952, the work of teachers, headmasters and school inspectors in implementing the directive on registration of children for religious education was to be inspected and assessed. The conclusions of the evaluation of school staff were the subject of a meeting of the Presidium of the CC CPS in February 1953. The leadership of the CPS demanded the teachers to be active in the campaign that was underway. It carried out sanctions against those who “*organized resistance against the CESA decree and manifested themselves as hostile elements.*”³³ These were headmasters, teachers and inspectors who, even at the height of Stalinist era, had the courage to openly oppose a discriminatory approach that abused the principle of respect for freedom of religion and conscience. Based on the preliminary results of the evaluation, the school administration dismissed a total of 36 school staff, with a further six to be investigated. Seven teachers were dismissed in the Bratislava region, eight in the Nitra region, twelve in the Žilina region, five in the Banská Bystrica region, none in the Košice region, and four teachers had to leave their jobs in the Prešov region.³⁴ There were also 177 headmasters and inspectors dismissed from the school services or transferred to teaching posts because they did not take a firm stance during the campaign and their attitude was hesitant.³⁵

Pressure on teachers escalates

After 8 September 1952, when it was no longer possible to sign children up for religious education, the teachers thought the action was over.³⁶ However, the leaders of the Department of Education pointed out that “*in the meantime, the class enemy, surprised at first, is mounting a counterattack and exerting more and more initiative.*”³⁷ The activity of the priests in many regions did not cease, and

³¹ State Archive (hereinafter SA in Košice), f. Department of Education and Culture (hereinafter DEC) of the Council of the Regional National Committee (hereinafter RNC) of the Košice Region 1949 - 1960, c. 53. Vyhodnotenie akcie prihlasovania žiakov na náboženskú výchovu.

³² SA in Košice, f. DEC Council of the RNC Košice Region 1949 - 1960, c. 53. Vyhodnotenie akcie prihlasovania žiakov na náboženskú výchovu.

³³ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 833. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

³⁴ SNA, f. CE, c. 132. Zasadnutie kolégia 23. augusta 1952.

³⁵ LETZ, *Prenasledovanie kresťanov*, p. 198.

³⁶ SNA, f. CE, c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane bola proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

³⁷ SNA, f. CE, c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane bola proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

they continued to visit parents. The Communist regime reacted by the issuance of another circular by the CESA on 6 December 1952, which stipulated that parents could withdraw their children from classes of religious education even during the school year.³⁸ Teachers were thus supposed to influence parents for ten months and contribute to a further decline in pupils attending classes of religious education, but according to the reports of senior officials at the Department of Education, their efforts faltered. It was therefore necessary *“to mobilize all teachers, party members and other progressive school workers in the fight against obscurantism and to assist them much more and more effectively in educational work between teachers and pupils.”*³⁹ When classes of religious education were in session, teachers were to conduct the so-called “Lessons of Joy” for unenrolled pupils and organise their free time during the services. The churches also paid attention to children and youth outside religious services, with the aim to increase their influence. The Roman Catholic Church organized sporting events, social gatherings and performances. The ministers of the Evangelical Church A.C. and the Evangelical Reformed Churches organized Sunday meetings, Bible clubs and Lord's Gardens.

Teachers, but especially the headmasters of schools of first and second level, were pressured to achieve the lowest possible number of pupils enrolled in religious education. As pressure was mounting, and in an attempt to ensure good results, many of them resorted to intimidating parents. For example, the headmaster of the national school in the village of Devičie, Krupina district, invited the wives of both CPS members and civil servants to a meeting and threatened them that if they enrolled their children in religious education, their husbands would be dismissed from their jobs and their sons and daughters would not be allowed to study at universities.⁴⁰ Others resorted to vulgar degradation of religious beliefs. At a meeting of the CESA in late September 1952, the actions of educators were denounced as they sought to formally accomplish the task when they *“moved from a positive struggle for the education of children in the spirit of a scientific worldview to a negative refutation of biblical statements, to ridiculing pastors and in some places to ridiculing religion”*.⁴¹

In general, women were more supportive of enrolment for religious education than men, and applications were mostly signed by mothers. Sometimes they even protested openly, as in the village of Lúčky, in the Ružomberok district, where they tore up the application forms at the teachers-parents meeting and spoke harshly against the school headmaster and teachers. In the aforementioned village of Devičie, they got into a fierce argument with the school headmaster and supported the local clergyman.⁴² The priests of the individual churches supported the parents' attitudes and, according to the leaders of the Department of Education, and carried out inten-

³⁸ *Školské zvesti*. Vol. 8. Issue 28 issued 31 December 1952, p. 555.

³⁹ SNA, f. CE, k. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 24. septembra 1952. Návrh na usmernenie a organizačné zaistenie ďalšej etapy boja proti tmárstvu na školách.

⁴⁰ SNA, f. SO CA, Secretariat, c. 5. No. 220/53. Správy o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952 - 1953.

⁴¹ SNA, f. CE k. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 24. septembra 1952. Návrh na usmernenie a organizačné zaistenie ďalšej etapy boja proti tmárstvu na školách.

⁴² SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 24. septembra 1952. Návrh na usmernenie a organizačné zaistenie ďalšej etapy boja proti tmárstvu na školách.

sive "undermining activity among women to get parents to sign as many applications for religious education as possible...In this activity, they took advantage of confessionals and pulpits and, by intimidating both the youth and women, sought to reverse the whole action."⁴³ The priests of the Evangelical Church of Au. C., especially in the districts of Myjava, Liptovský Mikuláš, Piešťany and Bratislava, spoke out against the implementation of the CESA decree in an organised manner. As a result, e.g. in Bratislava, almost 100% of pupils were enrolled in the classes of Evangelical religious education.⁴⁴ The CESA introduced new bureaucratic obstacles – e.g. the obligation to sign the application form for religious education was extended to both parents and the competence to accept it was transferred from class teachers to school headmasters.⁴⁵

Participation of pupils in classes of religious education

Monitoring of children's attendance at classes of religious education was carried out by the Slovak Office for Church Affairs and the Commission for Education, which submitted information to the Presidium of the CC CPS. The Presidium discussed the issue at the aforementioned meeting on 14 February 1953, when Miloš Gosiorovský submitted a rather extensive report. He reported on how the resolutions of the Political Secretariat of the CC CPC from June and October 1952 were implemented by party organs and organisations, the school administration and the Slovak Office for Church Affairs. He stated that enrollments for religious education "on the whole went smoothly. Although the priests took advantage and agitated outside the church, nice results were achieved."⁴⁶ Upon conclusion of the campaign in early September 1952, 25.5% of the children were not signed up for classes of religious education. Taking into account the fact that in the 1951-52 school year almost all pupils of schools of first and second levels attended classes of religious education, the overall effect of the campaign and the numbers of children were evaluated positively. In summarizing the pupils who signed up for religious education, lists were made in each school, including the smallest villages.⁴⁷ Subsequently, district and regional summaries were prepared, and the national results were compiled by the CESA.⁴⁸ The lists also included the social origin of the parents who signed their children up for religious education, broken down as follows: workers, cooperative peasants, officials, teachers, members of the NSC, the army, and other professions.

⁴³ SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 24. septembra 1952. Návrh na usmernenie a organizačné zaistenie ďalšej etapy boja proti tmárstvu na školách.

⁴⁴ SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 24. septembra 1952. Návrh na usmernenie a organizačné zaistenie ďalšej etapy boja proti tmárstvu na školách.

⁴⁵ SA Košice, f. District National Committee (hereinafter DNC) Košice - vidiek, c. 679.

⁴⁶ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 833. Zasadnutie 14. februára 1953. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

⁴⁷ A meeting of the Commission for Education on 28 February 1953, pointed out that student attendance of classes of religious education was declining because parents were also signing their children out of classes during the school year. Specifically, in Banská Bystrica, Bratislava and Košice, the numbers were 185, 197 and 166 pupils respectively, but numbers were also decreasing in other regions. SNA, f. CE c. 134. Zasadnutie kolégia 28. februára 1953. Správa o rozširovaní poznatkov prírodných vied a o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách.

⁴⁸ SA Košice, f. DEC council of RNC Košice region, c. 57.

During the course of the action, it became evident that many teachers were “indecisive”, and others took a passive attitude and “thwarted” its successful course by signing up their children for religious education. However, the so-called provocateurs and “insidious enemies of socialist education” were also exposed. These were school staff who found the courage to speak out against a discriminatory practice that abused respect for freedom of religion and conscience.⁴⁹ The teachers' manifestations of opposition against the communist regime's practice varied, as illustrated in several examples. Teacher Dobát from the Higher Agricultural School in Levice “provocatively” brought an application for his child's religious education to the school, the headmaster of the National School (Level I) in Mlyňany, Štefan Šebo, consulted with the priest about the implementation of religious education, teacher Rajcharová took the children to church on 1 September, teacher of the II. National School in Nitra wore a large cross around her neck during the persuasive action, and the headmaster of the national school Gunár, in Šípkov, Bánovce nad Bebravou district, met regularly with the priest and expressed his attitude towards religion as follows: “*if religion was like my coat, I'd take it off. But I can't take it off yet.*”⁵⁰ On the other side were the teachers and the schools, who managed to achieve “good results” in the autumn of 1952. These were, for example, the teachers in the second level school in Zlaté Moravce, where none of the teachers signed their children up for religious education, and out of 679 pupils only 367, i.e. 54%, attended classes of religious education. The situation was similar at the first level school in Bratislava, where teachers managed to achieve that 49% of pupils did not sign up for religious education. “Success” was achieved in the first level school in Prečín, in the Považská Bystrica district, where all the teachers were members of the CPS and all of them had left the church. Half of the children there attended classes of religious education.⁵¹

The communist regime practices included the checking of the implementation of the resolutions adopted by the leading bodies of the CPC. The course of enrollments of pupils for religious education in September 1952 was evaluated not only by the Presidium of the CC CPS, but also by the regional and district party committees and by officials of the school party organisations at regional seminars. Discussions at these forums confirmed that, thanks to communist teachers, the topic of religion was still relevant among teachers. On the other hand, they pointed out that there were still “*great deficiencies in the ideological level of the communist teachers, that even many teachers - chairmen of the BO of the CPS had not yet dealt with the issue of religion and had not left the church. Many BO CPS are only formally dealing with the issue, they are not achieving success.*”⁵²

⁴⁹ SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Predbežná správa o priebehu plnenia výnosu PŠVU o vyučovaní náboženstva.

⁵⁰ SNA, f. CE c. 132a. Zasadnutie kolégia 3. októbra 1952. Predbežná správa o priebehu plnenia výnosu PŠVU o vyučovaní náboženstva.

⁵¹ SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 833. Zasadnutie 14. februára 1953. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

⁵² SNA, f. CC CPS, Presidium, c. 833. Zasadnutie 14. februára 1953. Správa o plnení uznesenia Politického sekretariátu ÚV KSČ o vyučovaní náboženstva na školách I. a II. stupňa.

The Slovak Office for Church Affairs also had data on the number of pupils attending classes of religious education, which it received from the church departments of the individual regional national committees. The data are presented in the following table.

Region	Level I school			Level II school			Level I and II schools		
	number of children			number of children			number of children		
	Total	Not signed up		Total	Not signed up		Total	Not signed up	
		abs.	in %		abs.	in %		abs.	in %
Bratis.	89 395	11 990	13,4	44 196	8 060	18,2	133591	20 050	15,0
Nitra	68 441	9 588	14,0	41 194	8 898	21,5	109635	18 486	16,8
Ban. Bys.	47 255	6 584	13,9	25 295	4 863	19,2	72 550	11 447	15,9
Žilina	58 576	4 860	8,2	33 569	3 714	11,0	92 145	8 574	9,3
Košice	49 382	16 808	34,0	27 247	10 588	38,8	76 629	27 396	35,7
Prešov	49 275	29 521	59,9	27 253	17 549	64,4	76 528	47 070	61,5
Total	362324	79 351	21,9	198754	553672	27	561078	133023	23,7

Tab. 2. Number of children not signed up for religious education in first and second level schools in the 1952/1953 school year.⁵³

The combined results of the CESA and the Slovak Office for Church Affairs were nearly identical. While the CE reported that 25.5% of pupils did not sign up for classes of religious education, the figure was 23.7% according to the Church Office.

Teachers “coming to terms” with the issue of religion

Critical views on the attitudes of teachers to the issue of worldview and to the new procedure of enrolling children in religious education in the 1952-53 school year were also noted by the Slovak Office for Church Affairs. It expressed the belief that, in general, teachers have not “come to terms” with religion. In the districts of Malacky and Trnava, the majority of female teachers declared that they would sign their children up for classes of religious education. In the Pezinok district, about one third opposed the new way of enrolling children in religious education. In a few instances, teachers, including members of the CPS, informed priests about the course of teachers' meetings, where they were informed about the teaching of religious education. In Kapušany near Prešov, the headmaster of a school approached the priest and complained to him that he had orders to agitate against enrolling children in religious education, but he did not know what to do with his own children when “*he is not allowed to sign them up for classes of religion but he*

⁵³ SNA, f. SO CA, Secretariat, c. 5, No. 220/53. Správy o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952/1953. V kraji Nitra nebol zahrnutý okres Bánovce nad Bebravou.

*does not want to leave them without religious education either.*⁵⁴ Almost all teachers signed their children up for religious education in the district of Sered'. At a meeting of headmasters in the Nitra region, many publicly declared that they *"will not back down from their religious convictions, no matter what is done."*⁵⁵ In the Banská Bystrica region, there were 3150 teachers at that time, but only 148, i.e. 5.65%, were said to have come to terms with the issue of religion. A different situation existed among young teachers; for example, 65% of the graduates of the Secondary Pedagogical School in Banská Bystrica declared that they had come to terms with religion.⁵⁶

As already noted, part of the anti-religious campaign aimed at teachers was the so-called coming to terms with the issue of religion. In practice, this meant that a particular person should not to attend church services, marry in churches, christen their children, and, ultimately, they should leave the church. Many educators "came to terms" with the issue of religion out of fear, out of concern for losing their jobs and because of the material benefits that this move meant to them and their children. In fact, in case of admission to universities, it was often not only the applicant's record of participation in religious education, but also the record that the parents did not "come to terms" with the issue of religion that was given as a reason for denying them university education.

At the turn of 1952-53, the principle of the incompatibility of membership in the Communist Party with membership in a church began to be applied in practice and the pressure on religious teachers intensified. This principle was required not only of party members but also of civil servants, which included school staff. Of all civil servants, teachers in particular were subjected to intense pressure. The party authorities drew up lists of school headmasters and teachers who had signed their children up for religious education. Indeed, the punishment was uncompromising – headmasters were usually immediately stripped of their posts and *"teachers were gradually dismissed if they persisted in their convictions."*⁵⁷ As noted in the report of the Slovak Office for Church Affairs on religious education in the 1952-53 school year, many teachers showed a negative attitude toward religious education for purely existential reasons.⁵⁸

The radical action against school staff, which enforced the rejection of an idealistic worldview, also had an impact on the gradual change in the attitudes of the younger generation. In October 1952, the leadership of the Department of Education noted with satisfaction that *"education in the spirit of socialism has already ploughed deep furrows in the ranks of the school youth."*⁵⁹ and the pupils' attitude to religion, if not negative, was allegedly at least lax. The results of signing pupils up for religious education were *"attributable to a significant degree only to the influence*

⁵⁴ SNA, f. SO CA, Secretariat, c. 5, No. 220/53. Správy o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952/1953.

⁵⁵ SNA, f. SO CA, Secretariat, c. 5, No. 220/53. Správy o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952/1953.

⁵⁶ *Protokol X. sjazdu Komunistickej strany Slovenska v Bratislave dňa 13. - 15. júna 1953*. Bratislava: Pravda, [s. d.], pp. 103 - 104.

⁵⁷ SA Košice, f. DEC council of RNC Košice region, c. 57.

⁵⁸ SNA, f. SO CA, Secretariat, c. 5, No. 220/53. Správy o vyučovaní náboženstva v školskom roku 1952/1953.

⁵⁹ SNA, f. CE f. 132a. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane boja proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

*and decision-making of parents and priests.”*⁶⁰ According to the party authorities, particularly in the schools at the second level, parents in many cases made decisions against the will of the children.

Teachers were no longer permitted to go to church unless they went secretly to the district town or to distant villages where nobody knew them. This prohibition also applied to christenings, marriages, and confirmations, which the parents-teachers arranged in secret in the churches of distant parishes. The party leadership perceived that the public attitudes of teachers towards religious ideology were conditioned by external pressure, which was explicitly articulated by the Commissioner for Education and Enlightenment, O. Klokoč, at the 10th meeting of the CPS (13-15 June 1953). He stated that *“we cannot be satisfied with the fact that a teacher leaves the church. This is only a formality of the matter, which should be a consequence of their internal coming to terms with an idealistic world view... There is nothing more dangerous than an internally torn teacher. Such a teacher cannot educate a socialist youth, a person who is coherent, proud and firm.”*⁶¹ It was not possible to reliably ascertain the actual attitude of the teaching staff towards religious beliefs or their rejection of them. In fact, the above controversy stretched like a thin red thread through the whole society.

SUMMARY

The Imperative of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia: Teachers to Fight Against Religious Education

After the February 1948 takeover, the intention of the communist regime for education aimed to win the young generation to the ideas of building socialism in the Czechoslovak Republic; it presupposed a fundamental change in their worldview orientation. The ideas of Christianity were strongly rooted among the population of Slovakia. This was confirmed by the results of the census carried out in Czechoslovakia two years after the communist takeover. In the March 1950 census, 3 430 361 persons (99.6%) of the total population of 3,442,317 in Slovakia identified themselves with a religious worldview.

Given the ineffectiveness of the influence of the Communist Party on the education of children in the family environment, educational institutions became the main instrument of change. Their task was to bring young people up in the spirit of a materialistic worldview. It was impossible to implement the aforementioned aim of the Communist Party without the active cooperation of teachers, and so the Communist authorities took full advantage of teachers as civil servants and, in this context, of their existential dependence on the state.

The leaders of the CPS were aware of the situation among educators in Slovakia in terms of their worldview orientation. At that time, they knew that only a few dozen teachers were identifying with the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, of which atheism was an integral part. By the end of September 1952, the number of atheist teachers in kindergartens and educational institutions of the first to second level had reached the figure of 290. In the 1952-53 school

⁶⁰ SNA, f. CE f. 132a. Návrh na rozvinutie dlhodobej kampane boja proti poverám a tmárstvu na našich školách.

⁶¹ *Protokol X. sjazdu Komunistickej strany Slovenska v Bratislave dňa 13. - 16. júna 1953.* Bratislava : Pravda, [s. d.], p. 212.

year, there were 21 989 teachers in the aforementioned schools, which means that atheists accounted for only 1.31% of the teachers in the educational institutions. According to the information provided by the CESA, the number of atheist teachers increased in the coming period. From the end of September 1952 to the beginning of February 1953, i.e. in four months, their total in kindergartens and educational institutions of the first and second level rose to 1,020, which represented an almost fourfold increase. However, even this dramatic increase meant that only 5.49% of the teachers working in schools in that school year were atheists.

Teachers who made no secret of their Christian worldview became targets of the Communist Party, the school administration, and the security authorities, and their religious activities were subjected to monitoring. They were persecuted, transferred to new workplaces, and many were dismissed. In the terminology of the time, the phrases “persons who have not come to terms with the issue of religion” or “burdened with religion” were used to describe teachers who did not identify with the materialist worldview, did not leave the church, and participated in religious ceremonies, or otherwise manifested their Christian beliefs.

One aspect of the anti-religious campaign targeting teachers was the so-called coming to terms with the question of religion. In practice, this meant that a particular person was not to attend services, marry in churches, christen their children, and ultimately was to leave the church. Many educators “came to terms with the question of religion” out of fear, out of concern for losing their jobs, and because of the benefits that this step meant for them and their children.

A fundamental step in the re-education of the younger generation in the spirit of a materialistic worldview resulted in the gradual restriction of religious education at individual school levels, which constituted a significant interference with the religious rights of citizens as guaranteed by the Constitution. The struggle to implement religious education in schools constituted an integral part of the struggle between the communist regime and the churches to gain decisive influence on the education and ideological formation of the young generation. During 1952, the power-political struggle against the churches was transformed into a struggle against religion as an ideology. This involved the gradual restriction of the teaching of religious education in schools. By September 1952, parents were able to withdraw their children from classes of religious education. The Communist Party leadership changed the condition for children's participation in classes of religious education, and from the beginning of the 1952-53 school year, children could attend classes of religious education only if their parents signed them up for classes at the beginning of each school year, no later than 8 September. Should they fail to do so, the pupils were unable to attend the classes. The communist regime inevitably needed teachers in order to implement its aims in school policy, and this was also true when implementing the measure of registering pupils for religious education. The task of the teachers was to persuade the parents of pupils not to sign their children up for religious education. The “mission” was to be carried out during chance encounters, and especially during home visits.

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