

SOVIET EDUCATIONAL POLICIES:

Their Development, Administration, and Content

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IN ORDER to understand the direction upon which an educational system is embarked, it is imperative to identify and analyze educational policies which have been developed. An examination of educational policies along a time continuum additionally serves as a measure of achieved educational progress. Furthermore, revealed educational policies provide a basic framework for understanding a system of education and the aspirations of those responsible for policy development.

Development of Soviet Educational Policy

Not only is it important to examine developed educational policies; it is also necessary to identify the source of educational decision making. That group which formulates educational policy also controls the educational system. Control may be centralized or decentralized. It may be vested in an elite few who develop national policy. On the other hand, control may reside in widely-constituted bodies found at several governmental levels or agencies of government. The result here is shared policy making. Centralized control is a feature of the Soviet system of education, while decentralized control typifies the American educational system.

In examining the development of Soviet educational policy,¹ distinction must be made between "power" and "authority." In the Soviet state, "power," or the ability to do, is firmly held by the all-dominant and dominating Communist Party. The Party serves as the seedbed of power not only in economics and politics but also in the realms of ideology and education. "Authority," or the right to do, is vested within State agencies at 12 Soviet administrative levels from the all-union, union-republic, region, territory, district, and city down to villages and rural settlements.

As a result of an interlocking directorate, Soviet power and authority overlap. Party members are found in leadership positions in each unit of government.² Soviet education specialist Rudman stated ". . . it is the Party, acting through its membership, that

¹ For a thorough background of Russian and Soviet educational policies, see: Nicholas Hans. *History of Russian Educational Policy, 1701-1917*. New York: Russell and Russell, 1964. 255 pp.; and Donald R. Little, Jr. *The Policy-Making Process in the Soviet Educational System*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966. 448 pp.

² Herbert Rudman. *The School and State in the USSR*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967. pp. 4, 8, 22-25.

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controls and is in a true sense the government of the Soviet people."³ Lenin structured the Party in the shape of a pyramid, with layer placed upon layer. The smaller the layer, the greater the power. At the top of the pyramid, wherein the Politburo functions, power becomes absolute.⁴

The real source of all Soviet policy making is the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union). That central organ of power consists of 12 regular members and 6 alternates. Since the Politburo cannot make all decisions, it limits itself to the most fundamental questions facing the nation. Less fundamental questions are settled without a full meeting of the Politburo. Necessary screening of problems is done by the Secretariat of the Party, which serves as the Politburo staff. Periodically the entire membership (100 per-

³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴ State of Delaware Department of Public Instruction. *The Challenge of Our Times: Democracy Faces Communism*. Bulletin No. 30-63. Dover, Delaware: The Department, 1963. p. 32.

sons) of the Central Committee of the CPSU meets in plenary session to discuss and act upon decisions reached or recommendations made by the Politburo or the Secretariat.⁵

Supervision of Soviet educational policy is conducted by the Department on School Affairs, Higher Education, and Science (*Otdel Shkol, VUZov i Nauki*) of the Central Committee of the CPSU. Counterparts of this department are found in the Party central committees of the union republics. These offices supervise the affairs of every educational establishment, reporting these to higher level Party organs, and initiating whatever action is deemed advisable.⁶

Educational ideas are often tested in the form of press debates or discussions at meetings. This method provides the Party leadership with a sampling of public opinion and a semblance of democratic practice. Decisions reached by the Party are passed on to the Supreme Soviet which makes them law, thus legitimatizing Party policy. The USSR Council of Ministers, acting on behalf of the Supreme Soviet, then passes the directives down the administrative line.⁷

Administration of Soviet Educational Policies

While the Party guides and controls Soviet education, its actual administration is left to educational ministries.⁸ The USSR Ministry of Public Education, in conjunction with the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, works out the details for implementing general education policy. Policy decisions affecting the general system of education at the elementary and secondary levels are

⁵ Rudman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁶ Nicholas DeWitt. *The Soviet System of Education (A Report for the Use of Specialists in the Field of Education Planning To Visit the Soviet Union)*. New York: Institute of International Education, 1965. p. 4.

⁷ Nigel Grant. *Soviet Education*. Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1964. pp. 33-34; Wasyl Shimoniak. *Communist Education: Its History, Philosophy, and Politics*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1970. pp. 122-23.

⁸ Seymour M. Rosen. *Significant Aspects of Soviet Education*. Bulletin 1965, No. 15. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, 1965. pp. 4-6.

passed down to the ministers of public education of the 15 constituent republics. There are official channels to follow, such as republican Supreme Soviets and republican Councils of Ministers; however, in practice, direct instruction is applied.

The 15 republican ministries, usually with Party approval, make changes as local conditions demand. Decisions from the ministerial level are then passed down to regional or large-city departments of education, then to district departments, and finally to school directors and teachers. The further down the hierarchical structure, the greater is the amount of detail laid down for the conduct of the schools.

Soviet teachers are permitted little voice in basic educational policy decisions. In the policy development stage an educational worker may enter a disagreement. However, once policy is set, all teachers, inspectors, and school administrators must follow the "line." Nor are teachers permitted much personal discretion in the selection of course content, teaching methods, instructional techniques, and similar matters. As a result, there is a high degree of educational uniformity in curriculum, methodology, textbooks, school design, and the like.⁹

Soviet Educational Policies

Early in the establishment of Soviet power it was decided to separate the school from the church.¹⁰ This educational policy decision meant that any religious influence in Soviet education would formally cease and that scientific-atheistic thought would supplant religion, the "opiate of the masses." However, the spiritual tenor of the Soviet schools was not reduced to religious neutrality but moved to anti-religious indoctrination expressed in militant atheistic teaching and harassment of believers.¹¹ Marxist ideology was being applied to education. Communist

⁹ Grant, *op. cit.*, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰ "Znanie-nashe bogatstvo i sila." *Pravda*, January 7, 1970, p. 1; Shimoniak, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

¹¹ George Z. Bereday and others, editors. *The Changing Soviet School*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1960. pp. 60-61.

morality, exemplified in the Moral Code of the Builder of Communism, supplanted Judeo-Christian morality. The "new" Soviet man, fit to live in a transforming and eventually transformed society, was to be guided by the moral principle "Man is to man a friend, comrade, and brother."¹²

Along with the church-related schools, the Communists eliminated all competing private institutions of learning.¹³ The Tsarist educational structure, now minus any competing systems of education, fell solely into the hands of the authoritarian Soviet state. Education in the USSR became fully centralized and completely secularized.

Another early and important Soviet educational policy dealt with the liquidation of illiteracy. For all practical purposes, illiteracy in the Soviet Union has been eliminated.¹⁴ However, it must be noted that Soviet statistics on literacy include only the ages from 9 to 49. This arrangement of age group bracketing serves official Soviet propaganda exceedingly well.¹⁵ The Party's basic interest in and efforts toward achieving universal literacy stemmed from a need to indoctrinate Soviet citizens and provide them with the reading skills necessary in the performance of work skills. Intellectual and cultural development were secondary aspects in the Soviet drive toward universal literacy. Loyal and trusted citizens who could efficiently engage in productive labor were requisites to raising the standard of living and building a powerful and industrialized Soviet state.

Soviet authorities were quick to establish universal compulsory education. Such universal compulsory education has undergone several stages, each progressing to a higher level as the nation's material base and technological level improved. Universal compul-

¹² "Rules of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." In: John N. Hazard. *The Soviet System of Government*. Fourth edition. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1968. p. 255.

¹³ William H. E. Johnson. *Russia's Educational Heritage*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Carnegie Press, 1950. p. 255.

¹⁴ Ts. Garcia. *The Soviet Census, 1970: A Background Paper*. No. 34. New York: Radio Liberty Committee, 1970. p. 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

sory education advanced from the four-year primary level (1930 introduction—1933 completion), to the seven-year level or *semiletka* (1949 introduction—1951 completion), to the eight-year level or *vosmiletka* (1959 introduction—1961 completion),¹⁶ and finally to the full secondary (general compulsory) ten-year level introduced in 1970.¹⁷ In a phenomenally short 50-odd years, Soviet education has moved from an underdeveloped system to a fully developed one. Emerging nations are certain to take note of the process followed in the USSR. Perhaps such nations will want to copy the Soviet pattern of educational development in order to modernize and move more quickly into the 21st century.

Soviet educators enumerate the following policies as governing their system of public education and "guaranteeing equal opportunities" for all their citizens: (a) uniformity and continuity in the educational network from preschool institutions up to higher schools; (b) democratic system at all levels, from primary to higher schools; (c) equality for men and women; (d) equal educational opportunity for all Soviet peoples; (e) close links between school and life; (f) coordination of studies with socially useful work, with due account to physical abilities depending on age; and (g) close links between schools and other educational institutions and public organizations and people.¹⁸

Many of the above policies have inherent worth and idealism. However, a few are restrictive or are not being implemented. Policy (b) uses the word "democratic" but not in the same semantic meaning as inter-

¹⁶ M. A. Prokof'ev and others, editors. *Narodnoe Obrazovanie v CCCP, 1917-1967*. Moskva: Izdatel'stvo Prosveshchenie, 1967. pp. 16-18.

¹⁷ Alexander M. Chabe. "Soviet Curricular Developments and Trends." *Educational Leadership* 26 (7): 670; April 1969; and *USSR Education*, Academy of Pedagogical Sciences, Moscow, n.d., p. 13.

¹⁸ Dr. Zoya Mal'kova. "Fifty Years of Soviet Education." Lecture presented at the "Education in the U.S.S.R. Exhibition" of the Soviet-American Cultural Exchange Program, Buffalo, New York, December 16, 1967; *Public Education in the Soviet Union*, XXX International Geneva Conference on Public Education, Moskva: Ministerstvo Prosveshcheniya CCCP, 1967. pp. 50-51.

preted in the West. In the Soviet context¹⁹ a "democratic system of education" is one which advances the Communist cause.²⁰ Policy (d), noble in itself, lacks full application in Soviet practice.²¹

The Soviets have identified several other educational policies upon which their system is built and through which the system operates. Such policies include: (a) free education at all levels including that at institutions of higher learning; (b) instruction in the native language; (c) coeducation at all levels and in all types of schools; and (d) a uniform course of study.²²

Let us briefly examine each above-stated educational policy. It is true that no tuition charge for education is levied in any Soviet educational institution. However, Soviet education is not free of encumbrance for higher education graduates or graduates of trade and technical secondary schools. These young specialists, recipients and non-recipients of token stipends, are obligated to work for three years at any determined place of employment in accordance with the order of the Ministry concerned.²³ At present, the

¹⁹ For examples showing how the Soviets use words for their own ends, see: William W. Brickman. "Khrushchev's Vision of the Future Soviet School." *School & Society* 95 (2297): 461-74; November 25, 1967.

²⁰ House of Representatives Committee on Un-American Activities. *Language as a Communist Weapon*. Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959. pp. 21, 33. Stefan T. Possony, political scientist at Georgetown University, defines the Communist meaning of "democracy" as a technique for controlling large numbers, a method of familiarizing the "masses" with decisions made at the top, and a way of ensuring that the entire nation implements those decisions to its utmost.

²¹ For a documented study of Soviet practices which restrict the use of non-Russian languages and attack or distort the religious, literary, and historical heritage of the non-Russian peoples, see: Yaroslav Bilinsky. "Education of the Non-Russian Peoples in the Soviet Union." *Comparative Education Review* 8 (1): 78-89; June 1964; and "Nationalities and Nationalism in the U.S.S.R." *Problems of Communism* 16 (5): September-October 1967. 140 pp.

²² "Soviet Educational Principles." *USSR* 10 (85): 4; October 1963.

²³ W. W. Kulski. *The Soviet Regime; Communism in Practice*. Fourth edition. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1963. pp. 294-95.

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higher education diploma is withheld, to be issued only after obligatory State service is duly certified as completed. Soviet higher, trade, and technical secondary education operates on a "Study now, pay later plan."

Although instruction is carried on in the native tongue, reportedly conducted in 89 languages, such as Ukrainian, Armenian, Uzbek, or Latvian, native culture is not permitted to flower. Soviet policy is summarized by the following slogan, "National in form but socialist in content." Minority nationalities are permitted to keep their own language, literature, arts, crafts, music, and dancing. Minority nationalities also publish books and newspapers in their own language. However, all content must be "socialist," that is, reflect Communist beliefs, values, and goals. In such a way, the "national form" is strictly controlled by the "socialist content."²⁴

Coeducation is being implemented today; however, the policy of coeducation did not apply with regularity throughout the Soviet period. As a wartime measure (1943-1954), separate instruction was provided for boys and for girls. This unexpected move allowed for differentiating the military-physical preparation of the two groups.²⁵

A uniform course of study is followed providing similar education for each age group whether in Leningrad or Vladivostok. National minorities are permitted variances

²⁴ Leften S. Stavrianos. *The Soviet Union: A Culture Area in Perspective*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1965. pp. 64-65.

²⁵ George Z. Bereday and others, *op. cit.*, pp. 82-83.

as local conditions require. Elective (optional) subjects²⁶ have been introduced into the new curriculum plan of the general education school of the Russian republic. Such electives, designed to meet individual differences Soviet style, begin in the seventh form (American eighth grade) and are organized in one of the sciences or humanities depending upon pupil interest. Thus, some curricular flexibility has been introduced into a once uniform and prescribed course of study.

Soviet specialist DeWitt has noted other policies which guide Soviet education. Included are the following: "(a) the integration of productive work with educational training; (b) extensive emphasis on scientific-technical subjects at all levels of education; (c) intensive political indoctrination both in and out of school through partisan youth organizations; and (d) the inclusion of physical and military training."²⁷ As a consequence of the Sino-Soviet confrontation and shoot-out on the Ussuri River in Siberia, the policy of physical and military training has intensified. The locked steel doors to the school armory are not opened to Westerners, but that arsenal must surely include appropriate weapons for the conduct of paramilitary training. During the last four years of secondary school, Soviet officers and reservists teach teen-agers several military skills. Such skills include firing automatic rifles, basic infantry tactics, how to attack a bridge or to kill a sentry.²⁸

²⁶ Chabe, *op. cit.*, pp. 667-68.

²⁷ DeWitt, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

²⁸ "Moscow's Military Machine: The Best of Everything." *Time* 95 (18): 39; May 4, 1970.

DeWitt has further identified other Soviet educational policies which are the concern of this study. Briefly stated, they are as follows: (a) selective education is upheld, allowing entry into higher education only to those with demonstrated ability and motivation while absorbing those less competent in semi-professional schools or in on-the-job training establishments for skilled manpower; (b) the emphasis in education is on specialization, with orientation toward employment; (c) educational and manpower policies are closely integrated with economic and political objectives; and (d) separate institutions are established for the development of new knowledge.²⁹

In applying the principle of selective education, the Soviets have encouraged the formation of a managerial and scientific elite which is rewarded with ample rubles and privileges resulting in accentuated class differences. The Soviet emphasis on specialization has its shortcomings, especially as rapid advances in sciences and technology replace old skills. By integrating their educational and manpower policies closely with economic and political objectives, the Soviets are able to attain desired goals faster and more effectively than are those nations holding pluralistic values. The USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences serves as the research and development arm of Soviet education. Presently it is concerned with the integration of the latest advances of science and technology into the Soviet educational mainstream.³⁰

In summary, from an examination of Soviet educational policy development, administration, and content, it is apparent that the CPSU has an all-pervading and all-pervasive interest and influence in the educative

²⁹ Nicholas DeWitt. "Strategic Problems of Educational Policy in the Soviet Union and the United States." *Comparative Education Review* 7 (1): 5-7; June 1963.

³⁰ Alexander M. Chabe. "Soviet Education Faces the 70's." *Educational Leadership* 27 (7): 680; April 1970.

process. Under a Communist regime the tasks of education are too important to be delegated to professional educators who may hold a less zealous commitment to the cause. It is the political leaders who are initiators of educational policy while the educational authorities become implementers of that policy. The CPSU fully understands the power of education and insists upon maintaining control of that educative power. Stalin claimed that "Education is a weapon whose effect depends upon who holds it in his hands and at whom it is aimed."³¹

Soviet educational policies promote the needs and goals of the state rather than the individual. Highly centralized and regimented education under communism serves social, economic, and political purposes. Soviet schools function as an agency of their Communist government. Education fits the individual for service to the state, to the interests of the government. Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, was convinced that "Without teaching, there is no knowledge; without knowledge there is no communism."³²

The importance of education and schooling in Soviet society has been cogently expressed by I. A. Kairov, president of the USSR Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. He asserted that "The school must impart to its pupils the foundations of the scientific attitude, the Communist views on nature, society, and man's thinking, the passionate conviction of the greatness of Communist ideals, of the historical inevitability of the decline of capitalism, and the complete victory of communism. . . ." ³³ Is American education as dedicated to the ideals of democracy as is Soviet education to the ideals of communism? □

³¹ Quoted in: Raymond E. Callahan. *An Introduction to Education in American Society*. Second edition. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967. p. 35.

³² Quoted by: Herold C. Hunt. In: Bereday and others, *op. cit.*, p. viii.

³³ American Association of School Administrators. *Schools in the Soviet*. Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1965. p. 7.



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