

Significant Books in Review

Column Editor: George W. Denmark

Contributor: Harry W. Foskey

The Challenge of Soviet Education.

By George S. Counts. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957.

This analysis of Russian education is by one of America's leading comparative education scholars, Dr. George S. Counts. He presents in an interesting and insightful manner the historical evolution and current status of education in the U.S.S.R. With a background of professional experience in education, firsthand knowledge of the U.S.S.R., the publication of several books on related topics, and a long standing interest in Russian education, Dr. Counts is eminently qualified to evaluate and select from information coming through the Iron Curtain those facts and the interpretations which give an accurate picture of conditions as they exist, and to formulate the often conflicting information into this scholarly statement on the educational system of a nation bidding desperately to influence favorably the rest of the world in its choice of a politico-socio-economic affiliation.

Probably the most significant single feature about Soviet education as discussed by Counts is the almost complete centralization of control and domination of all facets of the system by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. The point is illustrated by the presentation of representative revolutionary writings ranging from the early nineteenth century to recent pronouncements by Khrushchev. The statements also docu-

ment that education is and has been of paramount importance to the Bolshevik-Communist movement since its beginning.

Since the study of an educational system may be quite meaningless without adequate attention to sociopolitical contexts, an observation especially valid in the case of Russia, the Marxist-Leninist history and philosophy and present-day interpretations are companion themes to education throughout the book. Viewing the unparalleled feat of mass education as a function of close coordination between political aims and educational procedures designed to accomplish them; the development of national policy is followed through its many directional changes, even reversals, to illustrate the direct effect upon what is taught, how, and by whom.

The discussion from the reverse point of view, the effect of education on society and national policy, is basically an account of the accomplishment of aims for education as conceived by the state: the fight against illiteracy, provisions for the quantitative and qualitative improvement of training programs in science and technology, education for political orthodoxy, and the reeducation of political dissenters and purged leaders. The accomplishments in these areas are significant, and Russia may have found a formula which combines mass education and high quality scientific work with unquestioning acceptance and obedience

to the regime. However, Dr. Counts raises some very interesting and central questions as to just what the long range consequences of such a program may be. For example, can the well trained mind be made scientifically creative and yet politically insensitive? Can the Communist controlled peoples continue to subordinate freedom of thought to politically expedient interpretations dictated by the Party?

Three chapters of *The Challenge of Soviet Education* are devoted to the moral, political and general education of the younger generation. Because of the importance of this level of operation in the total design for the creation of a new state and society, considerable emphasis is placed on matters relating to bringing up the young. Efforts at developing the "new Soviet man" are directed chiefly toward the elementary and secondary schools, where children are more impressionable, before much unlearning has to take place. While reading about this segment of Russian education, it is interesting to note the many different ways in which political indoctrination is an integral part of regular instruction, resulting, in effect, in a fusion of all aspects of the curriculum to achieve one overarching aim.

The last chapter is addressed to the implications of this system of education for the cause of human freedom in Russia and the world. A factor not to be

underestimated in speculating about future developments, according to the author, is the appeal of the apocalyptic vision of ideal communism for the rest of the world. His thoughts on such subjects as education for all Russians, indoctrination in the new morality, preferential treatment for the intelligentsia, and overemphasized industrial-technological development not only define the challenge of Russian education but inquire into forces that may substantially alter the nature of that education and swing the equilibrium of influence upon the Russian people in a more desirable direction.

Not covered in any detail are the areas of administration, finance, the kindergarten and schools for working and peasant youth, and day-to-day operation at the classroom level. The scope of the book is broadly conceived to include the basic features rather than a detailed account of a few special aspects. Its style is quite similar to that of a novel, interesting and readable, but disciplined and scholarly enough to qualify the book as an important contribution to source works on contemporary Russia valuable both for the student of Russian education and the layman interested in an overview of the philosophy and operation of Communist schools.

—Reviewed by HARRY W. FOSKEY,
graduate assistant, College of Education,
University of Maryland, College Park.

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it was really wonderful to see so many people from various places, with really interesting experiences to tell to others."

We wish that every ASCD member could be in Seattle to discuss "Curriculum Planning for the Years Ahead." Since this is not possible, we hope that

each of you will know that during the 1958 Conference, members of the Conference Planning Committee will be engaged in developing the best possible recommendations to make the 1959 ASCD Conference, to be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, an in-service activity of the highest quality and effectiveness.

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