

Report of Minister of National Enlightenment Awraam Norow on the inspection of the Warsaw School District in 1856

Summary

This inspection was a unique event for many reasons. Firstly, since the establishment of the Warsaw School District 16 years earlier, no Enlightenment Minister had ever visited those schools. Secondly, the inspection was conducted by the orders of the new Tsar of Russia, Alexander the Second, who had ascended the throne the previous year (on 18th February 1855) during a time when Russia suffered severe military defeat during the war with Turkey.

Aiming to rebuild the might of his Empire, the Tsar began introducing socioeconomic reforms, which, after some delay, included the Polish Kingdom. One of these reforms was the transformation of the education policy. In agreement with the new governor of the Kingdom, Prince Michail Gorczak, the course and scope of this policy, with appropriate justification, were to be put forward to the Tsar by Minister A. Norow.

For almost a fortnight in October 1856, Norow personally examined every stage of the national education, the condition of school buildings, educational resources, and most of all, the performance of school headmasters and principals, their cooperation with local civic authorities as well as the status and capabilities of the teachers. This was achieved by Norow's personal involvement in observing lessons, checking pupils' knowledge, observing their behaviour in the classroom, along with having short conversations with them. He visited secondary and district schools in Lublin and Radom, the Institute of Elementary School Teachers in Radzymin, and all the institutes, secondary and district schools, Cyrkuli and Sunday vocational schools, and Jewish schools in Warsaw.

The documentation pertaining to the above inspection (which can be found in the Central National Historical Archive in St. Petersburg) has made it possible to retrace not only its course but also conversations with school heads, teachers and pupils. It also facilitated the debate on the main points included in the report, which were presented to the Tsar by Norow, in agreement with the governor Gorczak and the school superintendent of the School District of Warsaw Pawel Muchanow. The outcome of such discussions and later decisions regarding the changes made by the Tsar are the subject of another publication.

Keywords: Minister Norow, inspection of the schools in the Polish Kingdom in 1856.