

FIFTY YEARS OF SOVIET EDUCATION

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This paper outlines the development of Soviet education over the last 50 years. The initial difficulties are considered, as are the effects of the Civil War and the Second World War. Soviet education is seen to have two constant concerns: practical (the production of personnel for a developing economy), and ideological (the use of education in the shaping of a new society). Tensions between principle and practicability can be seen in many areas of the system, and the major policy changes are examined as attempts to strike a balance between them. With a brief survey of achievements to date and problems still outstanding, it is suggested that the prospects for the next 50 years justify cautious optimism.

A fiftieth anniversary is an obvious time for celebration and also a good time for stocktaking. The two are not easy to reconcile: celebration brings temptations to self-congratulation, stocktaking needs cooler assessment. Life has to go on after the speeches and parades are over. There has been a good deal of celebration recently in the USSR, and it cannot be denied that in the field of education there is much to celebrate. But there has been cooler assessment too, a constant discussion of the problems that remain to be tackled if the next fifty years are to match the achievements and avoid the mistakes of the last fifty.

THE BACKGROUND TO THE SYSTEM PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

The makers of the 1917 Revolution were faced with problems on a scale that we in these islands find it hard even to imagine. The physical conditions of the country itself make things difficult enough: the USSR covers an area of nearly nine million square miles, and includes every variety of climate except tropical. The psychological effects of vast distances and often pitiless climate are a matter of debate, but the practical difficulties of communication are obvious enough. It is one thing to put into effect uniform curricula in Ireland or even France, to do the same from Riga to Vladivostok, even when the machinery exists, is another matter altogether.

The size and variety of the population have added to the problems. Sheer numbers — there are some 230 millions at present — make things difficult enough. Further, although Russians are in a clear majority, with over 120 millions, there are over 100 other nationalities with their own

languages and cultures. Some of the smaller groups can be counted in thousands or even hundreds, but the larger ones are by no means negligible. There are 33 million Ukrainians, seven million Byelorussians, six million Uzbeks, four million Tatars, three and a half million Kazakhs, while the others — Azerbaijanians, Georgians, Moldavians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Tadzhiks, Turkmenians and Kirgiz — number between one and three millions each. In principle, schooling is available in the children's mother tongue, with Russian a required second language, but this involves further difficulties. Some of the smaller groups are not numerous enough to make vernacular instruction feasible beyond the first year or two, and even in the larger groups the additional burden of learning Russian often makes longer schooling necessary. Again, though it is possible to study in (say) Armenian right up to university level, mobility beyond the boundaries of one's own republic requires good Russian for success. This is, of course, preferable to a policy of outright Russification, but the fact remains that the multi-lingual nature of the country carries built-in disadvantages for the minorities.

To make matters worse, the country was educationally backward before the Revolution. Literacy was probably about 32 per cent over the country as a whole in 1914-15. But this concealed great inequalities, the level was more like 40 per cent in European Russia, higher still in the cities. But in the Asian and Arctic regions the picture was much worse, from 20 per cent in Georgia to under one per cent literacy in Turkmenia and Tadzhikistan. There is some reason to believe that the worst of these figures are artificially low, but when all possible allowance has been made for this, there is still no denying the general backwardness of the country (8).

If the position in 1917 was bad, many of the subsequent events made it a good deal worse. The civil and interventionist wars that followed the October Revolution threw the country into chaos and led to widespread loss of life. The end of fighting brought little respite. After a brief period of reconstruction, marked by some degree of flexibility in education and economics alike, came the long winter of Stalin's rule. The ruthless transformation of the USSR into an industrial society, and the human cost at which this was achieved, is well enough known. It is worth noting though, that this was also a period of educational advance. Stalin, for all his resemblance to an oriental despot, knew well enough that the ambitious programmes of industrialisation depended for their success largely on education, this meant not only engineers and other specialists, but the whole supporting structure of technicians, skilled workers, and mass literacy. For this reason, as well as for political and social reasons,

education was placed high on the scale of state priorities. As one measure of this, literacy had risen to 81 per cent by 1939 (8).

But the German invasion put the clock back once more. From 1941, war raged backwards and forwards over some of the richest land in the USSR. The German armies penetrated to the very outskirts of Moscow and Leningrad, to the Volga and the Caucasus, leaving destruction in their wake. Loss of life has been variously estimated, and may have been as high as thirty millions military and civil, together with the loss of some ten million births, which was to have serious effects on manpower supply well into the 1950s. In more specifically educational terms, over 82,000 schools were destroyed, a loss of some 18 million school places to a country already short of them.

It is against this background that the successes and failures of Soviet education have to be seen. What happens in the Soviet schools depends not only on communist principles but on older traditions and the brute facts of reality as well. For a long time for instance, the classrooms have been characterised by academic formality 'chalk-and-talk' methods, and not a little downright dull teaching. But to lay this entirely at the door of communist attitudes is to oversimplify. During the 1920s, in fact, there was a vogue for 'progressive' methods of all kinds, mostly borrowed from the West, and these seemed to their practitioners at the time more in keeping with revolutionary ideas than did more traditional ways. But in the conditions of the time other matters were more pressing — literacy basic skills, and the quick training of specialists and skilled personnel of all kinds to haul the economy into the twentieth century. Under Stalin came the reaction with the reintroduction of the whole formal apparatus of the pre-revolutionary system. It was still, of course organised as a *mass* system and planned according to the needs of Soviet society, but otherwise it had more in common with the schools of the Russia of the Tsars than the Russia of Lenin (4). This had little to do with communist doctrine but was rather a reassertion of traditional ways in the face of pressure of events. In fairness, the formality has often been tempered by friendliness between teachers and pupils but this has not necessarily much to do with communist theory either, more simply, Russians like children, to the point of sentimentality.

Again it is true that the system is highly centralised, even rigid. That this has always suited the single-mindedness of the Communist Party is beyond question but it was not a communist invention. As often happens in revolutions, the new régime took over and adapted much of the apparatus of the old. The actual machinery has of course changed greatly and there have been varying (and minor) degrees of devolution from the

central ministries to those of the constituent republics. But the fundamental fact of central control and substantial uniformity throughout the country has remained from Tsarist times right up to the present. In the circumstances, it would have been surprising if a more decentralised system had developed, and in view of the extreme backwardness of most of the country in Imperial times, it is extremely doubtful if the over-all advances that have been made in fifty years could have been made in any other way. It may well be that such factors are now less pressing, and that there is a need for more flexibility. This could be argued for the present and future, but can hardly be used in an assessment of the past.

THE POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OBJECTIVES OF THE SOVIET SCHOOL

But practical pressures and the needs of industrial society have not been the only motive factors in the growth of the Soviet school system. It has, from the start, been a consciously used instrument for the building of a communist society, and its performance is judged in the USSR in this light. This can be seen both in the structure of the system and in the content of teaching. There have, of course, been frequent changes of interpretation of the 'correct' Marxist-Leninist approach to education as to other matters, but the insistence that such a touchstone can and must be applied is a constant theme in the development of Soviet education in the last half-century.

The comprehensive principle

The insistence on comprehensive schooling is a good example of this. Although it is a crude over-simplification to say that Marxist educationists deny the existence of differences in inherited ability, they are suspicious of emphasis on hereditary endowment, preferring to stress the importance of environmental influences — that is, on what can be changed by social action (24). To this must be added a basic belief in the idea of equality. Although few would deny that great inequalities do exist in Soviet society, they are deplored, equality remaining at least a desirable aim and ideal. The selection and segregation of young children into different types of schools is therefore repugnant on ideological grounds. Furthermore, streaming children by ability into separate classes is likewise rejected; thus, every class is supposed to contain a cross-section of ability, all children following the same course at much the same rate. They are assessed not on order of merit, but on a five-point scale (from 5 down to 1), 3 being the required score for proceeding to the following year. In principle, it is possible for everyone to score 5, in prac-

tice, it is expected that practically the entire class can and will do well enough to go on. In short, it is assumed that the normal curriculum is within the reach, not of the top third, but of the whole group, provided they are reasonably well taught and work hard enough.

In fact, it does not work out quite like this. Some children do have to repeat a year, the figure varies from place to place, but may be about ten per cent on average. In the towns, it seems, measures to reduce the amount of repeating are having some degree of success (51). But the problem remains, and since the assessment of pupils is made largely on oral or class work (rather more open to leniency than other methods) it may be greater than it looks. There have also been some experiments with ability-grouping within classes for particular subjects, but these are being handled very gingerly in case they turn into a system of streaming by stealth. Experiments of this kind, of course, take place within the comprehensive framework and would not be thought incompatible with comprehensive education in any western country. In the Soviet context, however, they are viewed with suspicion.

There are some other exceptions to the comprehensive principle in the various kinds of special schools for highly gifted children. In the ordinary system, children enter the comprehensive *eight-year school* at the age of seven, completing the course about the age of 15. They can then leave and go to work, although few in fact do, they can enter a *vocational-technical school*, and qualify as skilled workers over a one to three-year course, they can enter a *secondary specialised school* and take a technical or semi-professional qualification, combined with a general course leading to the leaving certificate, in three or four years, or they can complete their secondary education by going on to the ninth and tenth forms of the general school, taking a course aimed at the leaving certificate. This is what the majority (some 60 per cent) in fact do (23). With this parting of the ways at the end of the eight-year school, one might expect to find selection of the 'fifteen-plus' type operating here. But this does not seem to happen. Recent policy has been to expand the number of places in forms IX and X, and to regard this as the principal way of continuing schooling after form VIII (21). Consequently, the problem has not been one of shortage of places, but shortage of people to fill them, in many areas, the target figure for continuation in the ninth form has not been reached (21). Thus, the availability of other types of course at this stage is not really inconsistent with the comprehensive principle — not, at any rate as it is understood in the West.

But there are other types of school which are quite clearly selective. At one end of the scale, there are special schools for physically and mentally

handicapped children, at the other, ten-year schools for the gifted in art, music, ballet and the like. There are also secondary schools (post-eighth form) for the highly talented in the physical sciences and mathematics, these schools select pupils by admitting the winners of the nation-wide contests (*olimpiady*) in mathematics and physics. Schools of either type could hardly be termed comprehensive, but two points are worth bearing in mind. Firstly, the number of children affected is very small, secondly they cater for *special* talents, not for clever children in general. The comprehensive nature of a *system* is liable to suffer if significant numbers of able children are drawn away from it, thus depressing the standard of the ordinary schools by 'creaming off' their best pupils. This does not happen in the Soviet Union. Even so, there is some uneasiness about the special schools. Those for the gifted in the arts are a survival from Tsarist times. In 1958, Khrushchov suggested expanding the principle on a large scale to include the sciences (12), and had a very mixed reception in the press (4). In the event, this particular proposal was dropped when the education law was formulated. The subsequent appearance of a limited number of such schools for older children has all the signs of a compromise.

Now it is perfectly possible to argue the case for comprehensive schooling in strictly practical terms. The British Conservative Party, for example, is not noted for its egalitarian ideas, yet large sections of it, impressed by evidence of the unreliability of selection procedures, by the performance of many 'late developers' and by the social and educational waste of selective systems, have come to accept some form of comprehensive reorganisation. In the Soviet Union it has worked the other way round, selective systems are regarded as incompatible with egalitarian views of society. If the refusal to label children as failures at an early age has turned out to yield better scholastic performances, well and good. But even where the Soviet brand of comprehensive schooling does give rise to instructional difficulties, the social gains are held to offset this in large measure, and problems (such as providing other facilities for abler children) are dealt with in the comprehensive framework.

Ideology and education

The content of education, too, is affected by political considerations. This is most apparent in the use of the system as a vehicle for ideological teaching. The Soviet authorities make no secret of this as they see it: the schools, like any other facet of society, must make their contribution to the building of communism by educating the 'New Man', by equipping children with the skills, knowledge and attitudes that will make them

both able and willing to play their part Political theory, as such, does not appear in the curriculum until the final years of the secondary school, in the form of 'Social Studies', and in the various courses in Marxist-Leninist philosophy and economics that form a compulsory part of all higher education courses Training in Socialist morals and Soviet patriotism, however, is not put off until the pupils can understand the Marxist theory of value or the relationship between basis and superstructure Political attitudes (and this covers social and moral attitudes as well) are put across to younger children indirectly, moral education is socially based, the youth movements make extensive use of communist symbolism, history and geography textbooks are so written as to inculcate loyalty to the country and its social system, and so on (8) In principle this is a pretty well universal practice, where the Soviet Union differs from western societies is not only in *what* is taught, but in the deliberate thoroughness with which it is carried out The effectiveness of all this is a matter of speculation, ironically enough, it seems that it is the 'patriotic' element, not all that different from straight nationalism, that is the most telling element in securing loyalty and commitment (4) Here again there have been changes the 'patriotic' element has fluctuated over the years there have been slight changes of emphasis in political teaching in the amount of dogmatism used, and of course in the interpretation of the political issues themselves What has not changed is the basic assumption that a central task of the schools is to rear a new generation of committed communists

The polytechnical principle

Again the marked emphasis on science and technology is not only consonant with the needs of a technological society, but chimes in with the Marxist insistence on a 'scientific world outlook' hence the prominence of the sciences in the general school curriculum One aspect of this is the principle of *polytechnical education*, of which so much has been heard in the last decade Basically the idea is that children should learn something of the fundamental processes of industrial and agricultural production, both by studying the theory and applying it in practice in school workshops, experimental plots, in factories and on farms This is held to be desirable whether they intend to take up this kind of work or not, they must learn at first hand what production is about, they must acquire the experience of working, developing both their skills and 'positive attitudes' towards work and people who work (12) It is also hoped that experience of this kind will make it easier for them to reach an informed decision on their future occupation, but important though this

aspect is, it is secondary, the primary justification is social and political

The polytechnical principle is not new, but has been subject to changes of fortune since the Revolution. Most of the time it has been in abeyance, after the failures of the 1920s, polytechnical education followed progressive methods into oblivion during the Stalin era, to be revived by Khrushchov in 1956. It figured even more prominently in the major changes of 1958, but was somewhat diminished in 1964 and again in 1966. Some commentators have argued that polytechnical education is now a dead letter, and it is true that less curricular time is now spent on it. But it would be rash to assume that the idea has been dropped, practical pressures still make themselves felt, and the Soviet authorities have become increasingly cost-conscious in the last few years, in education as in economics. But developments in the last decade suggest that in the midst of concern for efficiency, ideologically-based policies, such as the polytechnical principle, comprehensive schooling, and the growth of a mass education system, are still taken seriously. Much of the current discussion is on ways of making principle practical as well.

PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE IN A PERIOD OF CHANGE

The 'Khrushchov Reforms'

This concern can be seen in the frequent revisions of the last ten years. From the end of the war until 1958, the basic school was one of seven years from seven to 14. It was a mass school, the longer form, the *ten-year school*, was not. Only a small minority completed secondary schooling (16), which was of the traditionally academic kind, geared to the needs of those going on to higher education. In a way, it was proving too successful in preparing more potential entrants than even the expanding universities and colleges could absorb, and by its narrowness unfitting them for anything else. It was against this background that the 1958 Law — commonly known as the 'Khrushchov Reforms' — was brought into effect.

These changes have been extensively analysed and examined elsewhere (4, 8), but it is useful to pick out the most important provisions. The 'Law on strengthening the links of the school with life and further developing the system of public education in the USSR' increased seven-year schooling to eight years, ten-year to eleven. There was to be a much greater emphasis on polytechnical and labour training, while practical and productive work in factories and farms — in the course of which most secondary pupils would pick up a trade qualification — was to take up about a third of the curricular time in classes IX-XI. There

was also to be a greater emphasis on part-time courses in secondary and higher education

This 'strengthening the links of the school with life' attracted most of the attention, then as later. This aspect of the reforms has been subject to constant revaluation, but as the comparative figures show, 'further development of the system of public education' has continued steadily since then

TABLE 1
PUPILS AND STUDENTS BY TYPE OF COURSE
1914-1966 (IN THOUSANDS)

Year	1914/5	1940/1	1950/1	1958/9	1960/1	1964/5	1965/6
General schools	9,656	35,552	34,752	31,483	36,187	46,664	48,255
full-time	9,656	34,784	33,314	29,567	33,417	42,002	43,410
part-time	—	768	1,438	1,916	2,770	4,656	4,845
vocational-technical	106	717	882	904	1,113	1,606	1,672
secondary specialised	54	975	1,298	1,876	2,060	3,326	3,659
higher education	127	812	1,247	2,179	2,396	3,608	3,861
further education etc	645	9,491	10,591	9,615	10,844	13,721	14,388
TOTAL	10,588	47,547	48,770	46,057	52,600	68,925	71,835

(Note The drop in numbers during the 1950s can be attributed to the drop in the war-time birth-rate)

The reasons for the changes were undoubtedly partly practical. The population 'dent' left by the hideous war losses was a powerful argument in favour of keeping as many young people as possible involved in some kind of productive work, even at the risk of 'eating the seed corn' (32). Cost was undoubtedly a factor too, part-time courses were cheaper as little as a quarter the cost of full-time courses. But too much should not be made of this, as Harold Noah has pointed out, *general* schools have received consistently favoured treatment in the State budgets (17). There was also a crying need for a better-trained labour-force, a need that the greater stress on all kinds of trade training could do something to meet

But ideological considerations also loomed large. 'We still', complained Khrushchov, 'have a sharp distinction drawn between mental and manual labour. Manual work has become something to frighten children with. This is fundamentally wrong and runs counter to our teachings and aspirations' (12). Hence the need to become familiar with work (and get used to it) in production practice, hence, too, the stress on part-time

courses, keeping pupils constantly in touch with the realities of working life. It was more than an affirmation of the dictum that 'learning and labour go together' in trying to discourage the growth of the 'white-collar' mentality, a development obnoxious to the ideal of the classless society, it was an ambitious piece of social engineering.

The 1964 changes modification of the 'Khrushchov Reforms'

It was not long, however, before it became clear that the programme for the rearing of the 'New Man' was not coming up to expectation. For a time, apart from some signs of disquiet in the press, nothing much happened. But when the major changes came, they came swiftly.

In 1964, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted a resolution 'On the change of the period of instruction in secondary general educational labour polytechnical schools with training in production' (29). By this, the eleventh year was abolished, though the eight-year school was retained, temporary curricula and syllabuses were drawn up, with the proviso that 'the shortening of the course must on no account bring about a lowering of the standard of the pupils' general education' (13). More efficient use of time, according to the Russian Minister for Education, 'will enable the school to fulfil the very same tasks in ten instead of eleven years' (1). Meanwhile, expansion was to continue still with a bias towards part-time courses. Most important, perhaps, the time spent on polytechnical education and production practice was cut to a quarter of the curricular time in forms IX and X, and its content was to be 'rationalised'. Much of it, apparently had been so badly planned as to seem 'just so much waste of time' (2). 'Overloading programmes with material not clearly needed (which) caused considerable discontent among pupils, parents and teachers as well' (6). At the same time, it was denied that this was a return to the pre-1958 system 'Education in and for work has become the sacred watchword of the Soviet school. This change in no way means a return to the old ten-year school a repudiation of production training' (6). Officially, the changes were welcomed as an advance, but there were signs enough that some teachers were worried, especially by the haste of the measures (6, 18).

Cost, once again may have played some part in determining events (as in the cutting of the eleventh year) but the main trouble seemed to be one of making polytechnical education practical in the form in which it had been introduced (9). In theory, prolonged spells in factories were all very well as a way of enabling senior pupils to acquire both a work qualification and sensitive attitudes towards manual work, in practice, too, it was

all very well where suitable conditions existed. But all too often they did not exist, and many pupils spent much of their time learning pointless tasks, doing repetitive work, or just getting in the way. Many factory managers, too, perfectly prepared to show parties of pupils round on excursions, were less enthusiastic about having large numbers of them under their feet two days a week. Both educationally and economically, the system was proving in many cases crude and ineffective (9).

Recent and current developments

The year 1956 saw a certain amount of consolidation and preparation for more, notably in the work of a special commission of the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of the RSFSR (2). These were to take the place of those thrown together in the previous year, and are now being gradually introduced, the process should be complete by 1970. At the same time, there was a great deal of discussion in the press of almost every aspect of the educational system. Teacher training, school methods, content of curricula and the frequent failure of practice to live up to theory were among the topics aired, but coverage was general. From the kindergartens to the universities, none escaped, and the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences came in for some particularly rough handling for failures in effective leadership (5).

Towards the end of 1966 the Communist Party Central Committee and the Council of Ministers of the USSR adopted the resolution 'On measures for the further improvement of the work of the secondary general educational school', laying down the guidelines for educational development during the next five-year plan (30). A great many points were dealt with, detailed and general, but according to a *Pravda* commentary, 'the most important task in the field of public education is to complete substantially by 1970 the introduction in the country of universal secondary education (30). More specifically, as the Minister for Education explains elsewhere 'By 1970, 75 per cent of those leaving the eight-year school will go into the senior classes. The rest will study in secondary specialised schools, shift schools for working youth and other educational institutions' (23).

At the same time, it is also made clear that full-time general courses are now the preferred way for youngsters to continue their schooling (21), a striking change from Khrushchov's preferences in 1958, or even those still assumed in 1964 (6). This, together with the changes in polytechnical education and production practice have led some observers to conclude that the 'links of the school with life' have finally been discarded.

Certainly, production practice of the old type in factories and farms

has been dropped in the majority of schools, only about a third intend to go on with it (22) The vocational bent is also discarded 'Life', says the Minister, 'has confirmed the profundity of the Leninist idea of a polytechnical *but not vocational* general educational school' (21) But he adds that 'the school must not build a fence round its activities' (21), urging the needs for familiarity with the different kinds of production in the neighbourhood The aim of polytechnical education is to give 'a general understanding of production' (10) This is to take the form of handwork in the younger classes moving on to more advanced work on school plots and workshops in classes V-VIII, linked with excursions, technical circles and other forms of extra-curricular activity From classes VII-VIII, vocational orientation, rather than specific vocational training, is intended 'to give the youngsters experience of *various* jobs and their significance to the economy, and to help towards an informed choice of future vocation' (10) Significantly, the emphasis in vocational training is on courses for those who have completed the ten-year school (31), this, in an age of technical change, makes much more sense than early training in specific trades — many of which, after all, may not exist in ten or twenty years' time Much has also been written about the need to construct courses that will make clearer the relevance of the theoretical sciences to production (3) No one pretends that the problems can be solved by decree As the Minister says once again, 'for the Soviet school to become truly polytechnical, a great deal of work still needs to be done' (22) The attention being given to the theoretical as well as the practical problems suggests that the polytechnical principle, for all the changes in interpretation is still more than a slogan

Other features of the new curricula include a reduction in the number of teaching hours per week in response to many complaints of the 'over-loading' of pupils (30) There has also been a tendency for some curricular material to shift from the secondary into the primary courses, in the Soviet Union as elsewhere (15), though this trend is comparatively slight as yet

There are also signs of greater flexibility Authoritative statements stress the need for the constituent republics to construct their own curricula on the basis of the model plan, rather than adopting it wholesale (28) Further, more room has been made for optional and elective courses These are not new — they made the marginal appearance of one hour per week in the senior forms under the 1958 Law, but now start earlier, and increase to four hours per week in the ninth and tenth forms These courses make it possible for pupils either to pursue chosen subjects at greater depth, or to add extra subjects to their studies This kind of thing has

TABLE 2
THE TEN-YEAR SCHOOL CURRICULUM (1965) (cf. 2)

Subject	Periods per week in forms									
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X
Russian language	12/10	10	10	7	5	3	3	2	—	—
Literature	—	—	—	3	2	2	2	3/4	3	3
Mathematics	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	5
History	—	—	—	2	2	2	2	3	5/4	3
Social study	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1	—	2
Nature study	0/2	2	2	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Geography	—	—	—	—	2	3	2	2	2	—
Biology	—	—	—	—	2	2	2	2	—	2
Physics	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	3/2	5	5
Astronomy	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1
Chemistry	—	—	—	—	—	—	2	2	3/4	3
Technical drawing	—	—	—	—	—	1	1	1	—	—
Foreign language	—	—	—	—	5	4	4	2	2	2
Art	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—	—
Music	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	—	—
Physical education	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Labour training	2	2	2	3	3	3	2	2	4	4
Total	24	24	24	27	31	32	32	32	32	32
Options	—	—	—	2	2	2	2	4	4	4

(Note. This curriculum was drawn up by the Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of the RSFSR and has been used with some modifications as the basis for the new curricula now gradually being introduced. The one given here is for children whose mother tongue is Russian; there are somewhat different versions for the non-Russian schools)

taken place for years in the extra-curricular 'circles' run in the schools and the Pioneer palaces. These activities continue; the new developments are in effect a formalisation of the principles of 'curricular enrichment' within the school course itself. For the rest, the broad curriculum remains in force; the new measures are an attempt to provide scope for individual interests while retaining a broad general education, and to attend to the needs of the abler pupils within the comprehensive framework (27, 28).

THE SOVIET SCHOOL AFTER FIFTY YEARS

Problems outstanding

As the Soviet schools move forward to universal secondary education by 1970, it is embarrassingly clear that many practical problems stand in

the way. As always, there is the question of cost, aggravated by the existence of many sub-standard school buildings and the fact that many schools are uneconomically small (about 70 per cent of the primary schools have under 40 pupils, and about 20 per cent less than 20) (7)

More serious is the shortage of teachers. This is worse in the sciences than in most fields, but seems to affect the whole range of subjects. In classes IX and X, practically all subject specialists are fully qualified, but in classes V-VIII (where all teachers are supposed to have higher educational qualifications) the *average* figure is under 60 per cent (16). Some allowance has to be made for teachers with out-of-date qualifications, but it remains that there is still considerable dilution at this level.

There are also acute local shortages. The Asian republics as a whole are affected (20), and so is the countryside in the RSFSR. In the Omsk *oblast*, for example, it was reported that only 35 per cent of the teachers in forms V-X had the requisite higher qualifications, which is much worse than the national figure (19). There are many such examples. Nor does dilution give an adequate picture of the problem, many schools lack even enough dilutees, and overcrowding is common. There have been some improvements, but the problem as a whole remains stubborn.

Various attempts have been made to staff the rural schools by persuasion, incentives or coercion. Pay differentials between urban and rural teachers were abolished in 1964, to little apparent effect. Rural authorities are supposed to provide teachers with free housing and a plot of land, but there are frequent complaints that these requirements are inadequately met (25). Even the existing powers to direct graduates to any part of the country for up to three years has had little success, there seem to be many ways of avoiding this. Basically, the problem is that the standard of living and amenities in the countryside compare poorly with those of the towns, until this can be rectified, it will remain difficult to staff the rural schools on anything approaching urban standards.

Rural schooling (and it must be remembered that half the population is still rural) is probably the most acute educational problem in the Soviet Union. Not only are there fewer teachers and more small, scattered schools, but standards of instruction are lower. So are standards of aspiration. The 1966 plans for numbers of pupils going on to the ninth form were generally unfulfilled in predominantly rural areas. In the Karelian and Udmurt republics and the Volgograd and Perm *oblasti*, just over half the eighth-form leavers went on to the ninth (22), while in the Yaroslavl and Vladimir *oblasti* the figure was not much over a quarter (26). Apart from the obvious difficulties, the discouragement of teachers can in itself have a bad effect, according to one press report (34), teachers'

pessimism easily produces indifference among pupils, which in turn reinforces the teachers' conviction that the task is hopeless — a vicious circle to which some rural areas are particularly prone.

The main difficulty, perhaps, is geographical: the sheer size of the country and the distribution of population put formidable obstacles in the way of providing the range of facilities and courses on a scale anything near the urban. To make this even feasible, some degree of centralisation into larger units is essential, and it is here that the boarding schools — at present essentially urban institutions — could play a useful rôle. This would be an extremely expensive solution: apart from the high capital costs, a place in a boarding school costs about eight times as much to maintain as one in a day school (17). There are signs, however, that this is now regarded as one of the measures needed to tackle the comparative backwardness of rural education (11).

Another major problem is the difficulty of implementing policy decisions, especially in the remoter areas. Formally, the central authorities are in a position to control almost everything that happens right down to the level of the class-room, but in practice their effectiveness is limited by difficulties of communication, shortages in the inspectorate, and not a little bureaucratic muddle. At best, this can make room for more flexibility in the system than the formal machinery would seem to allow; but in most cases, failures of the central authorities to implement decisions have negative effects. Even eight-year schooling is not yet fully compulsory in some areas. One commentator alleges that this is 'one of the most important state problems' (33); this may be something of an exaggeration, but the official figures do show some 'leakage' at the end of form VII (16), and it is possible that faulty returns conceal a higher true figure. Building shortages have already been noted. It is worth noting, too, that many buildings which have been recorded as complete have to function without plumbing, lighting and proper school equipment until bottlenecks in supplies (probably a commoner problem than real shortages) can be broken (14). Similar difficulties arise in the way of measures to improve teaching methods, teacher training, and many other features of the educational system; initiating improvements at the centre is relatively straightforward, but realising them in practice, particularly in schools away from the main urban centres, is much more difficult.

As if the practical problems were not enough, there are some fundamental problems of principle that are currently exercising the Soviet authorities. The most stubborn of these, perhaps, is the question of the rôle of secondary education in a mass comprehensive system. Fast though the expansion of higher education has been, the expansion of secondary

schooling has been faster, it is obvious now that in the USSR, as elsewhere, only a minority can ever hope to go on to university or college, however much these institutions may grow in the future (22) If secondary education of the academic type is no longer to be *essentially* a preparation for further study, what then is it for? How can it be made relevant to 'life'? A heavy infusion of trade training has, as we have seen, not worked very well (9) but merely removing it does not solve the problem either The idea of combining general education with polytechnical education and work training as a general preparation for the life of the working citizen in an industrial society has not been dropped The situation called for something of this kind, as Khrushchov realised, but to make it meaningful and practicable has proved much more difficult than he suspected Since this is a problem shared by other countries too, all of us have an interest in seeing how it is tackled in the years to come

Achievements to date

In attempting an assessment of the Soviet school after fifty years, noting the acute and unsolved problems gives a very incomplete picture The difficulties with which the system has had to cope help to put the failings in context, and make the successes all the more noteworthy Even if the targets have not been reached, what has been accomplished in quantitative terms alone is impressive Literacy is virtually universal, compulsory education from seven to fifteen is effective over most of the country, and at least 60 per cent of the age-group now go on past the school leaving age (22) There are over 48 millions in general schools, nearly four million students in higher education, a similar number in secondary specialised schools, and some sixteen millions taking trade courses, further education courses, adult classes and the like — a total of nearly 72 millions out of a population of 230 millions currently involved in some kind of formal education Qualitatively, there is a strong impression that the authorities and the populace alike care about education, regard the achievements to date as still insufficient, and show an encouraging tendency to examine and try to rectify the existing defects instead of sweeping them under the carpet or resting on what has been accomplished Whatever our view of the USSR may be, and whatever our attitudes are towards the purposes of the Soviet school, it is hard to deny that they accord to education an importance not easily paralleled elsewhere The Soviet people have come a long way in fifty years, and if one thing emerges clearly from their experience, it is that the more education they get, the more they want Whatever other reservations we may have, this would seem an encouraging starting-point for the next half-century

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