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SOVIET EDUCATION

SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURAL
REVOLUTION

R. D. CHARQUES

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NOTE

THE Soviet Union comprises an area of one-sixth of the earth's land surface and has a population of one hundred and sixty million people of diverse tongues and racial origins. It would tax the ingenuity of a single foreign observer to include, in a brief survey of the present Soviet system of education, a series of reports on education in Kazakstan, in the Caucasus, in the Urals, and among the Bashkir and Yakut and Altaian peoples. It is possible, however, whether or not one has first-hand knowledge of educational practice in those regions, to give an account of the general theory of Soviet education to-day, since this is uniform throughout the continent. Such an account may be supplemented by personal impressions of the way the educational system works in various localities.

For the rest, it may be an advantage to point out at the start that a sketch of Soviet education must of necessity cover more than the strictly educational ground. It is, indeed, in relation to (a) a planned socialist economy, and (b) the problem of democratic forms of culture, that the Soviet educational system in theory and practice is, in the writer's opinion, of special interest to the rest of Europe.

SOVIET EDUCATION

I

THE THEORY OF SOVIET EDUCATION

It should be clear by now that there is a theory for everything in Soviet Russia, above all for every kind of organised activity. When precedent is lacking the theorist enjoys unusual opportunities, and the Soviet theorist has availed himself of such opportunities with notable enthusiasm. There is in Soviet Russia to-day a theory of government, a theory of law, a theory of labour, a theory of social relations, a theory of ethics, of art, of education. The interested foreigner is, no doubt, fully aware of this. What he may be tempted to forget, however, is that these theories are always the same theory; that a single conception of life and society governs all the diverse spheres of human activity in Soviet Russia at the present day. That conception, of course, is Communism, and the crucial thing in connection with Communism in Soviet Russia is that it tends more and more to approximate a theory with a complete and practical way of life.

One of many stories that the Russian Communist liked to tell some years ago, during the later period of the New Economic Policy and the struggle for supremacy between Stalin and Trotsky, was as follows. Trotsky approached a Rabbi with the burning question of the hour: was it possible to build Socialism in a single country? The Rabbi went away, consulted the Talmud and returned. "Yes," he said, "it is possible to build Socialism in a

single country, but it is not possible to live there." The Russian Communist is still not averse from telling stories against himself, but that particular story "dates." There is no longer debate as to whether or not it is possible to build Socialism in a single country; the building proceeds. The manner of the building can perhaps be seen to greatest advantage in a survey of the present system of education.

In any attempt to describe the system, it is necessary, as has been suggested, to take into account many other things besides the design and working of the educational machine. It is essential, in the first place, to approach the subject from the standpoint of Soviet internal politics. By politics in this instance one means Bolshevik political science, the dictatorship of the Communist Party, the theories of Marx, Engels and Lenin. It is also essential to pay close attention to the economic development of Soviet Russia if the development of the Soviet educational system is to be adequately understood.

Why, it may be asked, is it necessary to drag politics and economics into a discussion of education? Why must a system of education be linked up with the processes of dictatorship or the development of heavy industry? The simplest answer is that a planned economy—which is the corner-stone of the Soviet building to-day—must inevitably include the whole sphere of education. More generally, since Marxian doctrine embraces, or is designed to embrace, the whole of life, Soviet institutions present a remarkable ideological unity. There is, indeed, very little in Soviet Russia that the foreigner can understand without reference, first, to the philosophy of scientific materialism; secondly, to what is called "the general line" of the Communist Party. This applies with special force to the system of education.

It is obvious, after all, that an educational system and cultural institutions generally take their complexion from a political system. An autocracy, like old Tsarist Russia, produces one set of educational ideas and institutions; a

democracy, like modern Sweden, produces a quite different set of educational ideas and institutions. The fact that a system of education derives its bias from a system of government is less apparent, and is perhaps given less emphasis, in this country than in Soviet Russia ; but it is not less true of Great Britain than of Soviet Russia.

What is significant, then, of Soviet education is, first of all, not the Soviet educational machine, but the unique political system of Soviet Russia. It is partly because the Soviet political system is not yet fully developed—because, that is, the Communist Party holds that an emergency state of revolution still exists—that Soviet ideas of education are so *plainly* stamped with their political origins ; but the chief reason for this is inherent in Communist political philosophy, which demands the subordination of all material and intellectual means to a single revolutionary end. To a certain extent it is true to say that every organised activity in Communist Russia is deliberately politicalised, and that it is always the political aspect of things which matters most—which is sometimes of exclusive interest—to the Soviet Government. Educational conferences in Soviet Russia thus resemble all other Soviet conferences in that their preoccupations are essentially political. The pronouncements of the present Commissar of Education in the R.S.F.S.R., A. S. Bubnov, the speeches on educational policy of Krupskaya, the reports of educationists like Pinkevitch and Shohin are, first and foremost, political manifestos. And it should not be forgotten that the executive authority in educational as in all other matters is the Central Committee of the Communist Party, which formulates and announces every important development in educational policy.

One phrase occurs with unwearying persistence in reports and speeches and declarations of policy in regard to Soviet education at the present day. The phrase is "socialist construction"—which is the key-note, indeed, of the whole of Soviet oratory and journalism and literature to-day. Education during a period of socialist con-

struction must itself be a work of socialist construction : that is the formula which confronts both the adult Soviet citizen and the youth of both sexes in the schools.

It is not an empty formula, as will be apparent from a study of the principle of "polytechnisation" in the schools. But it takes for granted much that the foreigner may appreciate only imperfectly, and it tends to cover only more immediate ends. Soviet education in substance is much more than politically "tendentious"; it is essentially an instrument of revolution and revolutionary rule. Education in a Communist country is necessarily education in Communism; and this truism is the driving force of the Soviet educational machine. If one asks a Soviet citizen what is the object of education in his country, it will not occur to him at this time of day to refer to so bald a truism. There is only one answer which he can be expected to give nowadays. "The object of Soviet education," he will say, "is to create active workers in the construction of a socialist society." For the Soviet citizen that is a sufficient answer; for the foreigner who finds it lacking in explicitness a more concrete statement of principle is always at hand. "The fundamental aim of primary education," declares the most eminent of Soviet educationists, "is the indoctrination of youth in the proletarian philosophy." This type of definition brings into view the aspect of Soviet education which the formula does not cover and which serves, in truth, as the basis of the entire cultural side of the Bolshevik Revolution. The two aspects—the constructive and the propagandist—are of equal importance in the present scheme of Soviet education, which may be characterised, in the last resort, as the application of Marxism to the cultural needs of a developing socialist order.

So much for the broad theoretical basis of education throughout the Soviet Union. There is still theory enough and to spare; it is not easy, as a matter of fact, to speak of Soviet educational theory and be done, since it has an inexhaustible fascination for the makers of the new Russia

and has been indulged with marked extravagance in recent years. Communism as a theory of society does not change in essentials, but there is always room for minor additions. Theory, planning, organisation, reorganisation, more theory—these delight the heart of the Soviet educationist and legislator, and it will be necessary on more than one occasion to return to the theoretical considerations underlying Soviet educational practice.

It cannot be made too clear at the start that Soviet education embraces much more than the school system. A point worth noting, to begin with, is that the strict meaning of the word *prosvestchenie*, which is always used nowadays to signify "education," is "enlightenment." "The People's Commissariat of Enlightenment" is, indeed, a much juster and more accurate title than "Board of Education" for the Soviet Government department which administers education in each of the constituent Republics of the Union. The Bolsheviks did not invent the word *prosvestchenie*, which was first employed in its current sense by reformists of an earlier generation and the modern use of which reflects with sharp illumination the cultural backwardness of Tsarist Russia; but it was they who popularised the word. Enlightenment in Soviet Russia includes, amongst other things, the uses of material civilisation and physical culture. The proper handling of domestic appliances and an enthusiasm for football (in summer) come under the heading of enlightenment. Habits of cleanliness and personal hygiene are likewise regarded as a necessity of Soviet enlightenment, and in consequence form part of the Soviet idea of education generally. You are an educated person in Soviet Russia if you wash regularly, if you brush your teeth, if your table manners bear some sort of comparison with European table manners, and if you do not get drunk. (The last condition appears to arise not merely out of the abnormal misery and cruelty which attended drunkenness in pre-Revolutionary Russia, but also out of a (a) respect for the habits of asceticism of the average Party member, and (b) the desire to

ensure fitness for manual labour.) Bad language is a flagrant breach of enlightenment. (The writer was walking in Moscow one evening last summer with two Russians engaged with him in heated and mildly abusive argument. At a street corner stood a middle-aged man—urinating in the road. He pricked up his ears at our conversation, shook his head in disapproval of our language, and addressed us in remonstrating tones: "Come, come, comrades, don't swear at one another!") If, finally, one wants to heap contempt or abuse on the head of a Soviet citizen to-day, one calls him "*nekulturni*"—uncultured—which is at least equivalent to calling a man "a swine" here.

At any rate it should be borne in mind that education in Soviet Russia covers, in addition to the school system, the work of the theatres, cinemas and wireless, of the museums (which Lenin in particular regarded as a strategic point of first-rate importance in the struggle with pre-Revolutionary ideas), of the Press and literature and the State publishing department, and also embraces the whole of that vast region of Bolshevik activity which is concerned with political education and propaganda in home and factory and farm, in mines and offices, in clubs and trade unions and national organisations and voluntary societies.

Before proceeding to examine the structure which has been raised on Soviet educational theory, three warnings may be desirable. In the first place, as a result of the Soviet passion for planning it is always difficult for the foreigner to distinguish clearly between Soviet achievement and Soviet plans for achievement. The Russian of to-day, having at last got over the worst of his problems of theory, is still so addicted to drawing things upon paper, and to the formulation of grandiose schemes, that he tends to ignore or at any rate lose sight of existing realities, while the sceptical foreigner for his part is too prone to conclude that such schemes are unlikely to have any foundation whatever in fact. That is a hard conclusion; but, so far as the writer's experience goes, it is certainly true that the line drawn by the educational authorities be-

tween what has actually been carried out and what has only been premeditated is anything but a firm one. Many Russians themselves demonstrate, by their fondness for the expression *fakticheski*—which may be translated by “in point of actual, concrete, fulfilled, existing fact”—their awareness of the gulf that yawns between planning and achievement.

Secondly, there is the question of statistics. There is a wealth of figures, diagrams, charts and tables of comparison on the subject of Soviet education. Generally speaking, there is no need to question the figures supplied from official sources. But such figures cannot convey a great deal to anybody who lacks detailed first-hand knowledge of conditions over the greater part of Soviet territory to-day, and they can seldom be used with profit to point comparisons with education in other countries. One or two illustrations must serve to explain the difficulty. The budget assignation for pre-school education in 1931 (in which year the proportion of women engaged in industry rose to one-third of the total number of workers) showed an increase of 193 per cent. over the previous year's figure. That, of course, is illuminating in some ways. But the information is of negligible interest unless one can set against it the increase in 1931 in the number of married women employed on the collective farms, the increase in the number of crèches attached to factories, the increase per head in pre-school expenditure, etc., etc. Again, the budget estimates for technical education in the present year, total, let us say, x million roubles. Comparison with the cost of technical education elsewhere must take into account not merely such matters as the relative inexpertness of the Russian skilled worker, but also the fact that about 40 per cent. of the cost of Soviet technical education is covered by students' wages. Only a statistician, in short, should make liberal use of Soviet statistics.

Lastly, although educational theory remains uniform, there are remarkable practical differences in the application of the theory. Like all political realists, the Bolshe-

viks flavour their methods with a strong dash of opportunism. Soviet educational organisation and method in a particular locality depend to a large extent on the industries of that locality, on its natural resources, on its proximity to other industrial or agricultural areas, and not least on its "political reliability." Moreover, in spite of the theoretical revolution brought about by the introduction of the polytechnical principle in education, educational practice appears to have undergone very little change in the last year or two in many outlying parts of the Soviet Union. It is above all in the towns, in established industrial areas like the Donetz Basin (where a large part of heavy industry is concentrated), and on the larger collective farms that the new ideas of Soviet education are in greatest evidence.

Before considering these new ideas, it is essential to review earlier stages of Soviet educational activity and to do justice to the biggest achievement to date of the educational system. That achievement, of course, is the liquidation of illiteracy, which is now in process of completion over the whole area of the Soviet Union.

II

PROLETARIAN REVOLUTION AND THE LIQUIDATION OF ILLITERACY

OBVIOUSLY enough, the initial educational problem confronting the Bolsheviks after the Revolution had as much to do with the peculiarities of the Russian scene and the legacy bequeathed by Tsarist Russia as with the proletarian ideology. So far as the Soviet inheritance from the past is concerned, it may be sufficient to observe that Russian society before (and for some time after) the emancipation of 1861 was essentially a feudal society, and that the cultural backwardness of the masses was a byword among the nations of Europe. The educational reforms inaugurated under Alexander II had proved, like the emancipation itself, a bitter disappointment. The *Zemstva* (district councils) had been conceded the right of founding "council schools," secondary schools had been established, and the universities had been granted autonomy; but, in the reaction following reform, real or nominal, it was seen that these changes had made remarkably little difference to the general character of Russian education. Such progress as was effected in the field of primary education was slow and sporadic. The educational work of the *Zemstva* had been crippled at the start by the extreme reaction of the Holy Synod, which burst into full flower during the lengthy Procuratorship of Pobedonostsev. It was the Holy Synod, it should be said, rather than the Ministry of Public Instruction which was invested with all real power in questions of educational policy almost up to the period of the War. If, then, education in pre-Revolutionary Russia was not a purely class prerogative, at any rate the educational system as a whole was still the traditional

instrument of Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality—the last symbolising the oppression of minorities. Only as such was it allowed to operate.

As a result of these conditions the masses of the Russian proletariat before the Revolution stood at a level of ignorance for which Lenin's description—"semi-Asiatic unculturedness"—was scarcely an exaggeration. The first objective of Soviet education was of necessity the liquidation of illiteracy.

There was little opportunity for tackling the problem during the period of European intervention and civil war, more particularly in view of the need for concentrating educational activity on revolutionary propaganda. After 1920, however, the Bolsheviks settled down to the task in earnest. There were a thousand and one obstacles to be overcome, and Russian habits of lethargy seemed not the least insurmountable. The Bolsheviks used every device of command and persuasion at their disposal in launching a series of "campaigns." All the machinery of social life was brought into use for organising adult education, the school became the centre of communal activity in the villages, the granting of social benefits in some districts became conditional on school attendance. Organisations like the Young Communist League were pressed into service, members pledging themselves to teach at least one other citizen to read and write. The unwillingness of the older generation of illiterates to exert themselves was countered with characteristic realism. The local authorities exhorted the idlers, cajoled them, and at last bribed them with promises which were not easily resisted. Before the principle of universal education became law, the reward for regular attendance at classes took the form of extra vouchers for the purchase of clothing and domestic utilities at the State shops—at State prices, that is. So the work proceeded, successive campaigns spreading in geographical extent and increasing in crusading zeal. At the present day the completion of the liquidation of illiteracy, originally assigned to the vague future, tentatively to 1937,

then to 1934, is in sight, and is already an accomplished fact over the greater part of European Russia.

Certain factors should be noted in connection with the practical side of the work. The urban and industrial areas were the first, of course, to be dealt with; but the main problem did not lie there. The illiterate population of Russia consisted for the most part of a far-flung body of peasantry of different races, only small sections of which had any direct interest in political revolution, at least in its first phases. A fair proportion of the educated classes had either fled from Russia after the Revolution or had been killed off in the civil war. Almost the majority of those that remained were deeply suspect by the Bolsheviki, who seldom allowed "bourgeois ideologists" and members of a class intelligentsia to take part in serious educational work. In its beginnings, therefore, Soviet education suffered more than anything else from a shortage of experienced teaching personnel.

There is a painting by a well-known Soviet artist, Bribein, with the title "The First Lesson." This is what might be called a Victorian title, and the picture is, indeed, not unlike a conventional piece of Victorian genre painting, though at once less sentimentalised and more vigorous in execution. It represents a middle-aged peasant woman sitting at a table with a pen in her hand and a sheet of paper before her. By her side, leaning over her, is a squarely-built young woman, obviously of peasant stock, obviously not a member of the intelligentsia and in all likelihood a member of the Young Communist League. Her pose is vigorous and determined, her expression is one of practical sympathy. She is guiding the hand of the older woman in the latter's effort to write the letter A. All things considered, the picture would seem to be a fair illustration of the way in which the Bolsheviki were forced to grapple with illiteracy. At the start at any rate, it was very much a case of the blind leading the blind.

Some simple statistics may be appropriate here. The Russian census of 1897 showed that 78 per cent. of the

population were illiterate. (Semi-literacy in Tsarist Russia may fairly be allowed to rank as illiteracy.) In 1920, 68 per cent. of the population of Soviet Russia were illiterate. In 1926 the figure was still as high as 60 per cent. In 1930, at the end of the second year of the Five-Year Plan—designed to “accelerate the tempo of reconstruction”—the figure had dropped to 33 per cent.

There should be no need to point out at this stage that the Five-Year Plan is not merely a plan of economic reorganisation, of industrial reconstruction and the collectivisation of farming, etc. The Plan embraces every organised activity, cultural, scientific, educational, and so on, in the whole of the Soviet Union. Included in the 33 per cent. of the population still characterised by illiteracy at the end of 1930 were twenty-two million inhabitants of the R.S.F.S.R. The control figures of the Plan for 1931 allowed for the liquidation of illiteracy among all these millions; and it is claimed that this was effected by the end of the year. Illiteracy in the remoter parts of the Union, tracts of which are peopled by nomadic tribes and primitive communities, should be liquidated, according to the Plan, by the end of the present year. The end, that is, of the first Five-Year Plan—the “Five-Year Plan in Four”—should witness the establishment of literacy throughout the Soviet Union.

These figures have been obtained from official sources, and there is obviously no means of checking them. Some exaggeration is probable: the Soviet authorities are, possibly, over-anxious to demonstrate their enthusiasm for education, and it may not always be easy for them to decide at what point semi-literacy leaves off and literacy begins. Still, even if one allows for a margin of exaggeration in the figures, nobody in his senses can doubt the reality and effectiveness of this stage of the *kulturni pohod* (cultural march).

Here are some assorted facts in illustration of the magnitude of the task of overcoming illiteracy in the whole of the Soviet Union. There are two thousand provinces to be

reached, and the number of different languages (some of them unwritten until recent years, others more or less undeveloped) spoken in those provinces appears to be anything between seventy and one hundred and twenty. The regard the Bolsheviks have displayed for the language and tradition of racial and national minorities—a regard in striking contrast, as has been suggested, to Tsarist custom—is of first-rate importance, since it has helped to secure political unity within the Soviet frontier as nothing else could have done. But it has also created its own problem. The inquiring foreigner, who wonders how a single theory of education can be applied to the whole diverse extent of Soviet territory, learns that the attempt imposes a severe strain on Soviet intellectual resources as well as on such material resources as paper—that is, the lumber industry. The difficulty, indeed, is so marked that, although it is said that the annual amount of printed material produced in the Soviet Union is now the second largest in the world (the largest, of course, is that of the United States), a “paper famine” has existed for some years. The control figures for 1931 for the production of printed material were eight hundred million printed books and three and a half milliard pamphlets, and the actual output is reported to have been well in excess of the estimate. It is not insignificant in this connection that the division of the old Supreme Economic Council into three separate Commissariats should provide for Commissariats of Heavy Industry, Light Industry—and the Lumber Industry.

It was partly owing to the uniform level of ignorance of the peasant proletariat that the Bolsheviks were enabled to proceed with the liquidation of illiteracy in, say, Azerbaidjan and the Tadjik Republic by more or less uniform methods. It was the cleanness of the slate, in fact, which helped to a large extent to make success possible and which enabled the Bolsheviks to combine rudimentary forms of education with revolutionary propaganda. That is something which should not be overlooked. From an educational point of view, the Russian masses were as im-

pressionable, as plastic, as sensitive to the shock of elementary ideas as the Bolsheviks could desire. The political significance of the liquidation of illiteracy is not merely that it has brought the millions of Soviet Russia into line with the proletariat of Western Europe, but that it has brought in its train an almost unconscious acceptance of the political and social doctrines of Communism. There are in Soviet Russia to-day tens of millions of Communists in all but name outside the restricted ranks of the Communist Party.

III

POLYTECHNISATION AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

THE aim of Soviet education is to create a body of workers actively engaged in achieving Socialism. This is, all things considered, sufficiently clear and unambiguous. What does it mean, however, translated into concrete terms of daily life and labour? What precise relations are being established between the educational system on the one hand and economic organisation, social institutions and cultural life generally on the other?

Apart from its larger and organic aim—or, more correctly, in deference to it—Soviet education at present has two fundamental objectives: first, the provision of workers to realise in its entirety the Five-Year Plan and to satisfy the requirements of planned socialist economy in the future; secondly, the intensive propaganda of Marxian doctrine and the materialist dialectic. These immediate aims are the motor force of the machinery and technical apparatus of the school system to-day.

Soviet education, of course, is quite free: nobody pays to be educated in Soviet Russia—indeed, a certain type of adult citizen is paid a wage for being educated. And co-education is the invariable rule. Although one is now accustomed in this country to experiments in co-education, it is surprisingly difficult for people here to realise how completely co-education has entered into the Soviet system. During one of the writer's first days in Moscow, the president of a large workers' club in the suburbs discussed with him its programme of educational work and spoke enthusiastically of the classes in aeroplane construction which had been planned for the new session. In complete innocence the writer observed: "I suppose they are

for men only?" "Oh dear, no!" was the amused reply. "We don't shut our eyes to facts." In all that concerns the vital activities of Soviet Russia, there is little difference between the things expected and demanded of men and the things expected and demanded of women. This has far-reaching consequences in the field of pre-school education.

The pre-school stage, roughly from the ages of three to eight, includes nursery schools, kindergartens, children's homes, play centres, and so on. This phase of education is being developed on an extensive scale in connection with light industry and, still more, in connection with the collective farms. Women, no less than men, are regarded primarily as workers in a developing socialist order of society, and although a woman wholly engaged in the upbringing of her children is necessarily a worker, she is as a rule, owing to the circumstances of the present labour shortage, considered a lower-grade worker than the woman engaged in manual labour—unless, that is, she happens to be a "child specialist." It is interesting to observe the effect that the growth of pre-school education is having on the institution of the family. There can be no doubt that it is an important factor in the changing conception of family relationships, although the days are over when a few ultra-enthusiasts decried the family as a "bourgeois institution" and held that the child belonged neither to itself nor its parents, but to the State; although, too, there is no need to assert that pre-school education, as it is being organised to-day, in indirect association with women's services in industry, is one of the influences that is "destroying" the family. It is one of the phases of Soviet education, it should be said, which is most severely handicapped by lack of money, lack of equipment, lack of trained personnel; but it is also in many ways the phase of education for which the State evidences the most punctilious concern. It calls forth, so far as the writer's observation goes, a religious zeal and devotion from those engaged in this initial task of ushering a new generation of

Soviet citizens into the world. Even here, however, the devil of theory has recently made its appearance, as will be illustrated later. Literature for the very young, for instance, is to be supervised in the present year by a special Government department charged, amongst other things, with developing a "technological psychology" in nursery schools and kindergartens. This is in accordance with the current slogan of "the conquest of technique."

The next stage is the primary school, the basis of the educational structure, designed to provide every child with a seven years' school education—that is, from the ages of eight to fifteen: the *Piatyletka* (Five-Year Plan) in industry has its counterpart in a *Semyletka* (Seven-Year Plan) in education. The teaching provided in these primary schools corresponds, in a rough way, with elementary education in this country; but there is, needless to say, a fundamental difference, and not merely in regard to the political complexion of the teaching. The developed ideological basis of the Soviet system of education is given material form in the primary school, and is expressed in the blessed and magical word "polytechnisation." The polytechnical principle is the life and soul of Soviet education to-day.

It is still comparatively undeveloped in practice. Concrete discussion of the principle dates only from August 1930, though it was mooted long before by Marx, who posited three approaches to education in a Communist order of society—education of mind, physical development and polytechnical training. The Bolsheviks had long had polytechnisation in mind before they proceeded to work out a practical scheme and to interest the trade unions and the factory worker generally in its main outlines.

The writer must confess that for some time the significance of the magical word eluded him; it seemed difficult to distinguish between the thing that Soviet educationists called polytechnisation and a fairly ordinary form of vocational training in the primary schools. In practice the

polytechnical principle appeared in most instances to lead to the introduction of one of several kinds of elementary vocational study into the school curriculum, the bias of such study being mainly technological. As a theory, however, it was apparent that polytechnical education was quite a different kettle of fish ; and as practice began to define itself more sharply and with greater uniformity there was no longer room for misunderstanding.

Polytechnisation at the present day is conceived as a method of education which will in the first place acquaint the boy and girl at school with the general processes of industry and labour in a developing socialist society, and which will make them familiar from childhood with the tools and instruments of a particular branch of production. To this end every school in the Soviet Union is, or eventually will be, attached to a neighbouring factory, or collective farm, or other producing unit of industry. The factory or farm makes itself responsible for the administration of labour propaganda and technological training in the school, and also shares a certain amount of responsibility in general matters of school management. The link between the producing unit of industry and the school—denoted by the term *shesftvo*—is the crux of the matter.

What the link signifies in actual fact is this. The primary school is attached, let us say, to a margarine factory in the neighbourhood. A boy or girl of nine or twelve is taught, therefore, in addition to the three R's and Marxian variants of the usual run of subjects suitable for elementary education, the whole story of Soviet margarine—first and foremost, that is, the uses of the type of machinery employed in the preparation of margarine and the technical details of the manufacturing process, then the part margarine plays in the national economy, the history of its preparation in the Soviet Union, the history and organisation of the trade union to which the people employed in the margarine factory are attached, and so on, and so on. In the same way, if the primary school is attached to a collective farm (that is, in view of the mech-

anisation of farming, an agricultural factory), the child will learn in the first place the elements of agricultural science and the uses of modern agricultural machinery, then the history of the particular farm and of collectivisation in general, the part which the farm is required to play in future agricultural schemes, etc.

Polytechnisation follows logically enough from the Marxian dictum that "the factory system is the embryonic form of the educational system of the days to come." It grows naturally, too, out of the Five-Year Plan and the Soviet bid to "overtake and surpass" the advanced capitalist countries of the West in industrial efficiency. It is undergoing rapid alterations and experiments in method at present, but it is unlikely to change in essentials for many years to come. Broadly speaking, polytechnisation aims at producing a nation of socialistically thinking technical specialists. In this respect it is a conception fundamentally at variance with what we in this country understand by a liberal education. More of that later.

The polytechnical school is not intended to function as a vocational school. Far from it. The link with industry is meant to serve a basic educational purpose, not to be of immediate assistance to production; it is only after the primary school stage has been passed that vocational training appears on the scene. But the new idea expressed itself at the start with much confusion and raised a crop of industrial abuses in many areas. Small children were set to work on unskilled labour far too heavy for their years, and the Communist Party found it necessary to issue strongly worded condemnations of this type of "exploitation." These reproofs have been repeated, it may be remarked, in recent months, and the fact points to a state of affairs in some parts of the country which the framers of polytechnisation cannot have contemplated—have indeed been anxious to avoid. The writer's personal observation of the primary polytechnical school does not go beyond September of last year, and it is said that the worst abuses and anomalies have been remedied since the beginning of

the new year. An admirable example (though the school does not materially differ from its pre-polytechnical form and is also one which presents few opportunities for exploitation) is that under the patronage of the newspaper *Izvestia*, in which the smallest children play with plasticine and boys and girls from the age of ten upwards are taught to work at miniature carpenters' benches and turners' lathes and are familiarised with types, printing processes, bookbinding, etc. It is precisely the element of "play" in the technological training provided here which is lacking elsewhere, particularly in the schools in the newly mechanised rural parts.

From the primary school the boy or girl proceeds immediately to work, or to what is called a technicum, or to some kind of vocational training in a factory school. The latter explains itself: it is part factory, part school (it tends more and more to be housed in the factory building itself), and the boy or girl divides the day between study and actual productive labour. Here, as throughout the educational system, the end in view is to combine theory with practice in the closest possible way; the acquisition of theoretical knowledge alone is regarded as the deadliest of sins—partly, it should be observed, on the assumption that it fosters a class mentality. The teachers always include workmen from the factory to which the school is attached; every qualified engineer in Soviet Russia is liable by law to devote a couple of hours in each working day to teaching. There are factory schools of every conceivable kind—for textiles, tobacco, paper, metallurgy, engineering of all descriptions.

The technicum (institute for technical study) still varies enormously in scope and intention in different parts of the Union. This is not surprising in view of the regional character of many important branches of Soviet industry, but disorganisation in this phase of education appears to have been assisted by rapid fluctuations of policy. Broadly speaking, the technicum is designed both to bridge the gaps in the fully qualified technical ranks and to train

cadres of second-grade qualified workers and technicians—that is, to produce on the one hand assistant engineers and workshop foremen, on the other subordinate medical officers of health, elementary teachers of technical subjects, and so on. It is as yet too soon to expect all technical workers to be fully qualified, so for the time being Soviet Russia makes shift with large numbers of semi-qualified workers. These are, so to speak, the hewers of wood and drawers of water in the field of specialisation. As the system develops their qualifications will presumably become higher and a more expert technical personnel will emerge.

Finally, at the apex of the educational structure, there are the higher technical institutes, which may be considered of university rank. Here educational and economic organisation meet at a high point of co-ordination. There are about two hundred of these higher technical institutes at the present day—possibly more, since their number grows apace. Modelled to a large extent on the vocational faculties in American universities, they are organised for the preparation of cadres for the higher technical and administrative posts. They cover every branch of the national economy—industry, commerce, the social services, the “professions,” research, and so on; and from them issue the new generation of expert constructional engineers, mining engineers, chemists, doctors, cotton specialists, economists, surveyors, agronomists, soap specialists, meteorologists, etc. These institutes are organised with extreme care and deliberation, since the quality of their output is of vital consequence on every “front.” The fulfilment of the year’s plan in any section of industry is dependent to a large extent on the provision of new technicians and qualified departmental heads, as well as of new bodies of skilled workers; and the work of the higher technical institutes is so regulated as to ensure a balanced supply of the types of specialist demanded by the estimates of the Plan. If, for instance, the authorities decide that a thousand new cotton specialists will be

needed in a certain area by the end of 1934, and that five hundred new tobacco specialists will be required in a neighbouring area, they will take care to adjust the number of students in the respective technical institutes in accordance with planned needs. The State Planning Commission will not want to be saddled with five thousand cotton specialists when production allows only for one thousand. To facilitate this co-ordination of technical education with industry, the administration of these higher technical institutes has been taken out of the hands of the Commissariat of Education and given over to the three Commissariats formerly represented by the Supreme Economic Council.

The above is a summary of the principal parts of the school machine. It is only a rough summary, however. In view of (a) the pressure on the machine, (b) the intricate devices of political education, local authorities frequently resort to promoting education when and where and how they can. Further, nothing has been said so far of such educational institutions as special schools for young peasants on the collective farms; or of the "educational combines" in the factories, some of which—those attached to the "Gigant" collective farm and the "Dynamo" works in Moscow, for instance—are among the most energetic and efficient centres of education in the country, combining as they do technical training with intensive propaganda or Communist "activism"; or of the voluntary groups and societies existing for home study; or of the Soviet variety of "correspondence schools"; or of the educational work of the Central Institute of Labour (an admirable psycho-technical institution founded by the proletarian poet, Gastev) which is extending on a large scale its six months' courses for manual workers; or of the special training colleges for technical teachers, in which the place of dialectical materialism in Soviet pedagogy forms a leading subject of study; or of the intensive education in political matters and the proletarian ideology which characterises training in the Red Army; or of the

special Communist universities. The old universities still survive, but their functions are limited to two faculties—mathematics and physics on the one hand, natural science on the other. The rest of the work on university lines has been taken over by the advanced technicums and the higher technical institutes.

There are, in addition, two further types of school to be considered in some detail. The first may be described as the humane equivalent of the higher technical institute, devoted to the study of literature, drama, history, art, philology, and so on. It is worth noting that Marxian theory has penetrated these institutions and coloured their outlook and the whole method of instruction in the humane studies to a truly remarkable extent; it is astonishing, indeed, to discover how drastically the study not only of the social sciences, but also of drama and literature, has been transformed by devotion to the premises of dialectical materialism and the conception of the class struggle. These colleges, of course, are still an essential part of the educational structure and are still the main training-ground for the teacher of the humanities. No Russian of to-day frowns on their work, but it is difficult for the foreigner to resist the conclusion that they do not matter so very greatly at the moment in the educational scheme. The humanities are the humanities, but turbine engines are more important than the study of nineteenth-century French painting.

The other type of school is in some respects the most interesting product of the Soviet educational system in transition. The *Rabfak* (Workers' Faculty) may be regarded as the adult workers' university. It is open to men and women between the ages of eighteen and thirty who have missed the opportunities for primary school education. It includes both the residential and the evening variety, though the former alone, which is largely concentrated in Moscow and Leningrad, is conducted on the Soviet equivalent of university lines. The favoured workers, selected as a rule by their trade union, are

released from their mine or factory or farm, and given a systematic course of study over a period of three or four years : they receive a monthly wage—scarcely a high one, however—while engaged as students. Generally they are trained to become skilled workers in their own branch of productive industry, though not infrequently they proceed from the *Rabfak* to a higher technical institute and eventually join the ranks of the technical experts. A considerable percentage of the workers thus released from industry appear to be Party members. There was a surprising amount of opposition to the whole idea of the *Rabfak* at the time of its inception, but nobody questions its beneficial results to-day.

The broad effects of Soviet education, its repercussions on the social structure, and the gains and dangers of its approximation to purely vocational training, will be discussed elsewhere. In the meantime certain facts of a practical nature should be borne in mind in regard to conditions in the schools. Since the end of 1930 adult education has been compulsory throughout the Soviet Union. The rush on the schools is so great that there are few which are not open the whole year round. There are holidays, of course, for both the teaching staff and students ; but there is always sufficient pressure on educational accommodation and on existing facilities for technical study to keep the schools open without a break. In the towns, above all in Moscow, most of them have a two- or three-shift day. The school may open at 8.30 as a primary school and close at 12.30 ; it may then re-open at one o'clock as a technicum and close at five o'clock ; and from 6 to 10.30 it may be in use as a school for adult workers in a neighbouring engineering works. The same building—there are hundreds of Soviet schools housed in other than school buildings—and more or less the same equipment will thus have to serve for all three types of student. Actual school buildings vary greatly in usefulness, also in hygienic conditions. The tempo of school building is not less impressive than other “ Bolshevik tempos,” as the phrase goes, and

many of the new schools are first-rate in design and equipment. But there are not a few decrepit and insalubrious structures among the older buildings, and equipment in many technical schools is old-fashioned and inadequate. Of the deficiencies in Soviet educational material and equipment to-day no one is better aware than the practical Soviet educationist. Polytechnisation in particular suffers from the lack of properly equipped workshops in the schools.

Nobody with any knowledge of Tsarist Russia who sees what—in spite of hopes that are too sanguine and claims that are exaggerated—is actually being accomplished in Soviet Russia at the present day can fail to be impressed by the unending stream of educational activity. Theory, it is true, still runs ahead of practice in the schools. And practice is, in a sense, less novel than the Bolshevnik claims. Polytechnisation is not a new idea, even in Russia. Soviet teaching methods are not new: the Bolshevniks have evinced much sympathy for up-to-date forms of experimentation and, having made wide use of the “laboratory method” (an adaptation of the Dalton Plan), have abandoned it only to embrace the Project system; but have themselves made no original contribution to the crucial problem of *how* to teach. Yet, however biased or incomplete or one-sided it may appear, Soviet education must be reckoned a new force in the world. Its originality lies not so much in itself as in its uses in conjunction with the highly original political system from which it has developed.

IV

LITERATURE AS EDUCATION

SOVIET education and Bolshevik propagandist activity are twin processes. Propaganda begins, so to speak, a little before the educational machinery is started, and thereafter sets every part of it in motion. The foreigner will encounter youthful students who can discourse with expert knowledge on the growth of the revolutionary movement in China or the history of British rule in India, and are yet unable to speak or write grammatically. The Communists have begun to appreciate the danger inherent in this state of affairs, and have sought of late to redress the balance by issuing several warnings on the subject: the three R's are still to be the *first* objective of education.

Soviet methods of enlightenment, however, are in many respects more potent outside the schools than inside. No matter how or where he is occupied, the Soviet citizen finds it difficult to avoid, or lose sight of, his political education: it meets him at almost every turn of life. Posters and "wall-newspapers," lectures and wireless attend pretty constantly to his needs; the theatres and museums and "parks of rest and culture" cater for them; his home teems with educational matter—the very calendar on the wall commemorates every day of the year with diagrams and statistics of industrial production, figures relating to the growth of armaments in the capitalist world, denunciations of imperialism and exploitation; the dinner-plates in communal restaurants are decorated with Bolshevik slogans; portraits and busts of Marx and Lenin confront the citizen everywhere. And the Press, of course, is an ever-flowing fountain of information about

the Plan, about the progress of socialist construction, about the capitalist enemy.

The Press, which is more or less under the direct control of the Party, is probably the most powerful educational influence in the Soviet Union. Newspapers were unknown in many of the relatively populous provinces of the old Russian Empire ; now they reach to the remotest villages. The educational strength of the Soviet newspaper lies in the single-mindedness of its appeal. " News value," since the Plan was introduced in October 1928, is almost entirely a matter of Soviet economic development and the tempo of production. " Human interest " is restricted to expressions of collective psychology ; the story of the man who bit the dog is not " news." Capitalist affairs are of interest only in so far as they bear out the Marxian diagnosis, or attest the growth of Communism abroad, or give evidence of the world-solidarity of the proletariat, or have some practical bearing on Soviet socialist progress. On the basis of the facts and figures which record this progress, however, the Press maintains an inexhaustible flow of propaganda of the proletarian ideology. No matter what the type of journal—*Pravda*, *Izvestia*, *Za Industrializatsiu*, *Rabotchaya Gazeta*, *Trud*, *Krasnaya Zvezda* (the Red Army newspaper), *Utchitel'skaya Gazeta* (the educational newspaper), the technical journals—all are tireless in repeating the same phrases, the same slogans, the same enunciation of " the general line " of the Party. The Press is, in fact, the pure fount of day-to-day Marxian truth. And literature itself is just such a fount, flowing less generously but equally purely.

Soviet literature to-day presents a remarkable spectacle—to the eyes of the interested foreigner, a rather baffling one. Books are numerous and extremely cheap in Soviet Russia. A glance at a bookshop window, however, will reveal two preponderating types. The first is represented by titles like *Turbine Engines and Metallurgy*, *The Foundations of Technology*, *The Chemical Basis of Agronomy*, *Science, Technique and the Diesel Engine*. The second type

is represented by titles like *Socialist Construction and Proletarian World Revolution*, *Imperialist Politics and Oil*, *The Struggle for Communal Laundries in the Caucasus*, *The Collected Works of Lenin (Volume XVI)*. The window, in fact, chiefly displays technical manuals and expositions of Communist theory and policy—works of applied science, that is, and of Marxian science.

It would be a lamentable mistake to conclude from this that literature of a general kind is lacking. The amount of fiction and verse written to-day is greater than ever before; the number of new proletarian poets and novelists seems to increase every month, every week. Considerable though their output is, however, it is less in evidence in the bookshops and apparently in the mind of the reading public than the other sort of reading matter.

There is nothing new to be said of the mass of politico-economic literature, which has the sameness of matter and style that propaganda demands. Still, two observations may be relevant here. First, it probably represents the most consistent body of doctrine in the world, and in this respect is fairly easy to assimilate. Secondly, it is a menace to the richness and variety of the Russian language.

Text-books and manuals, particularly those designed for use in the schools, present the problem of a Marxian upbringing in a peculiar light. Every handbook in use in the schools, no matter what its subject, is unfailingly couched in Marxian phraseology. Geography or chemistry is not less obedient to this rule than history or economics. The study of anthropology can yield almost as many analogies of the materialist interpretation of history and the class struggle as the study of literature. Foreign language primers in particular are made to conform to this cardinal principle of proletarian study, sometimes with remarkable results. One discovers in such primers examples of conversational English which make one wonder whether one has been deaf until now: why has one never heard the proletariat of England speaking in that fashion? All text-books, it should be said, are submitted before printing to a

special censorship section of the State publishing department, and a bourgeois point of view with regard to electromagnetic theory does not pass undetected. L I U

The Communist for his part is perfectly frank in his recognition of two types of literature—(a) literature, and (b) what he calls “artistic literature.” (In the same way there are two types of film—the film and the “artistic film.”) The State publishing department may, and often does, print an impression of fifty thousand copies of a new work by a Soviet novelist, and the entire impression may be sold out within a few days of publication; but the point that needs to be emphasised is that the demand for a new manual of technology may be even greater, and that whereas this demand will be satisfied at once, a new impression of the novel may be delayed for some time—and with good reason. Apart from the concentration on applied science (the foreigner, by the way, cannot help suspecting that the display of political literature in the shop window sometimes represents “remainder” stock), an extraordinarily large proportion of the total amount of paper produced in Soviet Russia is required for purposes of immediate propaganda. Millions of pamphlets and leaflets are printed and distributed every week which have only a brief survival value; and although they are doubtless eventually repulped and reappear in a not very dissimilar guise, there is meanwhile a considerable strain on the circulation of literary work of a more lasting kind.

There is also a strain on the production of such work, and that is a vastly more serious matter. It is not easy to give an accurate picture of conditions on the Soviet “literary front,” as it is called, during the last two or three years without seeming to damn the conception of proletarian art. Like everything else in the country, Soviet literature to-day is expected to play its part in the transition period of Communism, the period of socialist construction: it must itself be a work of socialist construction. What this means in effect is that the Soviet

literary artist is required to reflect in his work the fundamental processes and objectives of the period, to interpret the political and economic exigencies of the hour, to embody in imaginative forms "the general line" of the Party. It is not merely that he must accept the new values which the materialist conception of art posits, giving expression to a "proletarian world-view" and exhibiting the workings of collective rather than individual psychology, but he must find his ideas, his themes and methods in the practical realities of socialist construction. Far from distracting attention from the needs and problems of a planned socialist economy, the novelist must seek to describe them, clarify them, beautify them. He must find his inspiration in the control figures of the Plan, in the routine of industrialisation and collectivisation, in the accelerating tempo of production, in the optimistic spirit of the Party which guides Communist Russia's destiny. His heart must beat faster at the announcement that twenty-four new blast furnaces are to be constructed in 1932; he must celebrate in triumph and thanksgiving the increased productivity of mills and factories; he must rejoice over the rising figures of output of coal and iron, the increase in the area under tea and tobacco cultivation.

The significant word here is "must," since there is no lack of evidence to prove that the Soviet writer who fails to comply with what is expected of him inevitably loses caste to-day. Art is not art in Soviet Russia at the moment unless it is politics. That, of course, is an extreme way of putting the truth, but it must be admitted that the tendency towards the politicalisation of every form of literature is extremely marked at present. The Communist view in the matter is, roughly, that the writer's duty in a society engaged in achieving Socialism is to the needs of the proletariat rather than to his so-called artistic conscience; that those needs should in fact become identified with his conscience, so that the "conquest of technique," for instance, becomes for him an artistic symbol as well as a Party slogan. In other words, for the time

being at any rate the more politicalised literature becomes the better. This view finds practical expression in the uses of the censorship. It is obvious that writers are not encouraged to pursue lines of enquiry which constitute deviations from "the general line," and it is equally clear that the censorship silences many kinds of social criticism, previously tolerated, in the interests of the whole vast experiment of national planning. It is, indeed, because the "mass mind" is so sensitive to public expressions of opinion that the Communist Party, which has always kept a watchful eye upon literature, has found it necessary to organise and discipline the "literary front" in much the same way that it is itself organised and disciplined.

What it comes down to in the end is that the Soviet literary artist to-day is required to divert his energy into educative rather than creative channels. He must teach the Party line; he must stimulate the workers, encourage them, fortify them, educate them.

Is it surprising in the circumstances that the condition often proves inimical to art? The Communist answers that it is inimical to bourgeois art; the extra-literary compulsion which is laid upon the writer is, he says, an essential ingredient of proletarian art. Nevertheless, it is instructive to observe that not a few writers who had previously established themselves with good work of one kind or another have either been silent during the last three years or so or have produced work of a colourless and curiously irresolute kind. This is particularly evident in respect of fiction. The accepted ground of the novelist has been removed from under his feet, and in numerous instances his effort to adapt himself to changed conditions has altogether defeated him. The *poputchiki* (fellow-travellers), who had compromised in the past between bourgeois traditions of writing and loyalty to the proletarian cause, are noticeably ill at ease and completely out of favour. The proletarian writers have carried the day, though it is strange to see some of the most eminent of them (Libedinsky, Fadeyev) being admonished and castigated and

generally rapped over the knuckles by the official organisation RAPP (Russian Association of Proletarian Writers).*

From a bourgeois point of view, almost the greater part of the newest Soviet literature is devoid of "artistic" interest. This is not merely because it treats exhaustively of the technical side of various phases of the Plan, because it goes out of its way to describe complicated machinery and engineering processes and even (as in the case of Marietta Shaginyan's, *Guidrotsentral*) bristles with statistics and quotations from Marx, but because it is alien in spirit to the humanist conception of art. The interested foreigner can perceive the emotion underlying somebody's latest hymn to a Diesel engine, but he cannot easily share it. A novel like Leonid Leonov's *Sot*, probably the most extolled of all Soviet novels in recent years, which unfolds the magic of socialist construction in relation to the lumber industry, cellulose factories, the manufacture of paper and the growth of a new industrial city, is one in a thousand; Leonov has mastered the formula. And yet this novel, in which the details of industrialisation are tacked on to pages and pages of conventional Slav mystification, is hardly a good one. What it lacks is a sense of elementary human issues.

Still, the Devil may whisper, "Is it art?" and the Bolshevik will answer "It is proletarian art." Certainly literature of this type has a powerful educational influence; it brings home to the reader in vivid detail and far more persuasively than slogans and statistics the concrete reality of socialist ideals. It is effective training in the materialist philosophy and first-rate propaganda for the shock-brigade and "socialist competition."

Literature conceived as education is likely to develop rapidly in the near future. Among the omens are the pro-

* Since this was written the Central Committee of the Party has announced its dissatisfaction with the policy of RAPP and VOAPP (a similar organisation). These are being liquidated, and a new association of writers and artists supporting socialist construction is to be formed in their place. The change promises greater freedom for the Soviet author.

posals of the educational authorities to RAPP for furthering the interest of worker and student in machinery and the tools of production. Socialist construction will be assisted, the authorities suggest, if story-tellers remember to pen their descriptions of machinery in such a way that the reader is able to visualise all the parts and processes and even to draw a working plan of the machinery if necessary.

Mention has already been made of the special Government department which is to supervise the production of children's books. There are to be no more "children's songs about birds and rabbits," Mme. Krupskaya declared recently. The *skazka* (fairy-tale or fable, and one of the glories of classic Russian literature) must go, she proceeded; its place will be taken by "dialectical materialism for children." Children's literature, the educationist Razin declared, "must embody a materialist, anti-religious world-view, must propagate the ideas of collectivisation, must wrestle with every aspect of individualism and bourgeois mentality in the child's environment."

What possible comment can the victim of a bourgeois ideology offer here?

One odd effect of the concentration on propagandist and technical literature deserves to be mentioned. It is seldom easy for the Soviet citizen to obtain copies of the work of pre-Revolutionary writers. In numerous cases, of course, it is quite impossible to obtain them; the Bolsheviks, determined to make a clean break with the past, have rigidly banned scores of eminent Russian authors of a conservative turn of thought or worse. But the Bolshevik Index appears to include in addition many authors of a milder political category. It is impossible at the present day to buy a copy of a work like Klutchevsky's *History*—or, indeed, of any non-Marxian history. Nor is this the worst. Even the classics of Russian literature are often hard to come by. The writer searched in vain most of the bookshops in Moscow during a whole week last year for a copy of Saltykov's novel, *The Goloulev Family*. Clearly the authorities

can have no objection to reprinting an author of Saltykov's stamp, but they presumably refrain from doing so because there are always more urgent demands to be satisfied. The result at any rate is that the young Russian of to-day is deprived of a good deal of the literature of the past. The effect of the deprivation is hard to measure, but does it not follow that the break with the past is rather too clean? And can a past be broken for that matter?

That, perhaps, is the crucial question. The excesses and some of the dangers of the Soviet conception of education are fairly plain. The Soviet experiment is in the throes of cultural revolution, and revolution is a great destroyer. Can Soviet education afford to destroy the whole of the education of the past? Can it build up a tradition of its own in isolation from the humanist tradition? No doubt the answers are best delayed until the cultural revolution has worked itself out.

V

CULTURAL REVOLUTION

IN one sense the basis of Soviet education, covering as it does the whole range of political and economic relations, is immeasurably wider than the basis of education anywhere in Western Europe ; in another sense, it is much narrower—from the point of view of the “ bourgeois ” educationist it is painfully narrow.

The bourgeois educationist, however, has no right to the last word in the matter. In discussing Soviet education with the Communist, or with any well-informed Soviet citizen, one is again and again brought up sharp by his habit of questioning one's fundamental assumptions. What, indeed, is education? And what is a *good* education? We take it for granted in this country that the thing we call “ a liberal education ”—education, that is, regarded more or less as an end in itself—is much to be desired ; we tend, in fact, to exalt it above every other kind of education. The Communist retort is that a liberal education is the product of a capitalist society, that it is essentially a class privilege, that it is appropriate only to members of a ruling class who do not need to concern themselves with the problem of earning a livelihood and who desire to maintain their class ascendancy, that it is an instrument for the exploitation of the masses, and so on. Materialist philosophy, of course, has taught the Communist to reject the end-in-itself and thing-in-itself idea ; but is his criticism any the less cogent for that?

We are bound, therefore, to face the fact that our immediate objection to the drastic utilitarianism of Soviet values for education arises—as the Communist, indeed, does not tire of reminding us—from the predilections of

a bourgeois psychology. Bourgeois habits of thought die hard, if indeed they ever die a normal death ; and that must be the excuse for the truism that the prejudices in regard to education that are necessarily engendered in a capitalist society are not the best equipment for valuing education in a Communist society.

Nevertheless, that Soviet education is a one-sided activity is undeniable. It is earnest, it is energetic, it is passionately idealistic ; but it is one-sided. Soviet Russia, for example, is probably the only country in the world which has a daily newspaper devoted to education. (It has also several educational weeklies and monthlies, it should be said.) A glance at the *Utchitelskaya Gazeta*, however, will reveal the fact that it does not, in any European sense, deal with education at all ; it is given up almost entirely to technological and political propaganda. The relevant thing here, of course, is not that an Englishman would refuse to call it an educational journal, but that the official Soviet view of education always threatens to stop short at propagandist necessity.

The one-sidedness proceeds from the limitations of that view, not from the mere vocational bias. The phrase, "under the supervision of the Party of Lenin," may not carry more weight than it deserves ; but it appears to carry too much weight in education. It is the unrelenting pressure of authority on Soviet education which denies it substance and fullness ; it is the absence of freedom and individual initiative in the educational system which mars its constructive efforts. There is no question here of confusing bourgeois and proletarian forms of freedom ; freedom, according to Communist reasoning, is an impossibility in the period of proletarian dictatorship. But it is surely the first requisite of education. Socialist construction on the material side requires the support of Party authority ; on the cultural side it needs to be released from the straitness and inflexibility of the Marxian metaphysic.

The vocational bias in education is sound in theory and

is indeed a paramount necessity. Still, it has obvious dangers, which cause the sympathetic observer of the Soviet experiment reasonable misgivings about the future, and it is to be hoped that the present strength of the bias is a response to temporary conditions. Vocational education is likely to persist for as long as the building of Socialism continues, but it should surely become less general and less intensive as industrialisation develops. It is to be explained, in the first place, by a reaction to the scholasticism of the past ; the new idea is a protest against the remoteness to life of conventional academic standards, a corrective to the bookishness and dead knowledge of the old type of education, which was nowhere more lifeless than in Imperial Russia. More than that, however, the vocational bias springs directly from the consciousness of Russia's "backwardness"—economic, social, cultural and technical backwardness. Like so many other Soviet enthusiasms, the enthusiasm for science and invention has its origin in the facts of the Russian scene rather than in the materialist ideology. The primitive and bone-breaking methods of agriculture, the profound ignorance of the world of scientific invention, the incredible poverty and the lack of all material civilisation—it is these things, which characterised the life of the Russian masses before the Revolution, that have inspired the utilitarianism of Soviet education. The delight of the Russian youth of to-day in simple "gadgets" and machinery in general represents a phase of cultural development, and the woman who is so fascinated by a meat-mincer—privately imported, of course—that she uses it, as the writer once observed, for mashing potatoes, is expressing a newly acquired sense of "civilisation." Russia, a country of vast natural resources, is still undeveloped. "In order to be cultured," Lenin observed in early days, "we need to achieve a certain development of the material sources of production."

The Communist, indeed, is realistic enough in accepting the fact that we live in a mass-production age. He

welcomes the opportunity the age affords, since in applied science and modern industrial technique he sees a solution for many of the problems of socialist organisation.

Meanwhile, however, temporary though it may be, the tendency to identify education with vocational training has its perils. This is not merely because it threatens to substitute mechanical skill for knowledge, but because it intensifies the lack of intellectual variety and balance in the life of the younger generation, because it adds to the general strain of life in a country dominated by the tempo of industrialisation. The concentration of energy on accelerating tempos exacts a toll of hardship and sacrifice; it is common knowledge, for instance, that nervous and heart diseases have increased considerably in recent years. The Soviet citizen shoulders the burden with remarkable faith and courage; he is prepared to pay the price for achieving Socialism. But it is the younger generation, too, which is being called upon to pay.

What are the rewards in the sphere of cultural life? What is the revolution in human as distinguished from material values which Soviet education hopes to effect? What are the new mental horizons of the socialist society?

There appear to be four essential ideals of the cultural revolution. The first is expressed by the anti-religious attitude. (Atheistic or anti-religious propaganda is more marked in the towns than in the rural areas, and achieves a measure of violence only in Moscow. One notices that the cupolas of the churches even in Leningrad are in many instances freshly painted—which suggest that there is little official persecution of the faithful.) There is no difficulty in accounting for this ideal. It forms part of the ordinary stock of scientific materialism, but it is specially dictated by the fact that the Orthodox Church had always been a potent weapon of political reaction in Russia and had deliberately striven to maintain the masses in “darkness.” Whether or not religion is necessary is a problem of modern scholasticism; the relevant question is surely

this: does a particular variety of religious belief stand in the way of the satisfaction of elementary human needs? It stood in the way in Russia. The peasant who sprinkled his fields with holy water in the belief that he was attending to his crops has shed that belief. He is now taught that *all* such religious beliefs are equally unfounded; that faith in the efficacy of prayer or worship is inconsistent with his responsibilities to the community; that religion, in brief, is anti-social.

The second ideal is internationalism. The solidarity of the proletariat of all lands is a condition of peace and of the final achievement of Socialism.

The third ideal is expressed in the hatred of exploitation, whether of nation or class. It is linked up on one side with the internationalist ideal: war is bred by imperialism, which is the exploitation of nations. But war is also bred by capitalism, which is the exploitation of a class; and the hatred of exploitation is thus linked up on the other side with "a socialist relation to labour."

That is the fourth ideal. It stands for the challenge of socialist economy to capitalist efficiency, for socialist zeal in the labouring process, for the enthusiasm of the worker in a society which has abolished "surplus profit," for the collective idealism which has replaced the motive of private gain, for the proletarian will to industrial efficiency. All are workers in a socialist society, and all may compete in service to the community.

These, if they are anything, are the ideals of a democratic society. In Western Europe we are beginning to wonder whether democracy has failed, whether there is any further hope for it. May that not be because we have tried only "bourgeois" democracy—the form of democracy and not the substance? In spite of Party dictatorship, democracy in Soviet Russia is a reality in the major business of life: that is the celebrated paradox of the Communist form of government. Nowhere else are the signs of democracy so visible; nowhere else are men so conscious of their equality with one another. What the ideals of the

cultural revolution signify is, perhaps, the complete democratisation of society.

Any general conclusion that may be drawn by the foreigner in regard to the Soviet system of education must take into account the profound and passionate belief in education which is held by the masses. Education in Soviet Russia tends at the present time to take the place of many of the material refinements and creature comforts of life. The Soviet citizen knows that his deprivations are likely to continue for some years to come, and his heart goes out all the more eagerly to the blessings of education. For him it is at once a necessity and a promise that the things he now lacks will be forthcoming in the end. He does not for a moment doubt that he is creating a new society and a new world, to which the cultural march contributes every whit as much as industrial progress, is indeed necessitated by it. He responds to the propagandist drive of Communism partly because Communism is sounder logic than Autocracy, partly because so much of the education which he prizes comes to him in the form of Communist training. The fact, too, that higher education is accessible to every child—except, of course, the child of non-proletarian parentage, who still suffers from the Bolshevik reversal of former injustice—is a factor of immense importance in securing his support of the Party line.

A great deal of the idealism of the Bolshevik leaders goes into education, and is reflected in the principle of pupils' self-government which the school system fosters. The principle is not so marked now as it was some years ago, when the school was theoretically regarded as a commune. There was a time when the teaching staff and the pupils of the primary school were represented in equal numbers on the council of the school management; and although in the end the educational authorities were forced to yield to sober realities, the experiment serves to illustrate the length to which they were prepared to go in instituting new values for education. Even to-day there is always one or more representatives of the children of the primary school on

the school council, and the foreigner is assured that their presence is seldom a disadvantage.

It should be obvious enough that the future of education in Soviet Russia depends very largely on the younger generation; on the members of the Young Communist League, on the Pioneers—the phoenix that rose from the ashes of the Boy Scout movement in Russia—on the little Octobrists. Children in Soviet Russia do not enjoy what by European standards is considered an easy childhood. They have few material comforts, few of the distractions of childhood, too little opportunity for play. They become Soviet citizens at a tender age, and that is a hard lot. Such a state of affairs, it may be said, has been forced upon the Soviet authorities; Russia is a backward country, and even the Bolshevik cannot “overtake and surpass” capitalism in a night. But the subjection of childhood to the responsibilities of citizenship nevertheless constitutes one of the gravest defects of the system. The sense of citizenship does not come naturally to a child, and more may be lost than gained in imposing it by authority.

True, there are compensations. In Soviet Russia it is the young people who plan, who command, who organise socialist construction. A board meeting in London is conducted by a body of directors whose average age may be sixty-five or eighty-five. In Soviet Russia a similar meeting is conducted by men and women of twenty-five or thirty. The young rule there; they build their own lives. That, no doubt, is the reward for the sacrifices demanded of them in youth.

Soviet education inculcates in a remarkable degree the common virtues of citizenship, though it does so too soon and perhaps too ruthlessly. It inspires, too, particularly in the younger generation in the schools, feelings of idealism and pride in socialist achievement. But the problem of freedom in education remains. Can education be contained in a fixed pattern? Is there no higher authority in the growth of a people's culture than political government?