



Soviet Education '70's Faces the

ALEXANDER M. CHABE *

IT HAS been said about the Soviet Union that the more it changes, the more it remains the same.¹ Throughout the first half-century of Communist power, there has been much change. Yet, much remains the same. Soviet society has been transformed from an agrarian type to an industrialized type. Yet, much of the nation remains agrarian. Soviet ideology rejected bourgeois culture restricted to an elite few and introduced proletarian culture disseminated to the broad masses. Yet, many cultural values of the past remain.

The 1917 Revolution ushered in Marxist-Leninist educational philosophy and restructured educational organization, methodology, and curriculum. The dawn of a new educational era appeared as the church and aristocracy fell victim to the Communist "wave of the future." With the reordering of educational priorities, illiteracy was conquered. The downtrodden peasant could now read, even though he was provided only a bland diet of Communist propaganda.

The Stalinist educational era brought a return to the European academic model, while the Khrushchevian period reconsidered polytechnical training with its aim of developing needed blue-collar workers. Education was to be related to life. The post-Khrushchevian period saw Soviet education further accede to the demands of science and technology. As is evident, the long-term ebb and flow of Soviet education has been affected by

social, politico-ideological, economic, and scientific-technological considerations. Yet, educationally much remains the same.

On the present Soviet educational surface it looks like business as usual. However, serious problems, such as student discontent, have been reported even at the prestigious Moscow State University, from which recent American delegations have been steered away. Perhaps the shock waves of world educational ferment are now reaching Soviet shores. Eventually those waves may penetrate more deeply despite established Communist safeguards.

Ideal and Real Aims of Soviet Education

According to the vice-president of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences (APS), Aleksei Markushevich, Soviet education has the following aims:

... to educate a harmoniously developed all-round person spiritually and intellectually with an insatiable curiosity to be satisfied throughout life, one who possesses a good and kind heart with hands not afraid of any kind of work including manual.

Furthermore, he stated that "man possesses large potential. The teacher must help these young beings and apply their knowledge to develop a builder of a new and more perfect society."

It is very apparent that educational

¹ Anthony Carthew, "Moscow Report: . . . The More It Remains the Same," *The New York Times Magazine*, May 18, 1969, pp. 28-29+.

* Alexander M. Chabe, Professor of Education, State University College, Fredonia, New York

optimism underlies Mr. Markushevich's statements. In theory, Soviet education devotes attention to the ideal of developing an all-round personality for living in a utopian society. In reality, however, a Soviet citizen is trained or educated (within limits) by the Soviet state in order to serve the needs of the state. Soviet Communist education enhances the power and capabilities of the state and not the learner.

Rather than cultivating an "insatiable curiosity," Soviet education is producing the controlled and submissive man who is dutiful, unquestioning, and fervently patriotic. This "builder of the new and more perfect society" has discovered that the general design has been laid out before him by Party ideologists and planners. He must now pattern himself and his behavior to that design in order to become a successful "builder" of that "new and more perfect society." To do otherwise would result in failure.

General Features of Soviet Education

A primary characteristic of Soviet education is that the political power structure centered in the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU), intent on perpetuating only Communist values, determines the course of education. Ordinary Soviet citizens have little, if anything, to do with the formulation of local, republic, or union (national) educational policy which is implemented through the republic Ministries of Education and lower-echelon educational administrators. Educational change does not emanate at the "grass roots" but rather flows from the top downward through the CPSU, which retains centralized control over Soviet education and enforces a dictatorship over the mind. One result of such an arrangement is a uniform system of education and a standard curriculum.

With the exception of the hearing handicapped, visually handicapped, physically handicapped, and mentally defective, pupils are not grouped homogeneously. Such grouping or academic streaming is done neither in the first class nor later classes. Soviet educa-

tors are convinced that homogeneous grouping can be successful if instruction is properly organized. However, Soviet educators fail to recognize that their special schools in music, ballet, painting, and sculpture as well as the experimental schools in science and mathematics² reflect a grouping policy. They reason that such institutions serve only as developers of talents and not as agencies of streaming and differentiation.

As in other countries, Soviet educators have created a specially-designed curriculum for mentally defective pupils, who work at a specified rate under a teacher-specialist. According to the APS vice-president, pupils with deep mental retardation complete the four-year course of study in eight years, while those less retarded complete the eight-year course of study in ten years. Such claims provoke much debate among visiting American educators.

Pupil learning and instruction in the Soviet Union are carried on by the right hand. Soviet educators claim a physiological basis for right-handed instruction. They assert that a benefit of such practice is a lighter load on the left side wherein the heart is located. That the left side of the body has more nerves, more blood vessels, more inner organs, and controls the right side also points to the Soviet need for right-handed instruction. A pragmatic reason for right-handedness can be found in factory, workshop, and laboratory demands of Soviet technology and science.

Test types of the American and English system are not used in Soviet education, but instead achievement tests of the essay variety are employed. Such Soviet tests reflect the subject matter presently under study. After being administered, those tests are then analyzed for mistakes. As a result of that analysis, special tasks are assigned to individual pupils as the need indicates.

Soviet technical education is still being conducted in the technicums along a narrow profile of specialized studies. The key factor

² See: Elizabeth Moos, *Soviet Education: Achievements and Goals*. New York: National Council of American-Soviet Friendship, 1967. pp. 20, 58-73.

in obtaining advanced training and higher education in the USSR is ability. Educational progress is dependent upon individual motivation, capabilities, talents, and development.

The Soviet teacher is characterized as one who values each teaching minute and tries to use each such minute fully. He is considered the key figure in the educative process. Educational technology is regarded as a tool in the hands of a skillful and wise teacher.

Although many factories have changed or are in the process of changing to a five-day work week, Soviet primary and secondary schools still operate on a six-day week. Soviet educators envision no change to a five-day school week, but acknowledge the possibility of a changeover at some future date.

Soviet educators assert they do not want to leave out of their educational mainstream anything interesting, creative, and worthwhile in American education. The present value of American programmed texts is not being overestimated. Such texts are considered as one instrument available to the teacher in addition to others. Soviet educational researchers do not limit their horizon to American educational theories and practices, but study educational literature published in all countries.

Transition to the New Curriculum

The main thrust of Soviet education as it moves into the 'seventies is the transition to the new curriculum which attempts to bridge the gap between scientific progress and the old program. Due to the educative force of radio and television and developments in science, technology, and culture, much educational material had become obsolete. Therefore, unneeded and superfluous elements of the old curriculum faced elimination.

The contents of Soviet education changed after 1966 with the adoption of a new syllabus agreed upon by the CPSU's *otdel shkol* (school section) and the USSR Council of Ministers. In developing the new curriculum, the APS of the USSR Ministry

of Education sought advice and assistance from both educators and scientists. Revision in mathematics and the Russian language has been especially complicated. As of April 1969, forty percent of the schools transferred to the new curriculum. The transition is scheduled for completion by 1973-74.

The new curriculum will require new textbooks and teacher guides, which presently are under preparation at the APS. The APS believes that the main difficulty with the new curriculum will be with the teachers and not the pupils. Books, guides, materials, and articles will be needed to help upgrade teachers. Some parents, however, do not share the confidence of the APS educational workers. They contend that the advanced level academic content introduced into the new curriculum³ is beyond the intellectual capacity of many children. Furthermore, those parents contend that the instruction has become too abstract, resulting in confusion and a loss of pupil interest. Perhaps the APS went academically overboard in developing the new curriculum disregarding the learning characteristics and potential of the pupil.

As of 1970 under the new design, the primary level will consist of the first three classes rather than the first four classes. The fourth class will transfer into the subject matter system, resulting in an additional 500 hours of academic instruction. Rather than being taught arithmetic, primary classes will be taught mathematics. Physics, stressing atomic theory, will be taught in the sixth class. Chemistry will stress molecular-atomic theories and reflect modern science and technology.

Optional (elective) subjects begin with the seventh class and continue through the tenth. Such optional courses allow for meeting individual differences in a Soviet version. Pupils are given opportunity to study more deeply such subjects as art, literature, or science. The teacher must interest the pupil in a different field; however, optional courses are not required for every pupil but are being

³ For detailed curricular plans, see: Alexander M. Chabe. "Soviet Curricular Developments and Trends." *Educational Leadership* 26 (7): 667-68; April 1969.

encouraged. In the ninth and tenth classes, optional courses are included in the regular school day either before or after the scheduled lessons. Such courses are obligatory for the school and are included in the teacher's load; however, they are optional for pupils.

The new curriculum, theoretically designed to include a well-balanced volume of knowledge required of all pupils, is to serve for a ten-year period. Obviously, such a lengthy period of implementation will result in curricular dysfunctionality due to the rapid developments in science, technology, and culture. Apparently the Soviet educational bureaucracy cannot move any faster.

Soviet Educational Problems and Trends

Soviet educators identified several pressing problems.⁴ Problem 1 related to the shortage of men teachers in the lower classes. Repeated observation by this writer reveals that men teachers are in very short supply in all classes and in all types of schools. The institutes and universities, in comparison, are staffed with more men, but the exact ratio is unknown. It is doubtful whether Soviet men would be interested or permitted to teach in the primary level, which has become a woman's stronghold. Other classes of the ten-year school would undoubtedly be open to men. Identified as educational problem 2 was the shortage of teachers in foreign languages, mathematics, and physics. Similar types of teacher shortages exist in American education.

Educational problem 3 dealt with consolidation needs in the rural areas where too many small schools were operating. Such schools were either one-teacher or two-teacher primary (four-year) schools or incomplete (eight-year) secondary schools. The small eight-year rural schools have the separate subject curriculum, and some even provide boarding facilities.

Not identified by Soviet educators as a

⁴ For an accounting of Soviet educational weaknesses, see: Alexander M. Chabe. "Assessing Soviet Education." *Education* 88 (2): 3-6; November-December 1967.

SUPERVISION AND CURRICULUM RENEWAL

a systems approach

Kathryn Feyereisen, Wayne State University; **A. John Fiorino**, Temple University; and **Arlene T. Nowak**, University of Detroit.

This new volume presents a complete plan for effective supervision and curriculum renewal through the application of systems concepts to problems of educational organization. Featured is a step-by-step conceptual model for developing a self-adapting, self-regulating, self-renewing curriculum and instruction system—one especially pertinent for school leaders of the seventies.

338 pp. illus. \$6.50



Appleton-Century-Crofts

Educational Division

Meredith Corporation

440 Park Avenue South

New York 10016

This well organized PHONICS PROGRAM is successfully
used by over 120,000 teachers in all 50 states.



A simplified, carefully organized PHONICS program which may be used with any series of readers.

THE PhonoVisual METHOD

... supplements early development
of all COMMUNICATION SKILLS:
SPEAKING • READING • WRITING
SPELLING • LISTENING

This is ORGANIZED PHONICS... a proven, effective, game-oriented program that's quickly and easily taught. The Phono-visual Method is a parallel teaching supplement, not a substitute, to the sight method of teaching reading. It is a middle course between the old phonetic approach, with its attendant "word calling" without comprehension, and the sight approach with its dependence upon memory.

Within the first few months of his reading experience, the pupil is given the power to attack new words. He does not have to stop and acquire each tool as the need arises. Independence and the speed of learning allow for a greatly enriched program of outside reading, spelling, creative writing and proper speech.

Approved for purchase with NDEA and ESEA funds

FREE loan of demonstration film: "Phonovisual in Action"
(16-mm sound). Write to: Dept. EL-9

PHONOVISUAL PRODUCTS, INC. 4708 Wisconsin Ave., Washington, D. C. 20016

In Canada: Educator Supplies, Ltd. 105 Falcon St., London, Ontario

problem, but evident to American educators, is the smallness of room size. Space allotments at primary and secondary levels are minimal, curtailing any type of group activity. Seats and desks are crowded together, thus limiting the movement of pupils and teacher alike. One serious physical restriction and confinement.

Three educational trends^{5,6} were noted by Soviet educators: (a) *yasli* (nursery) and the *detskii sad* (kindergarten) are being consolidated into one establishment known as *yasli-detskii sad*; (b) the preschool network is being widened optimistically to be available within three to five years to all those Soviet children desiring such experiences; and (c) higher education evening classes and

correspondence courses are being dropped since they are considered to be of low quality.

As Soviet education faces the 'seventies, it recognizes its many achievements. The educational and cultural level of the nation has been raised. In economic development, the USSR occupies a place second to the world-leading United States. Soviet educators, however, are aware of the many problems and difficulties which lie ahead. Rapid developments in science and technology call for a continued reexamination of school organization, methodology, and curriculum. Soviet educational planners must concern themselves with the demands of an industrialized society and perhaps a post-industrialized cybernetic society such as that which is evolving in the United States. The 'seventies will show continued Party and government concern with education. Education will be expected to create that "new" Soviet man able to live in the "perfect" Communist society. □

⁵ For an enumeration of Soviet educational generalizations, see: Alexander M. Chabe, "Soviet Society and Education," *The Clearing House* 41 (5): 262-63; January 1967.

⁶ For an evaluation of Soviet education, see: Alexander M. Chabe, "Evaluating Soviet Education," *School and Society* 95 (2297): 458-62; November 25, 1967.

Copyright © 1970 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.