

## THE EDUCATIVE PROCESS IN SOVIET SOCIETY

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### THE PLANNED SOCIETY

THE PRIME characteristic of Soviet society is the unity of pattern and control in all subsystems of the society. In Western countries, subsystems — such as economy, religion, and government — coexist, but they preserve a certain amount of independence from each other. In addition, differing value orientations struggle within each of the subsystems — such as capitalism, socialism, and neo-liberalism in the economy, or Catholicism with Protestantism in the religious subsystem of a Euro-American society.

In a Soviet society, the same ideological pattern is superimposed upon all social subsystems, and no competition is allowed within any of them. This statement will have to be qualified to some extent by the persistence of survivals — those social subsystems which have retained some degree of independence because they are farther, in the Western direction, from Moscow. Yet these survivals are being planfully eliminated or subjected to such a degree of control that they lose their autonomy altogether, e.g., the Russian Orthodox Church. The latter has come to be tolerated as a pacifier of the less enlightened peasant stratum, but at the same time it serves as a transmission belt of some of the official values of the regime to this stratum, which the regime would otherwise be hard put to reach. This scheme was particularly well performed during the war — the Church prayed for Stalin, and Stalin paid the Church.

In addition to the infusion of all aspects of formal social life with one ideology, they are also all subjected to direction by one power center — the Politbureau. These two characteristics result in the organization of a formal social life which is very different from that in Western countries. The first and foremost difference is that, while in a Western society various subsystems are free to work at cross-purposes, this is made impossible, at least in the ideological sense, in a Soviet society. Any such conflicts between social subsystems would be reduced not to differences in values but to divergent material interests, such as occur when several ministries are struggling for control of the same industrial concern\*

- It is from the interstices of ideological systems working at cross-purposes that modern Western humanism springs. The elimination of this "wasteful" arrangement in Soviet society has led to a change in the meaning of "humanism". It now refers to a schizoid state of mind involving a full abandon of love for the Soviet, and passionate hate for the non-Soviet. This is the consequence of being displaced into the area between The System and flysteraa-which-should-no-be. Since The System cannot even be doubted, the negative side of the ambivalent feelings generated by this tremendously overbearing system is to be both displaced on and projected into the alternatives which so wantonly persist in continuing their existence side by side with the Truth.

As a consequence, all subsystems in a Soviet society have some of the same functions to perform — functions which are common to the whole official structure and, therefore, to any of its subsystems. All of the subsystems — economy, health care, sports, education, the arts — have to coordinate their efforts, within the structure provided by the Five-Year-Plans, in the fulfillment of these functions:

- 1) The ideological indoctrination of individuals coming in touch with the activities of the subsystem.
- 2) The testing of the ideological and political reliability of these individuals.
- 3) The selection of the reliable and the rewarding of the loyal for their loyalty.
- 4) The economizing of the expenses for the society of these processes of transformation and control of its human material.

In addition to functions common to the whole official structure (as distinct from institutions not yet put under complete control of the regime, such as the family, the peer-group, and the eternally sovereign love pair), every subsystem has its own specific function. Thus the function of the economy is to provide material goods by the application of human labor to natural resources. The function of the system of health care is to restore the human material used up in the productive process, as efficiently and as cheaply as possible, to the level necessary for continued exploitation. The function of the educational system is to form the formless, or, as in the case of the familiar "bourgeois-nationalist bandits" in the countries recently annexed, to reform the misshapen human being for the performance of his role in a Soviet society.

## **THE DETERMINANTS OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

THE ROLE of education is determined by two basic (and some auxiliary considerations). The first is the ideological. The individual has to be so educated that he not only knows the meaning of Marxism-Leninism, not only accepts it in a cognitive sense — but also wholeheartedly reacts emphatically with it. The individual has to determine his action by principles of Marxism-Leninism which he has completely internalized and which he would act in accordance with, even if political compulsion by the regime should be removed. This is what is called the aim of inward determination of action (rather than mere acting) in accordance with the principles of Marxism-Leninism.

However, this inner determination is very different from D. Riesman's inner orientation. The principles of Marxism-Leninism are to function, in the determination of the individual's action, not as an autonomous Superego but as a mechanism which would predispose the individual to the acceptance of orders coming from the embodied representation of the ideology he has been taught to internalize as the Truth. In other words, the ideological aim is inward determination of the individual to subject himself to orders of the Politbureau, and to exalt, to sense his glory as an individual, in this subjection — the more total, the more glorious.

This kind of self-subjection involves the complete subordination of the intellect, the will, and the desires. The individual must really love and hate (and cease to love and hate) on orders from the Politbureau. He must really find in Marx what has been read into his work by Lenin and Stalin (and that, indeed, has little in common with the genuine Marxian faith in the goodness of man). Finally, he must really be a mere selfless instrument at the disposal of the Politbureau.

The other determinants of the educational system are the empirical exigencies of the functioning of society. The school has to train individuals in the vocational and cultural skills needed for their performance as members of the society. But the extensive program of internal reconstruction and industrial expansion engaged in by all Soviet societies, and the aggressive foreign policy of the U.S.S.R., have put upon the school the extra heavy burden of vocational and three-year training. This fact alone — disregarding the equally heavy load of ideological indoctrination and required extracurricular activities — has made the Soviet school labor under overextended commitments which could not be fulfilled. However, it would be an exceedingly grave mistake to underestimate the success of Soviet schools in training highly competent (and numerous) cadres of narrow specialists, particularly in the natural sciences.

## **THE ORGANIZATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

THE STRUCTURE of the Soviet educational system is essentially determined by its position in the tightly orchestrated ensemble of subsystems encompassed in the structure of Soviet society. The school is not the only focus of the educational process, though it is a crucial one. The whole society has to educate its members in precisely the same spirit in all other areas of life as is prevalent, in the school as such. This equivalence of all of the formative influences which are focused, in a massive avalanche of the ever-repeated, by the society upon the individual is the crucial difference between Western and Soviet educational systems.

In point of fact, Soviet education does not start with teaching, but with the reconstruction of the conditions of life in a way that predisposes the individual toward the actions desired by the regime. Education in the narrower sense — though, again, not confined to the school but extended to business, cultural, recreational, and street life as well — then provides the pattern of explication of the actions induced. If the individual is to lose his autonomy for the sake of submerging in a collectivity, his life situation is so structured that he can perform his task only as a member of the collective, and habit — in Soviet pedagogy — is to precede understanding (or "social consciousness").

The main principles governing the organization of the educational section of Soviet society can be reduced to this scheme:

- 1) Close horizontal collaboration of the school with other social institutions on the same level in the social structure (cultural organizations, youth organization groups, Army units, economic establishments, etc.). It must be noted that the Soviet conception of collaboration of equals includes not only the duty of helping, but also that of controlling the other in the performance of his duties, and reporting the results to institutions that might be

interested, such as the Secret Police.

- 2) Internal control of the school as well as the collaborating institutions by Party actives operating on orders of the Party from within an institutional structure.
- 3) Hierarchical responsibility, which means that all information ultimately reaches, through several alternative channels provided by the authoritative structures of the collaborating organizations, the Central Committee of the Party, and all directions proceed the reverse way from the same monopolistic power center.

This organization of the educational system is exceedingly powerful in the concerted efforts which it can apply in almost all spheres of the youth's functioning, impressing upon him the stamp of the same blueprint of the "new Communist man." The obverse of this united effort is the total exclusion from the influences acting upon the youth, or the driving into obscure nooks and crannies of the social structure, of any alternative value systems or role models other than those provided by the regime. The student is simply prevented from realizing the existence of any other serious pattern of living, unless (as in the countries recently being sovietized, such as the Baltic States) he is made aware of different patterns by his family or by what survives of the Churches.

The overloading of the student with prescribed school work has the additional function (which is also one of the functions of Communist youth organizations) of preventing him from even finding time for independent departures from the provided patterns of thought. Obversely, he is obliged to actively occupy himself in practically all school work, including mathematics and in extracurricular activities with the not impressive resources of Marxism-Leninism.

## THE DYNAMICS OF SOVIETIZATION

HOWEVER, compulsion and restriction are not the only mechanisms through which the Soviet system exercises its charms on the young. The system knows the nature of man well enough to utilize all the motivational resources available in society for furthering the purposes of Communism. Even heterodox means are permitted if they serve the right end: fanatic emotionalization of the masses does indeed contradict the basic premises of the rationality of man!

Although the system has strenuously attempted to generate in its citizens "completely new" motivations of the Communist type, e.g., the Socialist attitude toward labor, it has not attained very much. The basic approach still remains that of functional utilization of pre-Soviet motivation for new ends, and the point is that all such motivation can actually, or potentially, be exploited. A typical case is the long-continued attempt to utilize heterosexual love as a means of increasing production — not only of babies, but of bricks and of tractors as well. The campaign has temporarily ended by means of a compromise: the Plan leaves Love alone, and Love promises not to interfere with (if it does not agree to positively support) the performance of the Plan. This is the real meaning of the recent return of romantic love in Soviet fiction and film

Several such psychosocial mechanisms of the utilization of non-Soviet motivation for the purpose of "Socialist construction" can be briefly pointed to:

- 1) The desire for companionship and play is utilized by the system by means of attempting to structure the life situation of the individual in such a way that he can satisfy this desire only in a group set up and controlled by the regime (Communist youth organizations, school interest collectives, etc.). The more compulsive aspects of the program of Sovietization are left to the school, the more attractive ones reserved for the youth organizations, so that the individual graduates with the more unpleasant memories connected with the conception of state school and the more positive attitudes attached to Communist youth organization (of which he is to remain a partisan after graduation as well).

- 2) The desire for advancement is played upon by the regime in appealing to those segments of the population that have social mobility aspirations, primarily children of the educated classes and sections of the upward mobile proletariat.

The loyal are rewarded by a system of admission quotas at the universities that specify what percentage of working class students are to be admitted. In considering such questions as admissions, scholarship awards, and professional placement after graduation, political qualifications are at least as important as professional ones. Together with the appeal to intellectual curiosity, this mechanism has served as the main socio-psychological means by which the Soviet system has harnessed the satellite intellectuals.

- 3) Intellectual and cultural Interests, which arise in puberty, are utilized by the system by means of monopolization of all vehicles of satisfaction of such Interests. Since no other intellectual system competes, Communism is at clear advantage. One must not underestimate the impressiveness of Marxism-Leninism as an intellectual scheme that purports to explain, in a rational and scientific way, the whole universe. Once an individual masters its difficult categories, it gives him the feeling of power over large segments of the universe, and of superiority over the unenlightened. In one sense. It is just the intelligent ones — those who can understand Communism rather than merely babble its slogans, that are the most vulnerable — since the intrinsic appeal of Communism is an Intellectual one. Most important, to those who accept it, Communism gives a system of faith and a way of life against which even religion is in its present emtattered state less and less able, in Eastern and Central Europe, to offer an equally impressive and comprehensive scheme.\*

\* For Intelligent recent discussions of this aspect see Cz. Milosz. *The Captive Mind*; and M. G. Lange. *Totalitare Erziehung*.

4) The need for Individual recognition is resolved by means of a planned system of competitions, exhibitions of student work, medals, and other rewards.

5) The need for new experience is responded to by pointing to the vastness and the variety of the country and culture in the Soviet world its immeasurable resources ,its dynamic expansiv-ness as an overpowering wave of the future. This appeal may well be expected to capture the imagination of at least some Eastern and Central Europeans in somewhat the same way as that in which the early Twentieth Century United States seized the fancy of some of their immigrant compatriots (or the Chicago of the Stock Yards — that of Carl Sandburg).

6) Finally, the idealism of youth, or the desire to immerse one's individuality in the service of a higher cause, is also used by the regime to attract adherents — though it has come to realize the intrinsic uncontrollability and, therefore, danger to the system of the idealist. The Communist idealist should by now be much more frequent, proportionately, in the West than in Soviet countries.

The leverage by means of which the Soviet system attempts to reach the deeper personality levels of the youth is the monopoly it reserves for itself not only of ideas, but of the physical, social, and cultural means of satisfaction of the basic developmental needs of the youth as well. The Marxist idea is then inextricably connected with the sources of need satisfaction so that it comes to be swallowed as an intrinsic aspect of the gratification of needs. In vulgar form, this mechanism operates in some such way as this: the kindergarten pupils are asked to pray to God for bread. Nothing happens. Then the children address a sort of prayer to Stalin, and some school functionary appears overloaded with bread—and sweets.

The typical structure of the process of Soviet-ization of the youth can be summarized in this way: before learning to think (the kindergarten and the lower grades), the child is taught to internalize certain habits and emotional patterns of attitude — positive toward the Soviet, and negative toward the non-Soviet objects. When he comes, in adolescence, to be able to reason, he is given the cognitive justifications for the attitudes already firmly established in himself. The complex of ideas, which he then comes to confront, derives its impressiveness from being a system which appeals on its face value to reason, satisfies at a deeper emotional level needs otherwise reserved for religion, and "places" the individual in an intellectually secure position with regard to the universe.

## THE REPULSIVE APPEAL

IT MAY be expected with a considerable degree of certainty that value orientations alternative to the Communist ones will be extinguished in one or two coming decades from the consciousness of the youth in the countries now under the heat of Sovietization. For various reasons inherent in the Soviet educational system, as well as in the culture of the nations concerned and the psychology of adolescence, the obverse prediction — that this youth will universally accept Communist educational demands and function as "new men"—cannot be made. Rather, a considerable amount of disguised resistance to positive Sovietization in the form of disinterest, disillusionment, skepticism, inner or professional emigration, sensualism, a pattern of irresponsible youth culture consisting of Western jazz, gaudy dress and drink, neurosis, and juvenile delinquency is to be expected. These developments do appear, If not increasingly, at least at a fairly high level of incidence in all countries of the Soviet orbit.

On the other hand, there are reasons to expect that precisely the best-trained and at least some of the most intelligent members of the younger generation will be most susceptible to the intellectual and/or material lures of Communism. One of the real dangers of Communist practises in the countries of their orbit is Inherent in the fact that any possible foci of resistance are capable of development only at the most primitive levels of social and mental organization. I offer this as one of the main distinctions between the resistance to the program of Sovietization now turned upon the countries of Eastern and Central Europe and the Resistance of the French against the Nazi occupants during the last war. A Sartre or a Vercors may be writing somewhere in Vilnius, but he cannot communicate with a public which he cannot create.

Consequently, no challenge to the monumental structure of Marxist-Leninist ideology can arise on the intellectual level, and even if this structure should not appeal, there is altogether no other to attract the attention of the intellectually awake. It is at this junction that the task of such institutions as the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe begins.

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*... The United Nations... Charter... does not call for peace at any price. The peace of the Charter is a peace of justice: it is a peace which will assure all nations great and small the right to be genuinely independent; it is a peace which will enable all individuals, however humble, to enjoy their God-given right to freedom.*

*John Foster Dulles*

*Militarily and materially we are strong. More important, we are strong in the partnership of many allies. But above all, our nation is strong in the support of principle: We espouse the cause of freedom and justice and peace for all peoples, regardless of race or flag or political ideology. Though in this strength we have reason for confidence, we likewise have need for wisdom and the caution that wisdom enforces.*

*Dwight D. Eisenhower*