

## Soviet Education—Four Studies

Nicholas DeWitt:  
*Soviet Professional Manpower, Its Education,  
Training and Supply*,  
National Science Foundation, Washington D. C., 1955.

Alexander G. Korol:  
*Soviet Education for Science and Technology*,  
Technology Press and John Wiley &  
Sons, Inc., New York, 1957.

George S. Counts:  
*The Challenge of Soviet Education*,  
McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., New York, 1957.

George L. Kline (Ed.):  
*Soviet Education*,  
Columbia University Press, New York, 1957.

Reviewed by Norton T. Dodge

THESE FOUR STUDIES of Soviet education, though varying in scope and focus, contribute significantly to a keener appreciation of the fundamentally different function and purpose of education in a totalitarian system as compared with a democratic society.

Nicholas DeWitt, of Harvard University's Russian Research Center, whose book antedates the other three more recent volumes, has produced a broad, pioneering study of the Soviet educational system and its growth and development. Alexander Korol, a member of the research staff of the Center for International Studies of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, presents a penetrating study of narrower scope concerning an area of Soviet education that is of particular interest at present. George S. Counts, educator and longtime student of Soviet affairs, focusses his attention primarily on the Soviet use of education as a weapon of political indoctrination. Finally, the volume edited by George L. Kline, of Columbia University, affords some interesting, though scattered, first-hand glimpses of the Soviet educational system, as recalled by eight former Soviet citizens.

Like every other form of state-directed activity in the Soviet Union, education is conceived as a

weapon serving the interests of the Communist Party and dedicated to a single objective—the victory of the Soviet system. In furthering this aim, it has a two-fold task to accomplish. On the one hand, it must equip thousands of scientists and technicians with the skills and capacities necessary to assure the constant growth of Soviet economic and military strength. On the other, it must perform the function—vitally essential to the perpetuation of any totalitarian system—of inculcating in successive generations of Soviet citizens unquestioning dedication to the ideology and policies of the state.

Thus, under Communist totalitarianism, the development of the state is substituted for that of the individual as the primary goal of education. It is precisely this characteristic which fundamentally distinguishes Soviet educational policy and practice from those in democratic countries. As DeWitt points out (p. 1):

It is not the individual around whom the educational system is built, but the state, which, by identifying itself with pursuits of the common good, attempts the ruthless subordination of the individual—his rights, tastes, choices, privileges, and his training—to its own needs.

This essential difference of educational purpose under communism and under democracy points up the inadequacy of trying to measure Soviet educational achievement by means of simple comparisons with Western academic training. While DeWitt, Korol and Counts all make such comparisons, they are

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nevertheless more concerned with the basic question of how well Soviet education meets the needs of the Soviet system itself.

The most impressive achievement of the Soviet educational system has unquestionably been the rapid growth in the number of students trained. The present widespread acknowledgment abroad of Soviet achievement in this area is largely the result of DeWitt's study, which at the time it was published in 1955, provided the first comprehensive statistical measure of the progress of education in the USSR. With ingenuity and care, the author pieced together such fragmentary data as were then available from Soviet sources and derived from them estimated enrollment and graduation figures by year and by type of institution and training. It is a testimony to his thoroughness that, when the Soviet government later published its own compilation of educational statistics in *Kulturnoe Stroitel'stvo SSSR* (Cultural Construction in the USSR), the estimates were found to be in close agreement. Much of the data contained in the Soviet handbook may be found in Korol's study, making it possible for the interested reader to compare the DeWitt estimates with the official figures.

THE STATISTICS show that there has been impressive growth at every level of the educational system. Total enrollment in regular primary and secondary schools almost tripled over the 25-year period beginning with the 1927-28 school year; the upper grades showed particularly impressive increases—ninefold in grades 5-7 and almost thirtyfold in grades 8-10. During the same period, technicum enrollment rose to more than 15 times its 1927-28 level. For the higher educational institutions, the increase was sixfold both in total enrollment of regular students and in the annual number of graduates. In addition, the number enrolled for correspondence study in the higher institutions—largely teachers seeking to improve their qualifications—has grown rapidly in the past decade and now amounts to one-half the regular enrollment. However, because of the lower graduation ratio for correspondence students, this added only 62,000 graduates to the 179,000 regular graduates in 1955.

The DeWitt and Korol studies also reveal the close correlation between changing state needs and relative enrollments for different types of training. Reflecting the acute demands of the industrialization program, enrollment for engineering study was predominant from the late 1920's until about 1937-38, when the main emphasis shifted to the training of teachers. At present, the state's requirements in the age of nuclear weapons and space satellites are reflected in the fact

that engineers and university-trained natural scientists and mathematicians account for almost 40 percent of the regular graduates.

Such preoccupation with science and technology was possible, of course, only at the expense of other academic disciplines, particularly the humanities and social sciences, which are considered less essential to the development of Soviet economic and military strength. The sacrifice of Russian intellectual potentialities in these "non-essential" fields prompts Korol to write (p. 411):

The greatest tragedy of this century may well ultimately be that for 40 years successive generations of the Russian peoples, living in a country with enormous potentials in natural resources and possessing vigor, talent, and a rich spiritual heritage, for all the training they have so eagerly and grimly undergone, have been denied the privilege of education.

Genius can, and indeed must, transcend any educational system, but the average student faithfully reflects his educational environment. Consequently, although the latter may never publish anything or provide other clues to his capabilities, these may be judged fairly accurately through a careful evaluation of the quality of his training. Such an evaluation must encompass the entire educational system: the physical facilities, the teaching staff and methods, curricula, textbooks, examinations, etc. Both DeWitt and Korol undertake this ambitious and challenging task.

On the lowest level, *i.e.*, the "ten-year schools" (equivalent to US primary and secondary schools), physical facilities have been sufficiently expanded to relieve some of the strain. Only a few schools are now operating on three shifts; two-thirds, however, still require two shifts. Laboratory equipment appears to be adequate in the cities, though reports indicate that this is frequently not true of schools in the rural areas.

The ten-year school curriculum, influenced by the old Tsarist gymnasium and its German antecedents, has thus far been a demanding one. Formerly only a small percentage of students was expected to complete this training, and the bulk of the less capable were directed into technicums or vocational schools. Today, however, as ten-year education becomes more general, there are signs of some erosion of the curriculum, in the form of "politechnization"; and it is the humanities, rather than the sciences, which are yielding ground in favor of more vocational type courses. Also, a tendency has been reported to grade student performance less strictly to avoid excessive failures, resulting in a hidden deterioration of stand-

ards. The fixed curriculum, syllabi and texts, however, limit the extent to which such practices are possible, and require a minimum level of achievement that is still quite high.

As far as the quality of teaching is concerned, one deficiency stands out particularly. Although a large proportion of the ten-year school teachers had their training in recent years, methods of instruction are reminiscent of the nineteenth century and stress learning by rote and mastery of detail rather than the development of independent thinking and creative ability. This "formalism in teaching and the pupils' knowledge" is accentuated by the examination system, under which the content of the questions is known in advance, permitting the students to regurgitate previously prepared answers. Still, the student who manages to graduate emerges with a very thorough grounding in rules, methods and techniques, as well as an impressive fund of factual information. As Korol puts it, "he may have gained considerable knowledge, if not an imaginative understanding."

HOW HIGH a place in the social and economic scale a Soviet youth can attain has become increasingly dependent upon his successful ascent of the academic ladder. Until recently, the ten-year school graduate could expect to continue on to higher education. Today, however, their number has so increased that the higher educational institutions can accommodate less than one-fifth of the graduates as regular students, and perhaps another fifth as correspondence students. The majority, therefore, either must be diverted into technicums and other vocational training programs or enter industry without further preparation.

According to the Soviet press, however, many of those not admitted to the higher educational institutions or to vocational training have been reluctant to enter the labor force, and remain at least temporarily unemployed. These frustrated aspirants not only constitute an element of waste in the educational system but also have contributed to the increasingly serious youth problem of recent years. (See articles by A. Kassof and by S. V. and P. Utechin, *Problems of Communism*, May-June 1957.) Despite a growing concern with the situation, the regime has not yet found a solution.

A further problem arises from the keen competition among those entering higher education for admission to certain favored fields of study. As a result of strong incentives (more generous scholarship aid and the future prospect of greater prestige and financial rewards) offered in the fields enjoying high government priority, these fields attract a surplus of applicants,

perhaps as many as a dozen candidates competing for each vacancy. Moreover, those who are not admitted must wait a year before reapplying to the same faculty or trying another, with the result that many students apply for a field in which they have little interest but where there is less competition. The unresponsiveness of the educational system to the desires of the students gives rise to frustrated careers and wasted talent. On the other hand, from the government's standpoint, the system does serve its purpose in providing the desired quantity of top-grade material for priority fields of study. In the physical sciences and select fields of technology, for example, there appears to be little outstanding talent missed.

What sort of education do the few who gain admission to the higher institutions obtain? During the past decade, unquestionably, some of the glaring deficiencies have been overcome. The quality of instruction is no longer likely to be impaired by shortages of properly-trained professors or of such physical facilities as classroom space, laboratory equipment and textbooks. However, in the matter of methods, certain defects still persist, one of which is the excessive burdening of students with class hours and other compulsory work. Soviet educational critics themselves have been urging a reduction of the 36 hours of required weekly class time to allow students more opportunity for independent study and thought. But despite these almost universal complaints from educational circles, the class load has not yet been materially lightened.

ANOTHER DEFECT plaguing university education is one inherent in the Soviet system of centralized control—a lack of flexibility in the curricula, syllabi and texts. Any changes not only must be approved by the Ministry of Education, but if approved become obligatory throughout the educational system. As a result, fruitful experimentation with curricula, course content and texts by individual professors or institutions is ruled out. During the period when the elevation of standards was a major concern, such uniformity may well have been necessary to ensure a minimum level of achievement; today, with standards more secure, it merely tends to discourage and frustrate the more original and creative minds. It is only in the most advanced courses, for which no syllabi can be prepared, that the professors are relatively free to teach as they please.

Despite these weaknesses at various levels of the educational system, both DeWitt and Korol view with respect the final results in the fields of science and engineering. Korol, who had the benefit of evalua-

tions made by M. I. T. specialists of up-to-date Soviet curricula, syllabi, textbooks, examinations and other material, sums up his assessment of Soviet training in physics, for example, in the following terms (p. 357):

A Soviet physics undergraduate starts his course without any formal deficiencies from his secondary education; he pursues his highly concentrated, professionally oriented study for five long years; the university he attends, relative to other Soviet schools of higher education, has been least affected by the unhappy experimentation with curricula, methods, and objectives of training; his school commands relatively the best teachers, textbooks and facilities. As to the level of professional training, therefore, we would conclude that the Soviet physics graduate is at a par with, and in his particular area of specialization (one of ten options) perhaps at a higher level of professional preparation than, his American counterpart after one year of graduate training.

After completing his higher education the Soviet graduate is obligated to accept, for a three-year period, the specific job to which the state assigns him. Although his personal desires may receive some consideration, in the last analysis it is the state's needs which are decisive. The power to allocate jobs in this arbitrary manner is, of course, indispensable to the operation of a highly-centralized, planned

economy, but it is at the same time a source of resentment and dissatisfaction among graduates whose personal desires and ambitions are in conflict with the objectives of the all-powerful state.

The other half of the dual task of Soviet education—the mass indoctrination of the people with Communist attitudes and beliefs—is the primary concern of the study by Counts. Additional insights into this aspect are provided by the first-hand reports of ex-Soviet citizens in the volume edited by Kline, which includes a revealing vignette of student life at a Soviet university and interesting accounts of teacher and engineer training. The value of these reports suffers, however, from the fact that all are based on experience prior to World War II.

From the first the Bolsheviks saw quite clearly that they faced the task of re-educating an entire people. Their almost naive confidence in the ability to transmute a conglomerate mass of human raw material into uniform replicas of the "New Soviet Man" was typified by Lunacharsky's boast that "we can mold a child of 5-6 years into anything we wish." Although hard-headed realists followed Lunacharsky as Minister of Education, the same grandiose aims

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## MANPOWER AND THE POWER OF THE STATE

The dimension that must above all be taken into account, if we are to understand the nature of the Soviet educational system, is the power of the Soviet dictatorship to allocate national resources, including intellectual resources, to its own ends. The degree of state control over manpower resources is exemplified by the obligation of every trained individual to work in a designated capacity and location for a number of years (in practical terms, indefinitely) after completing training.

Under Stalin, compliance with this requirement was substantially assured by the threat of direct punishment—a term in a forced labor camp. Under the "collective leadership," the harshness of enforcement has apparently been mitigated somewhat, with increased reliance being placed on exhortation and appeals to duty; and the many comments in the current Soviet press on the placement of graduates point to a considerable resistance on their part to accepting undesirable assignments. But graduates are still obligated to accept appointments. Despite Stalin's death and the subsequent relaxation of fear of police penalties, the statutory obligation of all graduates to take up designated work has been, to our knowledge, neither repealed nor modified; and it would be a mistake to believe—as Khrushchev would have the world believe—that the Soviet labor laws merely expressed Stalin's "cruelty." The need for compliance—if necessary, under a threat of extreme punishment—arises not from the qualities of individual leaders but inevitably from the logic of Communist philosophy and practice.

—From Alexander G. Korol's *Soviet Education for Science and Technology*, p. 401.



continued to motivate Soviet educational policy and practice down to the present time.

In his chapters dealing with political and moral indoctrination, Counts describes in detail how the teaching of literature, languages, history and even the sciences has been fashioned to build "the foundations of a scientific Communist world outlook." Of these, history is the most important medium for the inculcation of Bolshevik political ideas. In the ten-year schools, instruction in the history of the USSR is heavily stressed because—in the words of the Minister of Education of the Russian federated republic (RSFSR)—it aids pupils "to understand the priceless significance of the achievements of the socialist revolution" and cultivates in them "the desire to devote all of their strength to continuing successfully the cause of their fathers—the building of a Communist society in the Soviet Union." At the university or institute level, all students, even in engineering, must study the history of the Communist Party, dialectical and historical materialism, and Marxist-Leninist political economy; and their views are further conditioned by party-directed student activities and organizations, as well as by the more general media of the press and cinema—indeed, by their whole environment.

IT IS PERHAPS unfortunate that neither Counts' study nor any of the others under review explores the question of how the Soviet utilization of the humanities and the social sciences as vehicles of Communist indoctrination has affected the quality of education in these fields. DeWitt and Korol are almost exclusively concerned with Soviet training in the natural sciences and technology, where ideological dogmatism and interference have been felt to a relatively small degree. Both authors recognize this as one of the major reasons for the greater vigor and progress in these areas.

Counts' silence on this aspect is explained, perhaps, by the fact that the catastrophic effects of Communist attempts to force ideological conformity upon literature, art and the social sciences are already so well known as to need little elaboration. Philosophy, history, economics, sociology, even biology and genetics—all have been so twisted to fit the mold of Soviet-type Marxist dogma that these disciplines no longer exist as areas of true scientific inquiry.

What does concern Counts is the vital question of whether the formidable machinery of indoctrination set up by the Soviet state has actually accomplished its goal of converting an entire people, as Lunacharsky

so confidently boasted it would. In Counts' view, the answer to this question unhappily must be a qualified affirmative, but many observers would not fully share his pronounced pessimism. The observations of recent visitors to the Soviet Union, as well as scattered reports which have appeared in the Soviet press, provide substantial evidence of a growing ferment among the young intellectuals, and of the reawakening of a questioning and even critical attitude toward the Communist regime.

It is, of course, only in the past year or two that these currents of opposition have been able to come to the surface. During the last years of Stalin's regime, and even later, visitors to the Soviet Union invariably returned with the conviction that the massive weight of indoctrination and propaganda, coupled with long insulation from foreign contacts, had finally "brainwashed" the entire population. However, as soon as the grip of Stalinist terror was relaxed slightly, the facade of monolithic unity began to crack and hitherto latent doubts and dissatisfaction started to manifest themselves. The present reviewer witnessed this ferment in its incipient stage just three years ago.

To those who have lived as Soviet citizens and know from personal experience how far appearances can differ from reality in a totalitarian system, the recrudescence of signs of popular antagonism to the regime comes, perhaps, as less of a surprise than to many outside observers. The contributors to Kline's volume confirm that, even in the heyday of Stalinism, Soviet students remained inwardly sceptical of many aspects of Communist political belief, although forced to give outward acceptance and lip service. On the other hand, it certainly would be dangerous to assume that the outlook and attitudes of youth have not been warped to a considerable extent by long years of Communist indoctrination. In his sketch of Soviet university life for the Kline volume, for instance, H. G. Friese acknowledges (pp. 66-7):

At least one cardinal tenet of Marxism-Leninism was sincerely accepted by most university students, as well as ten-year school pupils, namely, that all preceding social systems, as well as present systems beyond the pale of Soviet socialism, were and are deeply unjust. . . . It was not merely the "scientific" criticism of Marx's *Capital* which convinced them of this, but also Russian literary works of the nineteenth century, including the writings of Gogol, Turgenev, Tolstoy, Goncharov, and Chernyshevski, and—among foreign authors—Schiller, Zola, and many others.

Moreover, even though the evidence of recent years indicates the existence in Soviet society of significant numbers of dissenters and non-conformists, it would be

premature to conclude that their emergence necessarily presages the decay and eventual collapse of the Communist system. Both Counts and Korol warn particularly against the dangerous but quite common tendency in the West—which they see as a product of our own intellectual conditioning and heritage—to assume that the spread of education must inevitably accentuate the dissident trends in Soviet society and thus pave the way for the ultimate triumph of liberty. Writes Korol (p. 415):

Consciously or unconsciously, we tend to endow any education with those ideals which are counted upon to contribute progressively to the well-being and quality of human society.

The Soviet system will doubtless evolve in a way unrelated to the experience of the West. Whether Count's pessimism will be justified or whether education, like a Trojan horse, will contribute to the ultimate destruction of Communist totalitarianism remains to be seen.

## Khrushchev and Kremlinology

Myron Rush:

*The Rise of Khrushchev*

Public Affairs Press, Washington, D. C., 1957.

Reviewed by Daniel Bell

IN EXPLAINING the deterministic logic of deductive wit, Freud tells a story called "It Stands to Reason". An East European Jew sitting in a railway car observes a young man in the same compartment who is going, apparently, to the same, small village in which he lives. Puzzled as to the young man's intentions and identity, he begins to ruminate: "Only peasants and Jews live there. He is not dressed like either, but still, he is reading a book, so he must be Jewish. But why to our village? Only fifty families live there, and most are poor. Oh, but wait, Mr. Shmuel, the merchant, has two daughters: one of them is married, but for the other he has been seeking a husband. Mr. Shmuel is rich, and lately has acquired airs, so he would not want anyone from the village for his daughter. He must have asked the marriage broker to find a son-in-law from the outside. But

Mr. Shmuel is old and cannot travel to meet a new family, so he would probably want a son-in-law from a family he knows. This means it would have to be one that had lived in the village but moved away. Who? The Cohen family had a son. Twenty years ago they moved to Budapest. What can a Jewish boy do there? Become a doctor. Mr. Shmuel would like a doctor in the family. A doctor needs a large dowry. The boy opposite is neat but not too well-dressed. Dr. Cohen. But in Budapest, Cohen wouldn't do. Probably changed his name. In Budapest? To Kovacs." As the train drew into the village station, the old Jew said to the young man: "Excuse me, Dr. Kovacs, if Mr. Shmuel is not waiting for you at the station, I'll take you to his home and introduce you to your betrothed." Replied the astonished young man: "How do you know who I am and where I am going? Not a word has passed between us." "How do I know," said the old man smilingly, "it stands to reason!"

The story is a long one, yet worth telling, for it illustrates the intrinsic wit and logic of Mr. Rush's book. His own chain of deduction began on a day back in 1955, when he observed in the May 25th issue of *Pravda* that Khrushchev's title as first secretary (*pervyi sekretar*) of the party suddenly appeared with the first letters of each word capitalized, as *Pervyi Sekretar*. Why the capitalization?—probably, ruminated Mr. Rush, to distinguish Khrushchev from all the thousand other "first secretaries" in the party, from the district level up, and thus to advance his

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