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DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET HIGHER EDUCATION 1961

When Khrushchev's educational reform was finally promulgated at the end of 1958, comment in the West generally tended to stress that higher education in the USSR would be seriously restricted as a result of the vocational and "proletarian" trends which seemed to be predominant in the wording of the decree. However the figures given last week by V.P. Yelyutin, the Soviet Minister of Higher Education (Pravda, 5th July 1961) do not appear to confirm this interpretation, which can now be seen to have been an over-simplification.

Certainly the increasing importance of a practical experience of labor in obtaining admission to a university can easily be demonstrated. Yelyutin said that whereas in 1957, the proportion of students enrolled for the first year of higher education direct from the Army or production enterprises was 28%, by 1960 the figure had already reached 57%. But Yelyutin also reported that there are now 2,400,000 students in the higher educational establishments, whereas in the 1957/58 year there were 2,019,100.¹ Thus an expansion of about one-seventh has taken place in three years. However the evidence suggests that the growth is concentrated largely on evening or correspondence courses. The latter now have 51.8% of the total number of students, i.e., 1,240,000, as compared with 906,000 in the 1957/58 year.

Khrushchev's deep-rooted concern for some basic improvement in agriculture is shown by Yelyutin's claim that the USSR now has 240,000 specialists with agricultural qualifications, nearly three times as many as in 1953.

The training of teachers by the Higher educational establishments appears to be in full swing, with 500,000 students learning the profession, although the country as a whole employs about 2,000,000 teachers in all.² Thus there is evidently plenty of scope for future expansion of the already generous ratio of teachers to pupils.³

In the sphere of teaching aids, Yelyutin put much emphasis on the value of films for training correspondence and evening-class

¹Narodnoye Khozyaistvo SSSR v 1959, Moscow, 1960, p. 741.

²Op. cit., p. 727.

³The pupil-teacher ratio at present is approximately 17-1 (U.S. Senate Congressional Record, August 1960.)

students at the universities. Although only 17 a year are now being made, he said it was necessary to step up production to between 400 and 500 annually, but he was curiously reticent about the development of educational TV, which appears to be still having teething troubles. "The Government decree on this subject is not being carried out", the Minister said.

Other key figures in Yelyutin's speech, which seemed to confirm the impression given in previous years of an abundance of specialists, verging on the point of superfluity, were:

3.6 millions with higher education
400,000 doctors (cf. 383,000 in 1960⁴)
1,116,000 engineers (cf 974,000 in 1960⁴)

The New York Times (7 July 1961) has argued that many of these engineers would not qualify as such by U.S. standards, and that the USSR needs a larger number of engineers because of its relatively underdeveloped nature. No doubt there is much truth in these contentions, but equally it is clear that the massive flow of students from the Soviet universities still represents a major challenge to the educational systems of both the U.S. and Western Europe. There are no signs to be derived from Yelyutin's speech that the Khrushchev reform has done anything to ease the pressure on the h.e.es. - far from it. At the same time it is worth remembering that the students entering them from the eleven-grade schools have had a year more of secondary schooling (395 hours more of mathematics and science) than was previously available to them.

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⁴Nicholas deWitt, quoted by Time, July 18th, 1960.