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SOVIET EDUCATION IN 1960

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In Moscow the All-Russian Teachers' Congress has now begun its work.¹ Watched over by A. B. Aristov and P. N. Pospelov, it dutifully began the proceedings by electing an honorary presidium consisting of the Presidium of the CC, CPSU, "headed by Comrade N. S. Khrushchev." Its main business is to review the first complete year of the educational reform, which is objectively and precisely described in Appendix I below, by a correspondent of the Wall Street Journal.

The first report to the Congress was presented by E. I. Afanasenko, Minister of Education of the RSFSR, who admitted that universal education has not yet been achieved. In fact the 1959 census showed that as much as 60.5% of the population -- aged 15 and upwards -- has not received a complete elementary schooling (7 years), but this situation is being rapidly corrected. At present about four-fifths of Soviet schoolchildren complete seven grades, and by the end of 1963, at least the same proportion is expected to graduate from the new 8-year elementary schools.

Afanasenko also made a strong criticism of some headmasters who have allowed general academic standards to drop in their enthusiasm for the production aspects of the curriculum, "not taking into account the real potential and strength of their pupils." However the negative effect of this minority should not be overestimated, because in fact only four hours a day, two days a week, are allotted in the 9th grade of the new secondary schools to actual production-line work²

¹ Pravda, 7 July 1960.

² See Appendix I, p. 3 below. In the 10th and 11th grades the production hours increase to six on two days a week.

as opposed to vocational training. Moreover, as the Wall Street Journal rightly points out, the secondary school curriculum is being lengthened to 11 grades from the previous 10, in order to compensate for the time spent in the factory.

As regards numbers, Afanasenko confirmed that secondary school enrollment is intended to expand rapidly when he claimed that in 1965 there will be 4.6 million pupils in the RSFSR's senior classes, compared with 2,000,000 at present. Before the demographic losses caused by the war began to make themselves felt, the RSFSR had about 2,862,000 pupils in the 8-10th grades of the secondary schools, with an additional 482,000 in the same grades of the workers' and rural youth schools (1955/56 figures).³

Since 1959-60 was the first year of the reform, it was to be expected that some 11-year schools would be established which do not yet possess the necessary conditions for success. Afanasenko indicated that in some cases there is a shortage of production facilities, classrooms, laboratories and skilled teachers of both general and vocational subjects. These shortages are likely to continue, in view of the rapid expansion which is contemplated, but they do not seem likely to become so critical as to imperil its ultimate success.

The clash between the vocational training enthusiasts, who wish to see Soviet adolescents given a "proletarian," practical education, and the factory directors, who do not want an ever-changing supply of juvenile unskilled labor clogging their production lines, has not yet been finally resolved. But Afanasenko recommended as "most desirable" the establishment of "instructional shops or sectors." This solution would have the effect of leaving the main shops free for the operations of the permanent labor force, though it has the disadvantage of requiring additional investment to provide the necessary space.

The overloading of pupils with too ambitious a program of study and homework continues, and I. A. Kairov, the President of the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of the RSFSR, complained that it hampers the task of indoctrination by reducing the time available. Nevertheless there is no sign that it will be reduced, and throughout the school curriculum, the work load continues to be formidable by normal Western standards.

r.r.g.

³ Kulturnoye Stroitelstvo SSSR, Moscow, 1956, p. 133, 159.

The Wall Street Journal.
29 June 1960
by Edmund K. Faltermayer

Mr. K. Starts Mixing Factory, Class Work; Protests Impede Plan

The much-acclaimed Soviet education system, which helped inspire the spirited post-Sputnik reappraisal of US schools, is undergoing a massive upheaval of its own these days - one that has brought a host of readjustment troubles and exposed some of the deeper-rooted problems of a communist society.

Curiously, while American educators are shifting emphasis from vocational learning to old-fashioned book learning, their Soviet counterparts are rushing headlong in very nearly the opposite direction. Their goal: To transform Russia's 200,000 primary and secondary schools into "polytechnical" schools that will equip all graduates to go directly to work in factories and farms. The science-heavy academic load, which has awed so many U.S. educators, won't actually be reduced. But high school pupils will have to spend a third of their school time learning a manual trade, even if they plan to go on to a university. To help make up for the time given to manual training, a year is being added to the Soviet curriculum.

The purpose of this most drastic school shake-up in three decades, according to its instigator, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev, is to bring the schools "closer to life" and combat the "lordly contempt for labor" that has developed among the intelligentsia - a grave development in a society supposedly moving toward a completely classless Communist state. The study-and-work scheme, unlike so many recent changes in the Soviet system, harks back directly to the writings of Marx and Lenin.

Practical Aims

But Mr. K also had some practical aims in mind: To discourage youth from seeking admission to jam-packed universities and technical institutes, and to remedy the serious shortage of skilled labor in Russia's increasingly mechanized factories.

What distinguishes Mr. Khrushchev's school reform from some of his other sweeping changes in the Soviet system is the non-dogmatic way in which it's being implemented. Says enthusiastic Mikhail Kashin, deputy minister of education for the Russian Federation, biggest of the USSR's 15 republics: "We're taking an experimental rather than a rigid approach."

Even more intriguing for the light it throws on the present days workings of the Soviet system, is the way in which powerful vested interest groups appear to have watered down some of the plan's more drastic features. This process unquestionably has its limits. But it demonstrates the strength of the opposition to Mr. Khrushchev's plan, at least in the form first suggested. Opposition to the plan came from three groups affected by it. These include the professional educators who don't like sharing dominion over their charges with factory directors, the harassed factory directors who don't

like the idea of youngsters cluttering up their plans anyway, and the big new middle class which is determined that its children shall not have to spend their lives in factories.

Educational Advance

When Mr. Khrushchev first agitated for a revamping of the schools in April, 1958, he said, in effect, that all students, except for a few "gifted" ones, should go to work after seven or eight years of schooling and complete their education in evening institutions. At least, that's the impression he gave to many Russians though others dispute this. But by the time the Supreme Soviet passed the school reform law in December, 1959, a lot of influential people had gotten Mr. K's ear. It now appears, partly in the light of later developments, that just as many children - about a third of the total - will go on to a full-time high school education as at present, except that they'll also have to do the part-time factory or farm stint. And the children of the prosperous middle class will still have a chance at higher education.

Thus, some Western authorities say, the school reform may never achieve one of its stated purposes, which is to wipe out inherited privilege. In practice, they say, those who continue on to high school will continue to be those who have the best grades - and aren't forced to go to work for economic reasons. One observer here sees a propaganda problem, too. "The school reform," he says, "points up a basic contradiction in the Soviet system: The idea of equalitarianism versus the party's pressure on people for self improvement."

Despite these difficulties, the plan is getting into high gear and is scheduled to become universal in the USSR in the fall of 1963. During the academic year just ended, some 80,000 high school pupils in 2,000 schools spent a third of their time on manual labor. In Moscow alone 161 factories participated in the plan. Next fall, half the country's 31,000 high schools will be on the new curriculum. Even in the lower grades, manual work has been stepped up, although it's limited to labor in the schools themselves.

Boarding Schools

Boarding schools, the feature of the school reform which aroused perhaps the greatest interest in the West, are also proliferating rapidly, though not as fast as the regime would like. This year 400,000 youngsters were enrolled in these full-time institutions, which are designed to provide a "Communist upbringing" under ideal conditions and ease the lot of poorer class families from which most of the pupils come. Under present plans, the number of pupils in such schools is to grow to 2.5 million by 1965 and to several times that figure by 1980. Ultimately, Mr. Khrushchev would like to see boarding schools become universal. But even the shorter-range goal may not be reached on schedule. One reason is lagging construction: During 1959 building of boarding schools in the Russian Federation ran 50% behind schedule.

An even more crucial limiting factor is the cost of maintaining a pupil in these institutions. According to Mr. Kashin, the cost - nearly all of which is borne by the State - runs between \$600 and \$700 a year (figured at the tourist exchange rate of 10 rubles to a dollar), compared with only \$70 to \$80 in an ordinary school. The same fiscal factor will probably limit the spread of "prolonged-day" schools set up to achieve some of the aims of the boarding school. Thus, for the next decade at least, the place where most Soviet youngsters will feel the impact of Mr. Khrushchev's school reform will be in the new "polytechnical" primary and secondary schools.

To see this new system in action, visit Moscow's School No. 465, a five-story gray concrete building on "Big Torchlight Lane," about a mile east of Red Square. Last fall, according to director Mikhail Lebedev, the school's 134 ninth grade pupils became the first class to operate under the new system. In two more years, they'll be the first to graduate under the new scheme, which takes on an extra year to the former ten-year curriculum in order to compensate for the extra factory work. Under the new law, the school is technically referred to by the mouth filling title of "secondary general labor polytechnical school."

Classroom Quizzing

Four days a week the ninth graders of School 465 study the usual academic subjects. On the third and fourth floors you can see bright-eyed boys and girls in uniforms and red ties performing chemistry experiments and being quizzed in a history class about the short-lived Paris Commune of 1871. In the latter class brown-eyed Gennady Torstnikov, wearing the standard blue-gray boy's uniform with brass belt buckle, is getting a grade of "four" - out of a possible five - for saying, among other things, that "although it lasted only 72 days, the Paris Commune was important not only for France but for the fact that it was the first proletarian state."

On two other days of the six-day school week, these same youngsters will turn up at four different factories in the neighborhood, depending on the trade each child has chosen to learn. Students can choose among the First Watch Factory, the Factory of Universal Assembly Fittings, and Garment Factories No. 4 and 18. There they can learn everything from dressmaking (girls only) to watch assembly and lather operation (mostly boys). According to Mr. Lebedev, each day at the factory consists of two hours of instruction and four hours of actually turning out goods under the factory's regular production plan. The total weekly work load is a grueling one by American standards: 24 hours of classroom instruction, a roughly equal amount of homework, plus 12 hours at the plant.

Nevertheless, says Mr. Lebedev, a bespectacled blue-eyed man in his fifties, the ninth graders think the new setup is just dandy. Only two pupils, girls who wanted to switch from dressmaking to watch assembly, have complained, he says, and they later changed their minds. "The rest of the students are quite happy in the factory work and doing well at it." He scoffs at the idea that factory work on top of study overloads his pupils. "It's not difficult to study academic subjects under this system," he says. "The pupils spend only four hours

working on the days they go to the factories. That's not overloading. Besides, the academic course has been spread out over three years!" Before the factory work was inserted into the curriculum, he says, the same academic program was squeezed into only two years.

Complaints Plentiful

Mr. Lebedev's optimism notwithstanding, there have been plenty of complaints in the Soviet press about the way the new system is being organized. The director of Moscow's School No. 330, a certain A. Mostovoi, complains in a letter to Pravda about "serious shortcomings". The problem of deciding which pupils shall go to which factory, he charges, is being solved in a "disorganized fashion." The 104 regional economic councils which now boss Soviet industry, he complains, haven't come up with a "long-range plan" to tie in part-time instruction in with factories' projected needs for skilled workers.

Moreover, Mr. Mostovoi frets, students approaching the ninth grade are being "poorly" counseled in choosing which factory trade they want to take up next year. The choice of vocations, he says, is artificially limited by the types of factories in a school's neighborhood. In cautious language he also hints that combining manual and brain work is disruptive. Taking up a factory task and then leaving it for two or three days, he says, gives students only an "intermittent" acquaintance with production. The official says he's "inclined" toward a different plan under which all factory work would be concentrated in a two- or three-month period, leaving the rest of the school year for academic subjects.

In any event, the idea of combining a healthy dose of manual work with academic study seems here to stay in the USSR. The old school system, Mr. Khrushchev says, was "divorced from life." Modeled on the old Czarist "gymnasiums" and dating in their present form from 1931, the old schools and their identical academic curriculums (the only "elective" is a student's foreign language) were almost exclusively designed to prepare pupils for college. This, plus the fact that a college education in the USSR means the difference between grim subsistence and a halfway tolerable living standard, has led most pupils to "expect" a college education.

By 1958 the situation had become serious. The expanding high school network was annually turning out 1.5 million graduates, nearly all of whom wanted to get into universities and engineering schools. But these can admit only 225,000 fulltime students (plus a roughly equal number of evening and correspondence students) and the daytime figure is being frozen because of the country's "surplus" of college graduates. Simultaneously, a shortage of skilled labor was making itself felt. Moreover, the number of persons reaching working age was declining because of the low birth rate during the war years - a serious development in view of the formidable tasks of the current seven-year plan.

To cope with the backlog of university applicants, which may have gotten as high as 4 million, the regime at first took stopgap measures. A rule was introduced under which institutions of higher learning only had to take 20% of their applicants directly from high school. The rest were to be people with the papers to prove they'd done two years of full-time work after high school. But this regulation hasn't stemmed the tide. Many institutions are admitting up to 50% without the two-year "production stage". Bigwigs are using "pull" to get their children into universities without this and other new requirements. Bribery has reared its head, with payments running as high as \$2,000.

While it might seem so at first glance, the Soviet school reform is not really a step backward. To be sure, the new law junks the goal of a free 10-year education for all, proclaimed ever since 1918 and as recently as 1956. Under the new scheme the amount of compulsory schooling has been boosted from seven years to eight, effective in 1962. But upon completing this requirement most pupils will go directly to work at age 15 and will complete their formal schooling in evening schools which are to be greatly expanded. Some will go to technical institutes, where they acquire a semi-professional status, or to vocational schools as at present. But only a minority will go on to the ninth grade and beyond in daytime schools.

Even Quality.

Despite this appearance of "turning the clock back", it appears that the quality of Soviet schooling won't decline below its present level. To understand why, it's necessary to know what that level is. It's not as high as many Americans think, despite phenomenal gains since the revolution. It's still true that a Russian high school graduate gets more science and mathematics than most US college graduates, and that the USSR spends between 10% and 15% of its national income on education compared with about 5% in the US. But as late as 1958 Mr. Khrushchev himself admitted that only about 80% of Soviet children finish the seventh grade. By the end of the 10th grade, it's been figured by Western experts, only between 30% and 35% have survived.

The reason for this is not a teacher shortage. There are four or five applicants for each opening in Soviet teachers' colleges. Nor is it due to a shortage of plant, even though new construction lags and about half the schools still operate on a two-shift system. The real reason is the low living standard of the average Russian family. Most children have to go to work at 15 to help support their families.

From this standpoint, the Soviet school reform can only be considered progress. Pupils will be getting a year more of compulsory schooling than they would have gotten before. Moreover, there are signs that the number admitted to full-time high schools will be about the same as at present.

Soviet Studies (Extract)

January 1960

By R. S.

Following the re-organization of Soviet primary and secondary education,¹ new curricula have had to be elaborated for the basic (primary) eight-year course and for the three higher forms (secondary course). Fundamental to the solution of the problems arising in this context is the question of how far the new eight-year school will be the starting school for all pupils to be followed by further courses, diverse but equivalent - which is the solution arrived at in principle in the discussion of Autumn, 1958 - or whether it is to remain an 'incomplete secondary school' differing from its predecessor only by having the extra year. In the discussions reported below, this was repeatedly emphasized by those who attacked the tendency to frame for the eight-year school curricula which would form the foundation of the average citizen's general education. One should however not forget that these discussions, as distinct from the one on general educational reform, were conducted for the most part by professional scholars, who are mainly interested in those graduates from the eight-year school who proceed immediately to complete their secondary education (just one-half of the total during the current seven-year plan),² and particularly in that minority who are to become history teachers or academic historians. As to the rest, it was repeatedly emphasized that by 1965 80 or even 87% of all pupils graduating from the eight class will continue secondary education in some form,³ and that eventually the eleven year-school (with professional training) will become general - a far cry from Khrushchev's original insistence on treating the eleven-year school as a mere second-best to be kept in being only to fill university vacancies until the continuation school has sufficiently developed.⁴

Against this argument, the supporters of an internally rounded-off curriculum in the eight-year school stated that some ten to fifteen years would still pass before the ideal state of universal eleven-year school would be reached⁵ and that many of those who completed secondary education in the continuation schools would do so after an interruption of some years. It is also obvious that adult workers who attend continuation schools in order to qualify for better jobs or to prepare for entrance to an engineering institute will be less fond of, and certainly cannot be failed because of shortcomings in, the humanities: this point was not made in the published discussions but was certainly in the minds of the participants.

Naturally enough, the pedagogical institutions engaged in drafting the new curricula had to find their way between the Scylla of continuing to overburden pupils - that old-standing problem of the Soviet school - and the Charybdis of provoking too strong an opposition from specialists. The latter would be interested in a strong development of their particular subject and convinced that it had a main claim on the teaching time gained by the addition of the eighth (or eleventh) school year notwithstanding the political decision

that, in the higher forms, that gain should be devoted to teaching the pupils some practical trade. There was also the general conviction that additions of time were required in all subjects to master even the existing curricula without undue overburdening of the pupils. The gain from the additional school year amounts to 1,015 teaching hours for the eight-year in comparison with the former seven-year school;⁶ in spite of the cutting of less essential materials (for example in the field of literature) and the transfer of minor non-essential subjects to the activities of voluntary circles, the correspondents whose letters are summarized in Uchitel'skaya gazeta 27 June 1959 complain that the overburdening of the pupils is bound to continue. Yet every effort to reduce the pressure by an approach more accessible to the average child's understanding provokes the opposition of pedagogues interested in systematic schooling.⁷...

¹Cf. Soviet Studies, Vol. X pp. 432. ff.

²Naumov, reporting at the all-Russian Conference on History Curricula (Voprosy istorii 1959 No. 6, p. 165.)

³Information given by the RSFSR Deputy Minister of Education, M.P. Kashin (ibid.) to this Conference and by A.T. Kinkulkin at the session of the Institute of History (Voprosy istorii, 1959, no. 8, p. 197.) If not arising simply from wishful thinking on the part of the compilers of Kinkulkin's data, the discrepancy is explicable by different definitions of 'complete' secondary education; if the higher figure is correct yet includes technical schools of all kinds this would not weaken the case of those who insist that the eight-year school should give the average citizen the desired knowledge of the humanities.

⁴Even E. Afanasenko, the RSFSR Minister of Education, addressing teachers on the eve of the new school year, described the aims of the continuation school as to give 'full secondary education to these young people who for some reason have had to interrupt their secondary education and who are now working in some branch of the national economy', with the conclusion that the schools have to be so improved that they can provide qualifications for these 'golden reserves' of future higher education (Narodnoye obrazovaniye 1959, no. 9, p. 12.)

⁵F.P. Korovkin at the Moscow University Conference (Voprosy istorii 1959, no. 5, p. 212.)

⁶National variations result from the solution of the language problem adopted for the non-Russian republics (cf Soviet Studies, vol. X, p. 434) In Azerbaidzhan, for example, schools teaching in the vernacular, with Russian as an additional subject, have at their disposal a total teaching time of 8,208 hours in the eight-year school as against 6,654 hours in the former seven-year school: The Russian-language schools, with the vernacular as an additional subject, have only 7,848 hours as against the former 6,620. But this is substantially more than normal Russian schools in the RSFSR. The difference is obviously due to

the better teaching of the second language, since the teaching of Russian to a standard sufficient to be a basis for higher education requires much more time than the conveyance of a working knowledge of the vernacular to Russian children (cf. Bakinsky rabochi 3 and 4 September 1959). There will be some temptation, particularly for pupils of the Azerbaidzhani national school, to drop the additional subject, with harmful effects on their future career: fear of such consequences must have contributed to the insistence of the non-Russian republics on a nine-year school in the 1958 discussion.

⁷Cf. for example the collective protest of Central Asian teachers of natural history (in Sovetskaya pedagogika 1959 no. 7) against the (eventually adopted) suggestion of the Leningrad Research Institute of the RSFSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences that in the fourth class (i.e., children aged 12) geography and biology should not be taught as specific subjects, but that there should be three hours weekly of 'knowledge of nature' followed by the fifth year onwards by special courses of geography and biology, each at two hours per week.